

The Messianic Triumph, Revelation 20
Rev. Dr. Don L. Davis • Season After Pentecost, Proper 24
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*Teachings are proactive for the next Sunday in advance. Unless otherwise noted,
all Scriptures are taken from the English Standard Version (ESV).*



Only Against the Backdrop of Judgment Can We See Mercy Clearly

We do believe in justice and we do believe in judgment. We believe the only reason mercy triumphs over judgment is that God, by a divine, omniscient act of redemption, fixed it so man could escape justice and live in the sea of mercy. The justified man, the man who believes in Jesus Christ, born anew and now a redeemed child of God, lives in that mercy always.— A. W. Tozer, A. and H. Verploegh. *The Quotable Tozer II: More Wise Words with a Prophetic Edge*. Camp Hill, PA.: WingSpread Publishers, 1997, p. 88.



*Our study draws much from the outline and content of George Ladd's study,
A Commentary on the Revelation of John. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972.(ESV).*

THE MESSIANIC TRIUMPH
In Christ, Mercy Triumphs Over Judgment

I. The Binding of the Devil, Rev. 20.1-3

Rev. 20:1-3 Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. [2] And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, [3] and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he might not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be released for a little while.

A. Various millennial interpretations over the centuries

1. Postmillennialism: the 1,000 years signify *Christ's triumph through the preached Word in the world which will lead up in crescendo and climax to the second coming*
 - a. A fundamentally progressive, optimistic view of history
 - b. Christ reigns spiritually over the church, which preaches the Gospel which enlightens the world until Jesus returns
 - c. Bogus: world wars and wholesale global chaos undercut its viability
2. Amillennialism: denies literal millennial reign, which is summarized and understood as *a spiritual reign in the hearts of believers*
 - a. A fundamentally spiritualized notion of the historicity of the reign of the millennium
 - b. Christ's reigns over the ones who have repented and believed on earth, or those who have likewise trusted in him, and have been translated to heaven
 - c. A popular and dominant view in the history of exegesis (Augustine perhaps the most famous advocate, many 20th century proponents, some traditions lean this way)
3. Premillennialism: *Revelation 20 depicts a literal, on-the-earth reign of Christ and his saints for 1,000 years, following his second coming*
 - a. A fundamentally literal view of Scripture: grammatical-historical view
 - b. Immediately following the Second Coming of Christ, he establishes a literal reign of glory on earth, with the events of chapters 19 (Christ's judgment on the beast, false prophet, and the kings of the earth) to be *followed sequentially* by the events of chapter 20
 - c. A view held by many early Christian thinkers and Fathers (Justin Martyr, Papias, others), made popular through the Graham and LaHaye film series (Image of the Beast, Left Behind, etc.)

B. What cannot be disputed

1. Christ will return in glory, Psalm 96:9-10 Worship the Lord in the splendor of holiness; tremble before him, all the earth! [10] Say among the nations, "The Lord reigns! Yes, the world is established; it shall never be moved; he will judge the peoples with equity"

2. He will reign in righteousness in the earth, Psalm 72:1-11 Give the king your justice, O God, and your righteousness to the royal son! [2] May he judge your people with righteousness, and your poor with justice! [3] Let the mountains bear prosperity for the people, and the hills, in righteousness! [4] May he defend the cause of the poor of the people, give deliverance to the children of the needy, and crush the oppressor! [5] May they fear you while the sun endures, and as long as the moon, throughout all generations! [6] May he be like rain that falls on the mown grass, like showers that water the earth! [7] In his days may the righteous flourish, and peace abound, till the moon be no more! [8] May he have dominion from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth! [9] May desert tribes bow down before him and his enemies lick the dust! [10] May the kings of Tarshish and of the coastlands render him tribute; may the kings of Sheba and Seba bring gifts! [11] May all kings fall down before him, all nations serve him!
3. Whereas the millennium's *timing* may be disputed, its *certainty* cannot!

C. The angel with the key and the chain to the bottomless pit, 20.1

1. Comes down from heaven: assumed that God has charged this angel with this high and important task at this point in his divine working
2. He holds in his hand *the* key to the bottomless pit, and a great chain
 - a. Where did he get the key *from*?
 - b. How big must the chain be to bind Satan, the dragon, for 1,000 years?
3. The imagery of seizure: the dragon pits his entire strength against the Lord and his people
 - a. Disguised and feigned identity, 2 Cor. 11:14 And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.
 - b. Harassment, 2 Cor. 12:7 So to keep me from being too elated by the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from being too elated.
 - c. Prowling lion, 1 Peter 5:8 Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

D. Satan's seizure and binding for a 1,000 years, 20.2

1. The angel seizes the dragon, "that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan" and binds him for a 1,000 years, 20.2
2. The angel threw the devil into the pit, and shut it, and sealed it over him: *this is a time of dominion and God's sovereign will; Satan will not function in the Kingdom of Christ as he does now!*
3. Note the contrast between this age and the one to come
 - a. While in this age the devil roams wherever he will, in that time he will be seized and bound, restricted to the bottomless pit
 - b. While in this age he deceives the nations, in that time he will not distract the nations toward evil
 - c. While in this age he steals, kills, and destroys, in that time he will not be able to hurt or lie, until after the 1,000 year period

E. The sealing of Satan in the pit, and his end of deception over the nations, 20.3

1. The reason proper for the seizure, binding, and isolation: so that he might not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be released for a little while.
2. God's sovereign will dictates the freedom and working of the devil, both now and in the age to come
3. The power of Satan to manipulate humankind will be seen at the end of the 1,000 year period; the devil is a liar, John 8.44

II. The Resurrection and Reign of the Martyrs, Rev. 20.4-6

Rev. 20:4-6 Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. [5] The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection. [6] Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years.

A. Thrones of those given authority to judge, 20.4a

1. John sees thrones, and those seated on them “were those to whom the authority to judge was committed,” 20.4a
2. We are destined for the throne
3. Paul Billheimer’s intriguing thesis: *we remain here on earth to get hands-on training on what it means to exercise authority in Christ’s name, in preparation for our reigning with him in the Kingdom!*
 - a. The saints of the Most High, Daniel 7:18 But the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever, forever and ever.’
 - b. The kingdom given to the people of the saints, Daniel 7:27 And the kingdom and the dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High; their kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey them.’
 - c. The apostles reigning the twelve tribes of Israel, Matthew 19:28 Jesus said to them, "Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.
 - d. The saints will judge the world, 1 Cor. 6:2-3 Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases? [3] Do you not know that we are to judge angels? How much more, then, matters pertaining to this life!

B. The resurrection of the martyrs in the Great Tribulation, 20.4b

1. Identity of those who came back to life: “those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands,” 20.4b
2. Editorial note: The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection, 20.5
3. The blessedness of those in the first resurrection: “Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years,” 20.6

III. Satan’s Last Rebellion and Final Doom, Rev. 20.7-10

Rev. 20:7-10 And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison [8] and will come out to deceive the nations that are at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle; their number is like the sand of the sea. [9] And they marched up over the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, but fire came down from heaven and consumed them, [10] and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

A. The release of Satan from his prison, 20.7

1. After the thousand years are finished, Satan is released from his captivity in the bottomless pit: “will come out to deceive the nations that are at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle,” 20.8a
2. Notice the efficacy of the devil’s lies after a 1,000 year hiatus: “their number is like the sand of the sea,” 20.8b
3. Satan resumes what he has done from the Garden: *he is the father of lies, and expert at it; after a 1,000 years, he starts up where he left off, with the same impact on humankind!*
4. Important questions about Satan’s release from the pit
 - a. Why does God not *simply destroy the devil* at the beginning of the millennium?
 - b. Are we to take the thousand years as *figurative or literal*?
 - c. Why is the devil so effective at *stirring human beings to oppose God* and his saints?

B. The rebellion against the camp of the saints, 20.9

1. A global phenomenon: “And they marched up over the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city,” 20.9a
2. The ignominious end of the final human rebellion: “but fire came down from heaven and consumed them,” 20.9b

C. The demise of the devil, 20.10

1. The unholy trinity share the same fate: “and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were,” 20.10a
2. The final doom of Satan and his minions: “and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever” 20.10b
3. The ancient promise finally fulfilled!
 - a. A bruised head, Genesis 3:15 I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel."
 - b. Crushed under our feet, Romans 16:20 The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.
 - c. Captives set free in the first coming receive the full reward, Eph. 4:8 Therefore it says, "When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men."
 - d. The disarming turns to destruction, Col. 2:15 He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.
 - e. Final destruction here seen, Hebrews 2:14-15 Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, [15] and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.
 - f. The purpose of the Son's coming is made complete, 1 John 3:8 Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.
 - g. The war begun is now finished, Rev. 12:7-8 Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back, [8] but he was defeated and there was no longer any place for them in heaven.

IV. The Great White Throne Judgment, Rev. 20.11-15

Rev. 20:11-15 Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. [12] And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. [13] And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. [14] Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. [15] And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

- A. The Great White Throne, and the one seated on it, 20.11a
 1. The symbol of God's final judgment on the sin and indebtedness of humankind
 2. Who is the one of the throne: Jesus Christ, the Righteous
 - a. The Advocate of God, 1 John 2.1-2
 - b. All judgment is given to him, John 5:22 The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son
 - c. The reason he died and rose again, Romans 14:9 For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living.
 3. This is a not a judgment of believers
 - a. All must stand before the judgment seat of Christ, 2 Cor. 5:10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.
 - b. We may lose reward, but believers themselves will be saved, 1 Cor. 3:13-15 each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. [14] If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. [15] If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.
 - c. Judgment begins at the house of God, but it ends of the condemnation of the ungodly, cf. 1 Peter 4:17 For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?
 4. The end of alibis, excuses, and recriminations: “From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them” 20.11b
- B. The dead gathered, books opened, and the Book of Life, 20.12-13

1. The dead, small and great stand before the throne, 20.12
 2. "Books were opened," 20.12b
 3. "Another book:" "Then another book was opened, which is the book of life," 20.12c
 4. The dead are judged *by what was written in the books, according to what they had done,* 20.12d
 5. Notice the all-encompassing nature of the judgment: the domains of the sea, Death and Hades give up their dead, who are judged, *each one of them, according to what they had done,* 20.13
- C. The end of Death and Hades, 20.14
1. After the judgment of the dead according to their works, God's attention turns toward the power and domain of the dead itself
 - a. Death as power to end life
 - b. Hades as domain of the dead
 2. Both Death and Hades are thrown into the lake of fire, 20.14
 - a. The end of the effect of the Garden forever: the cessation of Death and the obliteration of Hades
 - b. This is called the "second death," the lake of fire
 3. Whereas the first death was spiritual alienation and physical separation, the second death is a different order of aloneness and separation: eternal banishment from the presence and power of God
- D. The most sober text in the Scripture, 20.15
1. The fate of those not found in the book
 2. What are we to make of the finality and extremity of this judgment?
 3. Lingering questions
 - a. Annihilationism theories: the wicked are not tormented but destroyed, separated
 - b. Classic torment theory: the wicked are consciously and physically tormented forever
 - c. Symbolic representation theories: the wicked are separated from the presence of God forever, but the nature of that separation is not precisely spoken of in Scripture
 4. What is clear
 - a. All will be judged by the Lord Jesus Christ, Romans 14:11-12 for it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God." [12] So then each of us will give an account of himself to God.
 - b. The result of the judgment will determine the eternal destinies of those involved
 - (1) Psalm 62:12 and that to you, O Lord, belongs steadfast love. For you will render to a man according to his work.
 - (2) Proverbs 24:12 If you say, "Behold, we did not know this," does not he who weighs the heart perceive it? Does not he who keeps watch over your soul know it, and will he not repay man according to his work?
 - (3) Matthew 16:27 For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done.
 - (4) Rev. 22:12 Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay everyone for what he has done.
 - c. Only those whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life will escape the results of this judgment





All Accounts Are Settled in Jesus Christ

The only reason any human being escapes the sure and terrifying judgment of God is the wideness of his mercy, the same lovingkindness that our Father demonstrated by the sacrifice of his Son, Jesus, on the Cross. As a God of infinite holiness and righteousness, all people will and must give an account of their deeds before the Lord Jesus Christ. Only those whose names are written in the Book of Life will escape the terrifying prospect of eternal separation from him Who is all good and just. Praise God for the unspeakable gift of his Son, which for those who believe settles all accounts and pays all debts through his shed blood on the cross of Calvary!

The Season After Pentecost: Proper 24 (Year A, 2008)

The Coming of Christ, Revelation 20.
October 19, 2008.

Rev. 20.15. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

As we finish this Season after Pentecost, let us remember the amazing grace of God which was shown to us in the sacrifice of his Son, Jesus, on the Cross. Because he died and rose again for us, we now can know that our sin debt has been paid, and our names are now written in the Book of Life. While we will be judged for our works, through Christ we will escape the specter of eternal separation from God, the second death. Only in Christ can we be saved. In him alone, we are free!

Morning Collect: Eternal God our Father, thank you for the gift of Christ, who has paid for our sins and written our names in the Book of Life. We cling to him with all our hearts, resting in Your unmerited grace. Lead us today. Amen.

Evening Collect: Risen Lord Jesus Christ, what can we render to You for the work you did for us on the Cross? Enable us to remember Your sacrifice, and may we unconditionally obey Your every command. You alone are our life. Amen.

Memory Verse: MTB, **New Beginnings in Christ: Series 1. Topic 1, OT Plan of Salvation, Salvation to the World.** Psalm 2:7-9 I will tell of the decree: The Lord said to me, "You are my Son; today I have begotten you. [8] Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession. [9] You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel."