

Rev. 19:17-20:6, Through the Millennium
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Overview

19:1-21:8 is chiastic. The ends and middle summarize the blessings declared earlier in the book (19:9 <-- 16:15, rapture; 20:6 <-- 14:13 death; 21:7 <-- 1:3 obedience)

1. "I Heard" (rest: "saw")	19:1-5, 6-10	21:3-8
2. Entry of Groom...	19:11-16	
3. ... and Bride		21:1-2
4. Lake for the Beast...	19:17-18, 19-21	
5. ...and his Armies		20:11, 12-15
6. Satan Imprisoned...	20:1-3	
7. ...and put in Lake		20:7-10
8. Millennium	20:4-6	

A. 19:17-21, Beast to the Lake of Fire (2x)

1. 17-18, An angel summons the birds to dinner. There is no question about the outcome of this battle. Contrast "the supper of the great God" at which the followers of the beast are the main course, with "the marriage supper of the Lamb" at which the redeemed are guests.
2. 19-21, The Beast and his followers defeated.
 - a) 19, they take the initiative in the battle: "gather together to make war." Cf. Deut. 20:10-13, the policy that governed the first conquest. Even up to this moment they could bow down and acknowledge the Lord--but driven by their hatred for the Lord, they foolishly think they can defeat him.
 - b) Outcome:
 - 1) 20, Beast and false prophet (beast from the sea and beast from the earth, respectively) are not killed, but sent directly to the lake of fire.
 - 2) 21, Followers slain, to be raised and then cast into the lake of fire in 20:13-15.
 - 3) Compare the very few godly people (Enoch, Elijah) who are translated directly to eternal blessing without seeing death. So the beasts are taken directly to eternal suffering without seeing death.
3. Correlation with other prophecy
 - a) The call to the birds appears 600 years earlier in Ezek 39:17-22. There the battle is associated with the conversion of the house of Israel (v.22).
 - b) This in turn links it to Zech. 12:1-13:2, the final battle against Jerusalem and the conversion of Israel, which in turn provides further details.

B. 20:1-3, Satan Imprisoned

Ch. 12-13 introduced three leaders of the rebellion: Satan and the two beasts. The latter have been dealt with. What about Satan?

1. 1, Angel, key, bottomless pit: cf. 9:1. Differences:
 - a) Here, "an angel comes down from heaven." There, a "star having fallen from heaven." Both angelic creatures (cf. 9:11), but one travels under his own power, the other has fallen, out of control (cf. 12:7; Luke ...
 - b) Both have the key of the bottomless pit, but in ch. 9 it is described as an unusual permission; in 20, as an expected possession.
 - c) The pit is opened in 9 to let demons out; in 20, to put Satan in.
 - d) 9:11 suggests that Satan is the jailor in 9, but in 20 he is the prisoner.
 - e) The comparison emphasizes his humiliation. Earlier, under God's permission and hardly noticing his fallen position, he imagines himself in control over the demons of hell. But now an anonymous member of the host of heaven has power over him, to lock him where he kept his minions.
2. 3, cf. Matt. 27:63-66 (sealing; "deceiver"). Because he is an angel, Satan cannot die and be buried as people are. But this experience in the pit is probably as close as an angel can come. Seems to be modeled after the Lord's experience in the tomb--but that lasted only 3 days, and he came out when he pleased. Satan will stay there 1000 years, and can only come out when the seal is lifted.

C. 20:4-6, The Millennium (v.6, "Blessed")

1. Description

a) The Righteous Dead

Compare the progression from throne to enthroned ones with

- 1) 1:12,13, the candlesticks, then the Lord
- 2) 4:2,3, he sees first the throne, then the one sitting on it. Here the vision of the glorified martyrs follows the same direction.

3) 9:11, first the horse, then the horseman

4) 14:14, first the cloud, then the one seated upon it.

This progression seems to emphasize the glory and majesty of the one thus introduced, as though the observer cannot look immediately at the person but must slowly lift his eyes. Now that same progression is applied to the martyrs.

1) Their Thrones

From Dan. 7:9 (thrones), 21-22, 26 (judgment)

- a> Cf. 4:10; 11:16. There's nothing new about believers enthroned with God in heaven; now they appear to be on earth. The Millennium is the answer to the church's prayer, "thy kingdom come ... on earth as it is in heaven."

b> Judgment given to them: cf. 1 Cor. 6:2,3. We are to judge the whole world, and even the angels.

2) Their Identity

The second object of "I saw" is the martyrs. Described in two ways:

a> Positively: beheaded for the word and testimony. Cf. 6:9. Those who once were crying out for justice from under the altar now live in triumph on their thrones.

b> Negatively: did not participate in the worship of the beast or receive his mark. They were willing to stand apart.

b) 5, "The rest of the dead," that is, those without those two characteristics. NB: while making distinctions between people is anathema to our society, it is central to how God deals with the world.

2. Interpretation

a) From this distinction we learn that all the dead do not rise at once. "This is the first"; there must be a second.

b) What is the difference between these two? 6 gives a summary, stated in terms of the benefits of the first resurrection, but clearly implying the sorrow associated with the second. Those in the first resurrection are "blessed and holy"; those in the second are by implication cursed and profane.

1) "Blessed" (lit. "happy"): immune to the second death.

a> The title appeared once before, in 2:11, where the church of Smyrna was promised that overcomers would not be hurt by this. Now we see those overcomers enjoying this promise.

b> The death itself is defined in 20:14; 21:8 as the lake of fire, the place of eternal suffering for those who reject the Lord.

c> The corresponding curse for those who do await the second resurrection is to be cast into that lake of fire.

2) "Holy" ("set apart"): cf. 1 Pet 2:9 < Exod 19:6, "you are ... a royal priesthood, a holy nation."

a> They are set apart for royal and priestly function during the millennium. We are not told over whom they rule, or for whom they intercede. Angels? Some kind of people still on earth? Not clear. But we will have special, recognized functions.

b> The opposite of "holy" is "common, ordinary." Those who await the second death will not be distinguished in any

way, but will be lumped together. Their disposition in 20:14 is like a mass grave. Death and hades are cast entire into the lake of fire.

3. Theological excursus on the 1000 years:

We could talk at length about exegetical arguments for our interpretation of this passage, but I find it most helpful to consider the impact that historical events have had on recorded changes in the doctrine.

a) Through the first three centuries, the church believed in a literal physical kingdom of Christ on earth for a period of 1000 years. They identified this with the promises of the OT prophets that God would reign over the world. Great comfort in the face of Roman persecution.

b) Changes in the fourth century (300-400)

1) Constantine took the throne in 306, and embraced Christianity. Now the established church did not view Rome as a satanic power to be overcome, but as the kingdom of God on earth.

2) Observed abuses in the doctrine. People began thinking in terms of carnal pleasures during this period.

3) Led by Augustine, 354-430, resulted in spiritual interpretation of the millennium. For example, Hendricksen (a very godly and helpful Christian Reformed commentator):
a> 1-3, Satan bound so that he cannot deceive the nations (on earth): permits the gospel to go forth into all the world.

b> 4-6, saints ruling (in heaven); "first resurrection" is "the translation of the soul from this sinful earth to God's holy heaven."

c> 7-9 is the tribulation, followed by return of Christ in judgment.

c) Reinforced through the notion of church-states down until the 19th century.

1) Note "D.G.Regina" on Canadian coins; part of the queen's title, "Elisabeth II, by the grace of God, of the UK of Great Britain, and Northern Ireland and her other realms and territories, queen; head of the commonwealth; defender of the faith."

2) The "Holy Roman Empire" was established on Christmas Day, A.D. 800 by the coronation of Charlemagne by the pope. "It was called the Holy Roman Empire because it was considered to be the renewal [holy] of the roman empire of the ancient world, the last of the four great empires of antiquity." The title "king and emperor of the HRE" continued in the Hapsburgs of Austria until the early 19th century. (The

house itself ended in 1918 at the end of WWI with the abdication of Karl I.)

- 3) Cf. the use of the Orb as a royal insignia, symbolizing the victory of the cross over the world.
 - 4) Thus the historical amillennialists still believed in a physical rule of Christ on earth (though through human kings).
- d) From the perspective of history, we know:
- 1) These kingdoms failed miserably to "defend the faith," even while they were active. The true believers were regularly persecuted by them, and the Church that ordained these rulers was corrupt and apostate.
 - 2) With rare and only symbolic exceptions, these kingdoms either have ceased to exist, or drop any claim to be Christ's representatives on earth.
- e) Thus the increased attention to premillennialism in our day is the result, not of novel doctrines invading the church, but of a return to the primitive doctrine of the early church and the clear and normal reading of Scripture, and an insistence that God's kingdom will come, really and physically, on earth as it is in heaven.