

The Final Judgment (Rev 20)

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Most people do not want to appear in court. Although some criminals manage to go unpunished by earthly tribunals, they will not escape God's judgment (2 Tim. 4:1). The final "reward" is inevitable.

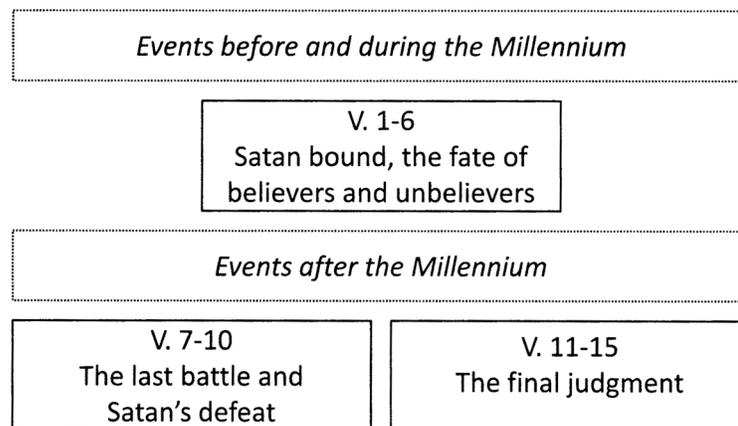
I. The Context

In Revelation 19 Christ's second coming is described in symbolic terms (v. 6-11). Those who do not belong to Jesus will perish (v. 12-21), while Christ's followers will be resurrected and/or transformed and will be with Jesus (1 Thess. 4:15-17). After the Second Coming a period of one thousand years (the Millennium) follows, which in turn will be superseded by a new heaven and a new earth (Rev. 21).

II. An Outline of Revelation 20

Revelation 20 can be divided into two parts.

The second part has two subsections which are parallel, portray the situation from different perspectives, and complement each other.



III. Events before and during the Millennium

- At the end of Revelation 19 the death of the unbelievers is described.
- In the beginning of Revelation 20 John deals with the question: What will happen to Satan? Revelation 20:1-3: An angel will bind Satan with a chain for one thousand years. Satan will not be able to deceive anybody during this period. The chain has to be understood symbolically: Satan is restricted in his activities, because the earth is depopulated (see Rev. 19 and 1 Thess. 4:15-17).
- John's attention now turns to the believers. Revelation 20:4, 6: Christ's followers will reign with Him for a thousand years and will participate in the judgment (1 Cor. 6:2-3). An important aspect of the final judgment is the vindication of God's character and the revelation of His love and justice.
- In the middle of his depiction of the righteous John performs a mental leap asking himself what would happen to those that are lost and reports that they will remain dead during the Millennium. Starting with v. 7 the focus is on the lost and on Satan.

IV. Events after the Millennium

- After the Millennium the lost will be resurrected. Therefore, Satan will be able to lead them astray (Rev. 20:5a, 7, 13a).
- Being deceived again they will attack the New Jerusalem which has come from heaven in the meantime (Rev. 21:2). The greatest war of all times is supposed to be fought.
- However, suddenly the unbelievers and Satan will find themselves in front of God's throne and will be judged (Rev. 20:11-13).
- Finally, the verdict will be executed (Rev. 20:9b, 10, 14, 15).

V. Questions

- Who will be judged during and after the Millennium?
True followers of Christ are participants of the judgment activity, not defendants (see John 5:24; 1 Cor. 6:2-3). The final judgment will be dealing with the unrighteous and the satanic agencies.
- What are the criteria used during the judgment?
Salvation is by grace, but judgment includes the issue of works (Rev. 20:12-13). Obviously, the sentences and the degrees of penalty will differ depending on what people and angelic beings have done and how they lived, although all enemies of God will die.
- "They will be tormented day and night forever and ever." Does this statement point to an ever burning hell?
The term "forever" or "everlasting" has different shades of meaning in Scripture depending on the nature of that to which it is applied:
 - (1) without beginning and end (in connection with God)
 - (2) with beginning but without end (the eternal life of the believers)
 - (3) with beginning and end (e.g., Jon. 2:6; Exod. 21:6)

The context of Revelation 20 suggests that the torment will not be forever, because fire will devour God's enemies (v. 9). Their annihilation is called "the second death" (v. 14). It is not the punishment which will continue forever, the results of rejecting Jesus will. God does not enjoy people to be tormented forever.

- What about the time after the final judgment?
Jesus promises a wonderful new earth without sin, suffering, and death. The redeemed will live there in close fellowship with God.

The Millennium is not a period of peace on earth in which people still can make a decision for God. Such an idea is not only foreign to Scripture but also dangerous, because it indirectly encourages people to put off their decision for God to a time, when it will be too late. The Millennium is the time of God's final judgment. At the same time, it serve to vindicate God's love and justice and help the redeemed to acknowledge the fairness of the judgment process and accept that some of their loved ones and friends could not be saved. However, God's children do not need to be afraid of the judgment, because God intervenes for them. The choice is ours whether or not to believe in Jesus and follow him.

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