

## Revelation Chapter 20 - John Karmelich

1. This lesson is called "Understanding our sinful nature". That's a nice easy topic to summarize. ☺
  - a) My point is that much of Chapter 20 is designed to teach us about our sinful nature.
  - b) With that said, I'll summarize Chapter 20, and then I'll come back to this title.
2. Revelation Chapter 20 focuses on the events of specific, one thousand year time frame. Let me summarize some key points of this chapter:
  - a) This one thousand year period of time is commonly called the "millennium". The word "millennium" comes from the Latin and refers to a 1,000-year time period.
  - b) In the first 3 verses of Chapter 20, Satan is locked up for a 1,000 years. During this 1,000-year period, Jesus rules the earth with believers. Prior to this millennium, was the seven-year "Great Tribulation". For those of us who believe the Great Tribulation is a literal future event, some people who survive through this period. Christians then rule over Great Tribulation "survivors" leading into this 1,000-year time frame. (Don't worry, I'll explain this some more as we go. ☺)
  - c) After 1,000 years, Satan is released and there is another big rebellion against God. Like the whole "Babylon thing" in Chapters 18-19, Satan loses badly. He is then thrown into hell forever. Also after this 1,000 year period, all "unsaved" people are sent to hell forever.
  - d) Chapter 21 will then go on to discuss events after the millennium and judgment process.
3. Understand that one learns very little about life during the millennium from Revelation Chapter 20. Most of what we know about this time frame is scattered through the bible. One estimate is that there are over 400 verses in the bible that talk about this millennium. Here are some key points about the millennium from elsewhere in the bible:
  - a) It is a time of peace for 1,000 years. (E.g., See Isaiah 9:7, 32:17, Ezekiel 37:26) Jesus rules the world from Jerusalem. God told Mary that Jesus would one day sit on King David's throne, which was in Jerusalem. (Ref.: 1:32). That has never happened yet.
  - b) Apparently, predator animals like lions will no longer predators. There will be no more danger of wild animal attacks. (See Isaiah 65:25).
  - c) People will live a long time, like they did before the flood. (See Isaiah 65:20)
  - d) There is a new temple built for animal sacrifices (See Ezekiel 40-44). The same way the Old Testament pointed forward to Jesus' sacrifice, there are new animal sacrifices that memorialize what Jesus did on the cross.
  - e) The land of Israel is once again, divided up by the 12 tribes. (See Ezekiel 47-48). Those Jewish people that survive the tribulation get the land of Israel. God tells them what tribe they came from, and the land is theirs.
4. Now it is best to get back to the title of this lesson: "Understanding our sinful nature".
  - a) The millennium appears to be some sort of "utopia" in terms of living conditions. Despite this utopia, the chapter focuses on judgment and rebellion. In fact, after Satan is released after the 1,000 years, we read of another worldwide rebellion against God, just as "Babylon" in the previous few chapters was some sort of organized worldwide rebellion.
  - b) The point is the millennium is there to teach us a lesson: Living in a "utopia" world does not alleviate our sin problem. Just because everything is wonderful all around us, we still have our built-in nature to rebel against God and want to do it "our way".
  - c) How does this apply to our lives today? Think about when you are more likely to sin: When things are going right or wrong? I'll argue that when the world is falling apart, the Christian is more likely to draw closer to God for help. It is when "things are fine" is that we tend to rely upon our own resources and draw away from God.
  - d) Let me put it this way: When Adam and Eve sinned, were they living in paradise or running for their life from a hungry lion? ☺ The point is humanity is more likely to rebel when things are going well. That is a (not the) lesson of the millennium.

5. Next, know that there is a debate among bible scholars over what is the "millennium".
  - a) Most Evangelical Christians believe in a literal, future 1,000-year time-period. Yours truly is among that group. That will be my main argument in this lesson.
  - b) Most Roman Catholics and some Protestant denominations teach "amillennialism".
    - i) In Latin, when the letter "a" is in front of the word, it becomes a negative. It is like the prefix "non" in English. The word "sense" becomes "nonsense".
    - ii) The view of amillennialism is there is no literal 1,000-year time period. They take this chapter as word-pictures. The view is that it is the peace of Christ one has when Jesus rules in our hearts. The "iron rod" refers to the struggle we have with sin. These verses are not taken literally, but allegorically.
  - c) Revelation Chapter 20 mentions the 1,000-year time frame six times. Those of us who believe in a literal millennium like to ask, "How many times does the bible have to say it before one takes it literally?"
  - d) The amillennialist might respond with Peter's quote of "A day is like 1,000 years to the Lord and 1,000 years is like a day". (2nd Peter 3:8). I agree with this. In heaven, there is no time. To God, 1,000 years is like a day and vice-versa. For those of us on earth a 24-hour day is exactly 24 hours and 1,000 years is exactly 1,000 years. Since the 1,000 years refers to people on earth, I take this verse literally.
  - e) To me, if "now" is the millennium as amillennialists argue, than I am disappointed. I read the Old Testament passages about the millennium and I don't buy the argument that the "peace of Christ" is solely the millennium.
    - i) In Revelation 20:2, we'll read that Satan is chained for a 1,000 years. The classic joke is "If this is the millennium, than Satan's chain is too long."
  - f) Know that this is not a salvation issue. For those of you who believe the 1,000 years is not literal, you are still saved and have every right to be wrong. ☺
6. Unto the important question: Why is there a millennium? Why can't the good guys just live happily ever after in heaven and the bad guys live unhappily ever after in hell? ☺
  - a) One can look at all of human history as a big "test" by God on human affairs. The single question is, "Can man do good without God's help?" I'm not talking about individual acts of kindness, but a utopia society where people don't sin.
  - b) From the Tower of Babel story in Genesis to the Babylon story in Revelation is describing man's first and last attempt to make a perfect society without God. Throughout history, kings, dictators and emperors have promised peace and prosperity as long as the line forms behind that king. It has never worked. Even if there is utopia, sin will still exist.
  - c) Man can argue to God, "It's not fair you are condemning us. Satan is running around the place, tempting us with all sorts of things. If we could just have a time frame without demonic influence, I'm sure we can then be perfect." Thus, the millennium is that test.
  - d) A good illustration on this came from a cartoon in Christianity Today Magazine. There is a picture of Satan sitting on a porch step. He is sitting there sulking. He is saying, "It's not fair. People blame me for everything". (Story source: Chuck Missler).
    - i) This gets back to the lesson theme: The millennium is to show mankind that even without Satan's influence, we still have the "built-in sinful nature ". Man may bow down to Jesus by force, but some people's hearts will still not be in it.
    - ii) Revelation teaches that Jesus will rule "with a rod of iron". If people are all happy and joyous Jesus is in charge, that "rod of iron" isn't necessary. The point is even though this 1,000-year period is a utopia of sorts, harsh rule is still necessary.
  - e) Another purpose of the millennium is for God to finish "judging" people.
    - i) Since all people must go through judgment, there has to be a judgment of people who survived through the Great Tribulation. Apparently, how one "acted" during this previous Great Tribulation period is the basis for judgment to get to live through the millennium. We'll talk more about this as the lesson progresses.

7. OK, time for favorite question: "Why should I care?" ☺
- a) Understand that the millennium is not eternity. This happens before "eternity" begins. It is God's time to show that even without Satan's influence judgment is necessary.
  - b) The point for Christians is to understand that we can't blame the devil for everything. A big part of our ability to sin is due to our own sinful nature.
  - c) Understand that that the millennium is about God fulfilling His unconditional promises. God made such promises to the Israelites that are not fulfilled until this millennium begins. The Israelites get to inherit the Promised Land. Jesus rules from this land.
  - d) When the world is falling apart, the key to remember is that this life, as we know it, is not forever. Just as God brought life to a start, God is going to bring it to an end. There is a hope for the future of mankind. It is not through any political effort by mankind. It is by God Himself coming back to intervene in the affairs of mankind.
8. Chapter 20, Verse 1: And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. <sup>2</sup> He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years.
- a) The key point of Verses 1 and 2 is that an angel seized the devil and put him in the Abyss for a thousand years.
  - b) The first word is "And". It's a grammatical incorrect way to begin our study. ☺
    - i) In fact, a bunch of verses in this chapter start with "And". The idea, in my opinion, is to connect all the events of Chapter 20 as one "thought" about the millennium and judgment.
    - ii) The idea of "And" here in Verse 1 is to connect this with the previous chapter.
    - iii) Remember that John saw all of this from "somewhere" on earth. Revelation 17:3 said John was somehow transported to the "wilderness".
    - iv) The previous chapter was about the actual return of Jesus to earth. The point is the events of Chapter 20, the "1,000 year millennium", are tied to Jesus' return.
  - c) Let's talk about the angel for a moment. Revelation is full of references to "mighty angels". Here, John just says "an angel". You know, the regular everyday variety. ☺ Angels are sent from God to perform specific tasks. This one has the authority to lock up Satan. The point is this angel is not "anything special". The point is it didn't require a super-angel to perform the task of locking up Satan.
    - i) This is a good opportunity to give a brief discussion of our power over Satan. John wrote, "The one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world." (1st John 4:4). The power God enables within the Christian is greater than any and all power Satan can have over Christians. Pray enables that power to be used over demonic forces. At the same time, we as Christians cannot say, "By the power of Jesus, I bind Satan so he can't attack anyone in the world". The point is God grants us some power over demonic forces, but not all power.
    - ii) Does this mean we can prevent horrible things from happening in our lives? No. God allows tragic things in the life of the believer as well as the nonbeliever. At the same time, I'm convinced things can be a lot worse for the believer if we don't pray for strength against the temptation from demonic forces.
    - iii) All tragedies in our lives are "God filtered" for some purpose (See Romans 8:28). They draw us closer to God He helps us get through such times.
    - iv) Satan's goal is to get us to turn from God. What we as Christians have the power to do (through prayer) is to have the strength to overcome temptation and the strength to be good witnesses for God despite anything and everything that is happening around us. Satan has no power over our attitude in any situation!
    - v) Does that mean we can't mourn when we are hurting? Of course not. The point is we can still trust in God to get us through that pain. The point is we can still have our faith that God will ultimately win in the end, despite whatever is happening.

- d) Meanwhile, back to the verse. This angel had a "great chain" in order to bind Satan.
- i) My view of Satan is that he is not omnipresent, meaning he is not everywhere at once. He is an actual "being", but like other angelic creatures he exists in more than three dimensions and can travel from "Point A to Point B" instantly.
  - ii) Can Satan be bound with a metal chain like a dog? Possibly. Maybe this is written in a way John could comprehend it. The "how" does not interest me as much as the "why". The real question is "why" is Satan bound this way: To have a thousand year period of time on earth without his influence.
  - iii) Let me get in one last shot as to why I believe the millennium is a literal future event as opposed to "right now". To use a line I stated in the introduction, "If this is the millennium, then Satan's chain is too long". One can see how Satan still has a strong influence in this world. There is too much evil that exists. Satan may be limited in what he can do to Christians, but he is not limited to his influence on nonbelievers. I'll argue the millennium is a future event is if no other reason, I refuse to believe Satan is currently "chained up".
9. Verse 3: He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended. After that, he must be set free for a short time.
- a) The "He" in Verse 3 is the angel. The "him" is Satan. The point is Satan is thrown into the Abyss (we'll come to that in a minute) and locked up there for exactly 1,000 years. I get the idea there is a padlock on the outside of the entrance with a sign reading, "Do not open until the year three thousand-and-something". ☺
  - b) Let's talk about what is the "Abyss". This is untranslated (transliterated) word from the Greek meaning "bottomless pit". I believe it is the center of the earth, as there is "no bottom" in the center of the planet. Since I believe Satan exists in more than three dimensions, I'll argue somehow this is possible. Whatever or wherever it is, this "holding tank" is where Satan is bound up for a thousand years.
    - i) If you recall in the last chapter, the antichrist and his "buddy", the spiritual leader were both cast into "fiery lake of burning sulfur".
    - ii) In Verse 10 of this chapter, Satan goes the same location after the 1,000 years.
    - iii) My point is this "Abyss" is not permanent hell, but a "holding tank" for future judgment. Even though we may not understand all the details about each location, the important thing for now is to understand there are two locations.
  - c) I can't help reading this and thinking, "why just a thousand years? Couldn't you keep that guy locked up a lot longer? ☺ In other words, why did God pick a specific 1,000-year period for a millennial reign? Again, why this length of time?
    - i) Some scholars suspect it has something to do with God's principal of "six and one". The world was created in six days and God rested on the seventh. There are those who suspect that the humanity exists for six thousand years, and then there is the one thousand year millennium. (The Jewish calendar is currently in the year 5758 when this study is written.) Personally, I point to the Matthew 24:36 that says in effect no one knows the day of Jesus return. Therefore, I don't buy into the theory that Jesus comes back exactly or about the year "6,000".
    - ii) My personal view is that 1,000 years is a good "benchmark" as a time test to see how mankind does without Satan's influence. It is God's way of telling us, "I (God) can give you (mankind) 1,000 years. During those 1,000 years, there is peace, prosperity and no influence of Satan. Yet, despite that, the moment I (God) let Satan loose, there is rebellion again. (This final rebellion is coming up later in the chapter.) A purpose of the millennium is to show we can still rebel against God even if we live in a perfect environment.

- iii) Let's look at this another way: If Adam and Eve's world was so perfect, then why did they choose to rebel against God? The answer is, even if we are given a perfect world to live in under God, we as humans still desire to do it "our way". That is why Adam and Eve chose to rebel. That is also why in this perfect millennial world, people will still disobey God if they are given a chance.
    - d) OK John, I get the idea that there is a desire to rebel against God in a perfect world. What does that have to do with my life? The point is we can't blame our environment as an excuse for sin. We can't say, "Well if we had more money, we wouldn't sin. Or, if I wasn't suffering so much, I wouldn't sin." Adam and Eve sinned despite the best of conditions. There will be rebellion in the millennium despite the best of conditions.
      - i) Now we go back to the comment of 1<sup>st</sup> John 4:4 where it says, "The one (Jesus) who is in you (Christians) is greater than the one (Satan) who is in the world. Temptation cannot be avoided by living in paradise. Temptation can be avoided by praying to be kept from it. (See Matthew 6:13) Temptation can be avoided by praying for God to give us a way out. (See 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 10:13).
      - ii) I'm not arguing one can be perfect. I'm arguing that sticking close to God through prayer gives us the ability to overcome whatever Satan throws at us.
    - e) We are now at the end of the "millennium" purpose section. Again, one has to go through the entire bible as to understand life during the millennium. Chapter 20 of Revelation only focuses on the fact that Satan is bound for exactly 1,000 years. The rest of the chapter focuses on the "judgment" aspects during and after this period.
10. Verse 4: I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years.<sup>5</sup> (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection.
- a) Remember that in Verses 1-3, John saw Satan being bound. Here in Verse 4, John saw "thrones" being set up and "somebody" was seated in these thrones for judgment. This leads to two big questions: Who is doing the judging and who is being judged?
  - b) It's probably easier to start with who is being judged. Verse 5 starts with, "The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended." One gets the impression that if you don't resurrected until after this 1,000-year period, it is very bad news. ☺
    - i) There are various theories on who is being judged in these verses. The problem with Verse 4 is that it uses too many pronouns and not enough nouns. If you read the first sentence of Verse 4, it is all pronouns. In other words, John does not disclose bluntly who is being judged and who is doing the judging.
    - ii) The consensus evangelical view is that those who are being judged are those who survive the tribulation. Again, if you read all the judgment chapters of Revelation, there is no verse that says, "Everybody dies in the Great Tribulation". One gets the impression some survive through this Tribulation period. These are the ones being judged if they are worthy to live through the millennium or sent to hell.
    - iii) There is a story in Matthew 25 called the "sheep and goat judgment". People are compared to either sheep or goats. It is not that one animal is better than the other. The point is some are saved and some are sent to hell. In that parable, the point is people are judged based on how they treated Jesus' "brothers". Many suspect that parable refers to this millennial time period. People are judged based on how they treated Christians (or Israelites) during this Great Tribulation.
  - c) Next, let's talk about who is doing the judging. In order to do that, we have to understand the concept of "resurrection" in terms of time.

- i) Jesus told a true story (not a parable) about two people in "hell". One was a man named Lazarus (not the guy raised from the dead). The point of the story is that hell had two sections. A place of torment and a "nice, comforting location" that is called "Abraham's bosom (side)". (Source: Luke 16:19-26).
  - ii) Jesus is described as the "firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep". (Ref: 1st Cor. 15:20). The idea of "first fruit" is that it is harvest time and the first fruit to be picked from the trees is called the "first fruits". What that means is Jesus was the first of the resurrected souls to go to heaven. This was followed by those who were dead, but saved and were temporary living in this "nice section" as described in Luke 16:19-26. As Christians die on earth, we join the ranks of the "first fruits".
  - iii) Again, one has to remember that heaven has no time. We on earth are stuck in time. God created time, so God is outside of time. From heaven's perspective, you and I may arrive there at the exact same time, even though we may die years apart, from "earth's" perspective.
  - d) With all of this said, now I can explain Verse 4 a whole lot better.
    - i) The idea is Christians reign with Jesus, and judge with Jesus as this millennium. That's why the marriage of Jesus and the church takes place prior to the millennium. That marriage is a symbol of our authority to reign with Jesus.
    - ii) Among those doing the judging (i.e., "on the thrones") included those who were "beheaded" for Jesus during this great tribulation. Know that the Greek word for "beheaded" refers to any type of execution, and not just that methodology.
    - iii) The point is those that declare their allegiance to Christ during this Great Tribulation (and suffered for it) get the same privileges as you and I during this millennial judgment period.
    - iv) There are also some alternative views. Some argue Christians that die before the Great Tribulation are given a special "heavenly status" and the thrones are only for Christians who lived through this period. You can read the verses from that perspective as well. I disagree with this view, and I'll talk more about it later.
  - e) The point is "the good guys" are doing the judging with Jesus. Those being judged are the ones who survived through the seven year Great Tribulation period. Just because some people survive through the Tribulation does not mean they all get the privilege of living through the millennium. Everybody is accountable to God for their actions.
11. Verse 6: Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years.
- a) This verse says that whoever is part of this first resurrection is blessed. Such people will be priests of God and Christ and will reign with Jesus for 1,000 years.
  - b) Before we get into the specifics of this verse, learn the cliché: "Born once, die twice; born twice, die once". That means if one is "born-again", one only has to experience death one time, when our bodies die. If one is never born-again, there are two deaths: The physical death and when one is judged and sent to hell forever. That principal is in this verse.
  - c) Based on this verse, I'll argue that all Christians are part of this millennial kingdom. We may not fully comprehend how we are part of it, but the fact that the text says whoever is part of this "first" resurrection gets to be part of this 1,000-year millennium.
    - i) Again, the "first" resurrection is a continual process of all Christians who have died since the church began. From our time perspective, it has continued through the last two thousand years of history.
  - d) Next, let's talk about Christians as "priests of God and of Christ". What does that mean?
    - i) Does this mean we have to wear black robes for 1,000 years? ☺ No.
    - ii) Let's define a priest in biblical terms: A priest is someone who intervenes on man's behalf to God.

- iii) Jesus is in charge. We as Christians living and ruling with Him, also help intervene (think "minister") between people living at that time and God Himself. A "priest" could be a teacher. A "priest" could be a music leader. A "priest" could be some sort of government leader that helps people understand what living under God's laws means and enforcing those laws.
  - iv) This is where one's "rewards" as Christians come into play: The bible teaches that Christians are rewarded on our faithfulness. (Ref: Rev. 22:12) I'm not sure of the details, but I believe our power and responsibilities we are given are "given out" during this millennium time period.
12. Verse 7: When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison<sup>8</sup> and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth--Gog and Magog--to gather them for battle. In number they are like the sand on the seashore.
- a) In Revelation chapters 17 and 18, one gets the impression there was a large organized army that opposed the God of the Bible. Satan was behind that army. Here in Chapter 20, Verse 7, we read of another organized effort a thousand years later. The end of Verse 8 implies this army was huge, "like the sand of the seashore".
    - i) The moral of this little story is despite a 1,000 years of utopia, there is still rebellion (i.e., our sinful nature) in people's hearts. Satan is given "one more shot" at life and He uses it to show the rebellion in his heart and in man's heart.
  - b) I have to admit, I was fascinated by this verse from Satan's standpoint.
    - i) You would think after being locked up a thousand years, Satan would have learned his lesson and not organize another rebellion. I'm convinced Satan "knows his bible" and knows of this verse. Why organize another rebellion?
    - ii) The answer is Satan has a desire to be worshipped as God and never lost that desire. (Ref. Isaiah 14:14) A thousand years in prison never took away that desire. People still follow him because even after a thousand years of utopia, people still want to do it "their way" as opposed to following God. That is also why good Christians still sin. There is a rebellious nature in all of us that at times, wants to turn from God.
    - iii) The point is a thousand years in prison didn't rehabilitate what is inside of Satan. The same goes for people whose heart is not given over to God. Punishment can't change people's hearts all unto itself. It has to begin with the grace of God. Living in the best of situations won't cause people to give their heart to God. The only way to change is to realize our way of living is wrong and God's is right. There has to be a behavior change based on a commitment on our part to follow Christ.
  - c) OK, time to talk about the elephant in the room I've been ignoring: Gog and Magog. ☺
    - i) This verse mentions the words "Gog and Magog". What does that mean?
    - ii) These words are mainly used in Ezekiel 38-39. For "prophecy buff's" these are famous chapters in the book of Ezekiel. Let me put that reference in perspective:
      - a) Ezekiel Chapters 36 and 37 deal with the restoration of Israel as a single, independent country. This book was written roughly 600 years before Christ was born. Israel was never a united independent country again until the year 1948. When Israel was founded as a modern country, the leaders cited Ezekiel's prophecy as being fulfilled.
      - b) Ezekiel Chapters 40 to the end of that book is about life during the millennium. These chapters give specific architectural details of a temple that has never been built. Scholars believe this temple will exist during the millennium reign. Animal sacrifices come back. Christians believe those sacrifices are to memorialize what Jesus did. These chapters also describe the land of Israel being divided up to descendants of the twelve tribes of Israel.

- iii) The point is in-between the chapters about the restoration of Israel (Chapters 36-37) and the chapters about life in the millennium (Chapters 40-48) come two chapters about a war against Israel. The war is lead by a nation called "Magog" (Ref.: Ezekiel 38:2) and the leader of this nation is called "Gog". (Ref: Ezekiel 38:3).
  - iv) Bible prophecy nuts like myself ☺ are fascinated by these two chapters. The idea is since Israel is a country again as predicted in Ezekiel 37, then the "Gog and Magog" scenario should be soon on the horizon. Whatever it is, it takes place after Israel is a country again and before the events of the millennium.
  - v) Whatever it is, it is some sort of organized war against Israel.
    - a) Most evangelical scholars think it is describing a battle against Israel that happens prior to the Great Tribulation itself.
    - b) Some think it is another description of the battle of Armageddon.
    - c) The point is, whatever it is, "Magog" is the lead nation in this rebellion and "Gog" is the leader of this nation. There are other nations involved in this battle, but Magog is the lead nation.
  - vi) Now let's get back to Revelation: Is this the same Gog and Magog dudes? No. ☺
    - a) The idea is God nicknames this final rebellion "Magog and Gog" as to remind us that just like the rebellion in Ezekiel 38 and 39, this final rebellion is going to lose badly.
  - vii) Let me put it another way: In the last few hundred years, one of the most famous military losses is Napoleon and "Waterloo". The location of "Waterloo" is where the French emperor Napoleon lost his final battle in his plans for world conquest. This "Magog" reference would be like God taking this final end-time battle and nicknaming it "Waterloo" so we knew that this army is about to lose decisively.
13. Verse 9: They marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of God's people, the city he loves. But fire came down from heaven and devoured them.
- a) Let's set the scene: Here is another big organized effort against Jesus ruling over the world. There is a large, world-size army organized to rebel against Jesus and those in charge of this world-order. This army descends upon Jesus, and then "all of a sudden" fire comes down from heaven and well, "that's that". ☺
  - b) You have to admit, this battle is anticlimactic. Verse 9 describes this huge army of people all descending upon Jerusalem ("the city he loves"). Then fire comes down from heaven, devours this army and in one instant, the war is over.
  - c) That is sort-of how I picture the Battle of Armageddon from Chapter 19. It is not really a battle, but an instant wipeout. The point is history repeats itself from the "battle" of Armageddon in Revelation 19 to this battle in Revelation 20:9, a thousand years later.
  - d) It goes to show that 1) some people never learn from history; 2) you can't defeat God no matter how big the organized effort and 3) people's hearts never change despite the best of circumstances.
14. Verse 10: And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.
- a) Let's set the scene: Here in Verse 10, the 1,000-year millennium is now over. The text says the devil is thrown into "the lake of burning sulfur". This is the same location where the beast (a.k.a., the antichrist) and his pal, the "false prophet" are located. The last sentence says all three of these characters will be tormented forever.
  - b) Let me give a few final words about the antichrist and the "worship leader". These were major characters in earlier chapters. To recall, they were both humans who were demonically influenced. The antichrist was the political leader of this final great, organized rebellion against God and the second guy, the worship leader, was the spiritual leader of this moment.

- c) Notice after 1,000 years, the antichrist and the false worship leader are not dead. They are suffering for their sins, but they are not dead. The bible argues against annihilation, which is the concept one no longer exists.
- d) This is a good time to bring up the idea of "living forever". My favorite illustration on this is a blank DVD disk or a CD disk.
- i) If one takes a blank DVD disk, how much does it weigh? Less than an ounce.
  - ii) If one records a movie or computer software on that disk, how much does it weigh? The exact same weight. That digital code software has no weight.
  - iii) The "real you and me" is like software. That software lives forever. When we die, we are "transferred" to a new DVD disk. ☺
  - iv) Yes, the bible teaches the idea of a body resurrection, or that we have "new bodies" in heaven. My point here is that all humans, like computer software, live forever.
  - v) It is the computer disk, like our bodies that wears out, but the software lives on.
- e) Ok, so where is this lake of burning sulfur? Can we visit it? Is there a keep out sign? ☺
- i) My personal view is that this "lake" is both literal and a word picture. In a few verses and in the next chapter, we're going to talk about the fact God is going to create a new heavens and a new earth. Therefore, I don't think this lake is a place one visits on earth, like a particular body of water. It exists in the "spiritual realm" of existence. It is a place we cannot visit on earth, but it is a real place.
  - ii) The biblical view of hell is that it is eternal. It is not a place where God doesn't exist, but a place where God's grace is not present. I like to argue that nobody goes to hell by force, but it is a place of one's choosing. God sentencing people to hell is Him saying in effect, "You don't want to live by my rules? Fine, since you will exist for eternity, you will exist outside my presence for eternity.
  - iii) C.S. Lewis said, "The gates of hell will be locked from the inside". The idea is hell is a place for people who willfully choose to reject to live with God for eternity.
  - iv) Why is hell a place of torment? My view is not that some demon with a pitchfork is poking you in the ribs for eternity. ☺ My view is the sinful desires one has a human still exist for eternity, but they are unfulfilled. It is the pain of eternal loneliness coming from unfulfilled desires.
  - v) The hard part to comprehend is the "eternalness" of heaven or hell. A good exercise to do is to try to envision a thousand years or ten thousand years. Keep going until you can't imagine any further. It makes one get on one's knees and be all the more grateful to God that His grace alone has saved us for all of eternity.
- f) Back to the verse itself: Why is Satan sent to hell at that point in time? What about that "holding tank" (i.e., the Abyss or bottomless pit) Satan was in for a 1,000 years?
- i) It appears that "holding tank" will be destroyed along with the earth itself. This "sulfur lake" is a permanent location where people and spiritual beings (i.e., the devil and demons) are sent for eternity. We'll discuss this more in a moment.
  - ii) The bible predicted Satan's ultimate fate in the Old Testament. Ezekiel Chapter 28:19 predicts Satan's ultimate sentencing to hell.
    - a) This chapter in Ezekiel has a condemnation of "The King of Tyre". It becomes fairly obvious that Tyre is a code name for Satan.
    - b) Ezekiel describes this king as being in the Garden of Eden (Ezekiel 28:13) until sin was found in him. Therefore, one knows the text is more than some king living in Ezekiel's time frame and is describing Satan himself.
  - iii) The only reason Satan wasn't sent to hell after Adam and Eve was that God had a purpose for Satan staying alive. God wants us to come to Him by our free will. In order to see if mankind chooses God out of free will, there has to be legitimate temptations of our choices. At this point of Revelation, there is no more choosing of good and evil for mankind, so Satan is no longer needed.

- iv) The reason I state this here is to remind us that God is in charge, even when it appears the world around us is falling apart. Remember God created Satan, knowing how the future would play out. Satan is not some "equal" to God or even Jesus. He is a created being that was created for God's purposes, even though you and I can't see all the puzzle pieces of that purpose.
15. Verse 11: Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it.
- a) I stated earlier that Revelation 20 has two judgments: One judgment is during the 1,000-year millennium and a second judgment is after the millennium.
    - i) The first judgment was conducted by Jesus, and somehow, Christians are involved in this process. Apparently, the judgment is over those people who survived the Great Tribulation. During this time of "utopia", the concept of sin still exists and that is why it is stated Jesus rules "with a rod of iron". Apparently, some people get hit with that rod during this time frame. ☺
  - b) In Verse 11, the happiness is over. The judgment in this verse is the condemnation to hell of all nonbelievers who have ever lived. This is the topic of Verses 11-15.
  - c) What is important to grasp is that the term "judgment" used in Verses 11-15 is not some sort of trial. This is not people arguing for and against people going to hell. This is for people already pronounced guilty. This is a "sentencing hearing". After a person is found guilty, a judge then renders a sentence. This is the part where a judge says, "You will serve ten years in prison" or "You are going to be hanged". The point is this is not a trial, but a sentencing of condemned souls to hell.
  - d) Let's talk about the great white throne itself:
    - i) The idea of "great" refers to its power. The point is God has the power, the authority and the ability to send condemned souls to hell forever.
    - ii) The idea of "white" refers to purity. The idea is God is perfect in judgment.
    - iii) The idea of "throne" is that a king has the authority to make this sentence.
  - e) Now let's talk about who is on this throne: This is not God the Father, but Jesus Christ!
    - i) Jesus said, "For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son (i.e. Jesus)". (Ref: John 5:22a, NIV, text in parenthesis added.)
    - ii) Stop and think of all the people we know who mock the idea of Jesus as God. Imagine them standing here before Jesus Himself, who knows all things!
    - iii) Does this mean that you and I are in trouble for the times we took Jesus name in vain or something like that? As Christians, we are forgiven of all sins, past, present and future. There is no condemnation for believers. (See Romans 8:1). Such acts are still sins, and to be avoided. If we love God, why would want to disobey Him or show any acts of disrespect?
      - a) What about "Blasphemy of the Holy Spirit"? (Ref.: Mark 3:28-3:29 et.al.). Doesn't the bible say that is an unforgivable sin? Yes it does. That term "Blasphemy of the Holy Spirit" is the continual denial of Jesus as God. It is a lifetime denial that Jesus is the savior of the world. It is not a bunch of magical words that if uttered once, one is condemned.
16. Verse 11 (cont.): Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them.
- a) This second sentence appears strange at first. It says in effect, when this final sentencing takes place against condemned souls, the earth and sky fled from his (Jesus') presence.
  - b) What does it mean? It means there is no turning back. The condemned cannot return to earth as another option. What I suspect it means is that wherever this judgment is taking place, it is not on earth as we know it. The condemned no longer see earth as it exists.
  - c) Revelation Chapter 21 opens up with "I saw a new heaven and a new earth, as the existing heaven and earth are past away". We'll get into more details of that in Chapter 21, but understand for now the concept that God is going to destroy the existing world as we know it one day and create a new one.

- i) The main idea is this world is contaminated by sin and there is no cure. To create a new perfect world to live for eternity, it is necessary to destroy the one we know.
  - ii) This is not an anti-ecology verse. We are not to "help" God destroy this world. ☺  
God will do it His way on his timing!
- 17. Verse 12: And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books.
  - a) Verse 12 centers around books. Verse 12 states that all who died that are condemned are standing before God and there are a bunch of books.
    - i) For centuries, people have wondered, "What are these books?"
    - ii) The only book listed by name is the "book of life". This is an Old Testament concept that whoever is saved, their names are written in the book of life. (See Psalm 69:28) The idea in this judgment is that all these people are not on that list.
  - b) The text mentions other books. The question is what are the other books?
    - i) Most argue it is a recorded list of all the "deeds" people have done in their lives. It may be the evidence of their lives that showed they reject God.
    - ii) Some argue it is the bible itself and shows how the condemned reject God's laws.
    - iii) The point is whatever the books are, it is somehow used to condemn those who reject God.
- 18. Verse 13: The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done.
  - a) This verse gives the location of where people were prior to this sentencing hearing. It says that some condemned souls were in the "sea" and some were in "Hades".
  - b) First, let's talk about "Hades". If you recall from earlier in this lesson, Jesus talked about a "soul holding tank" location with two sections. (Source Luke 16:19-26) Jesus described a man named Lazarus (again, not the one Jesus raised from the dead). Lazarus was in a "good part" of this holding tank. The condemned souls are in the "bad part" of this holding tank, for a lack of a better word. In that story, Jesus said people were tormented in this "bad part". This "holding tank" is also known as "Hades".
    - i) It is assumed that after Jesus was resurrected, those in the "good part" were also resurrected. Those people are part of the first resurrection and got to see the one thousand year millennium.
    - ii) The people in the "bad part" are still there during the thousand years. "Now" they get to come out for the sentence hearing.
    - iii) My point of all of this is "Hades" is that holding tank for the dead. It had a "good part" that has now been vacant for about 2,000 years, and the bad part which stays filled with souls until it is time for this "great white throne" judgment.
  - c) The strange part of this verse says, "The sea gave up the dead that were in it".
    - i) This does not mean that all people who died at sea are condemned. Apparently, there were some resurrected "entities" that were buried in the sea.
    - ii) There are two common theories on this. One is at the "sea" refers to Gentile (non-Jewish) condemned souls. The "bad section" of Hades is only for people of Jewish decent who turned from God. In a few occasions, a bible "nickname" for non-saved Gentiles as "the sea" (E.g., Isaiah 60:5).
    - iii) The other view (the one I hold) is that the "sea" represents the demonic beings that get their final sentence. There once was one time where Jesus and His disciples were at sea and the waves were rough. Jesus calmed the sea, in a sense, by performing an exorcism. Jesus "rebuked" the sea. (Ref: Matthew 8:26; Mark 4:39).
      - a) The New Testament says that we are to judge angels. (Ref.: 1st Cor. 6:3). I believe that passage to the angels that rebel against God, which are the demonic beings. Somehow, the "sea" is a nickname for these demons.

- d) The verse says the dead came from three places: 1) The Sea, 2) Death and 3) Hades.
    - i) The only one we haven't talked about is "death" itself. It is unclear what this means. Based on Verse 14 coming up, I believe the idea is death itself no longer exists. Life as we know it will no longer exist and there is no more death.
    - ii) Again, I don't think the "how" is as important as the "why" question. The point is everyone who ever existed, be it human beings or demonic beings, get to spend eternity in one place or the other.
  - e) There is a story of Jesus casting demons out of a person and into a herd of pigs. The demons asked Jesus the question, "Have you come here to torture us before the appointed time?" (Matthew 8:29 NIV). The point is these demons knew of their inevitable fate and still choose to rebel against God! I'll argue the same is true for people sent to hell!
  - f) People always wonder about children who die young or people who never heard of Jesus. The answer is a perfect God judges people perfectly. I don't lose sleep over this issue. I'm convinced there will be multitudes in heaven of children who die young and God's grace is upon them to make up for their shortened lives on earth.
19. Verse 14: Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death.<sup>15</sup> If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.
- a) There is an expression that goes, "He was thrown into jail and then they threw away the jail". The idea is one of permanent condemnation. That is why it says, "Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire." The idea of wherever and whatever Death and Hades each represent, they are to no longer exist, as they are no longer necessary. There is no more "temporary" residents for the dead as everyone is now permanently in heaven or permanently in hell. There are no more people being born. There is no more death.
  - b) The key book in this sentencing procedure is the "book of life". The idea is God knows all things. Since He knows all things, He knows who is saved for eternity. This list of saved people is the "book of life". We as humans don't know who is on the list, therefore, we as Christians try to reach out to everyone.
    - i) The other thing to grasp about this list is that it is finite. There are only a fixed, limited number of people in heaven. As I've stated all through these Revelation studies, there is only "x" number of people in heaven. Satan is well aware of that fixed number and realizes once that number is complete, his fate is sealed.
  - c) Notice that both Satan and the demons are both quite aware of this eternal fate. Despite that, they choose to rebel against God. They want to delay that event as long as possible. Spending eternity in hell is their own choosing as they would rather have that fate than to spend eternity submitting to God.
    - i) I'll argue that same theory applies to humans. Most unsaved people I know don't want to think about eternal hell or just joke about it. They don't want to submit to God and change their lifestyle to live in conformity to God's rules. When Jesus sends these people to hell, the sad reality is they are getting what they asked for.
20. Let's get back to the lesson title: "Understanding our sinful nature".
- a) Most of this chapter takes place during, or right after a thousand year "utopia" period on earth. Based on Old Testament passages of this millennium, it reads like it is a perfect environment with no significant problems.
  - b) Despite all of that, most of the text of this chapter is about judgment. Despite people living in the best of environments, many get eternally condemned to hell.
  - c) The last third of the chapter speaks of the final judgment to hell of all nonbelievers.
  - d) In other words, if the millennium is so perfect, why does this chapter spend so much time dealing with death, hell and judgment? The underlying point of this chapter is "utopia" is not good enough. The point is a perfect environment is not good enough to overcome our sinful and rebellious nature. Despite the best of circumstances, rebellion still takes place.

- e) This is why the final judgment of the condemned comes after the millennium. It is God showing man that despite the best of circumstances, the human heart is incurable wicked and people deserve to be driven away from the presence of God.
    - i) The only way to be saved is for God to reach out to us and save us. No matter how perfect the world may be around us, we still sin and don't deserve to be with God forever. That is why salvation requires the grace of God.
  - f) OK, John, I get all of that. How does it affect my life today?
    - i) For starters, don't think that having "utopia" will make us less of a sinner! If anything, we tend to sin more when things around us are going well. Christians tend to pray more when things are falling apart than when things are going well. This lesson should teach us that even in a perfect environment, sin is still there.
    - ii) Next, understand that we can't always control our circumstances, but we can always control our attitude. Submitting to God is what causes us to change our attitude and our behavior. In other words, the decision to act better comes first, and then our emotions follow.
    - iii) What I want you and me to get out of this lesson is to understand that we shouldn't wait for things to get better (or worse) before submitting our lives to God. Beware of "utopia" because our sinful nature is still there. There is nothing wrong or sinful with say, wanting a better life for ourselves. The point is to understand we are no closer to God because things are going well. God loves us equally as much when things are going well as when they are going badly.
    - iv) What we should do is pray for God to keep us from temptation when things are going well and when things are going badly. The moral of the lesson is to never wait for things to improve before seeking God. We need his help in both the best and worst of the times of our lives!
21. Father, Help us to understand that we shouldn't let our circumstances affect our relationship with You. Help us to realize you are there in the good times as well as the bad. Help us to be strong against temptation, especially in times when things are going well. Keep our egos in check, and help us to give you the credit for all the blessings in our life and not ourselves. Finally, thank you for rescuing us from eternal hell. Help us to remember this is a place of eternal torment. The only reason we are not there along side the condemned is due to Your grace. I don't know why You picked us, but You did. If You picked us, You must love us and have great plans for our eternity. Help us to keep that in mind when we feel lonely or unloved. Help us to remember that no matter what life throws at us, we are in that Book of Life. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.