

The Synopsis

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1 THE REVELATION

1.1 Chapter 20

We now come, evil power having been set aside, to the exercise of judicial authority in peace; and this is conferred on the saints. The prophet does not merely see the thrones as set in Daniel 7, but sitters on them too. Besides all to whom judgment is given in general, two special classes are mentioned, because they might seem to be too late, or to have lost their part : those beheaded (after the assembly was gone, for it is the Revelation-period we have to do with) for the witness of Jesus; and those who had not worshipped the beast (compare chap. 6: 9-II; 13: 15). These, as well as previously departed saints, had their part in living and reigning with Christ a thousand years. But those who were not Christ's, the rest of the dead, did not live again till the thousand years were over. ¹ These were finally delivered from the second death. The first death they had undergone, the natural wages of sin, but in faithfulness; in the second death, the final judgment against sin, they would have no part. It could have no power over them. On the contrary, they had special relationship with God and Christ, they were priests of God and of Christ, and would reign with Him a thousand years. They also are priests and kings. Note how God and Christ are here united in one thought, as continually in the writings of John. Thus the beast and the false prophet are in the lake of fire, their armies slain, and Satan bound in the abyss, and the risen saints are priests of God and Christ, reigning with Christ a thousand years. The details and effects, mark, are not given here. The object is to give the place of the saints, and especially of the sufferers, during the time of this book. The rest come in as a general fact, there were sitters on thrones of judgment; but the faithful of the prophecy are specially mentioned.

When the thousand years are finished, Satan is let loose again. He comes up on the earth, but he never gets up to heaven again. But the nations are tested by his temptation. Not even having seen Christ and enjoyed the fruits of His glory-no mere means can secure the heart of man, if it is to be depended upon;

¹It may be noted here that, according to the true reading, the living and reigning is certainly resurrection. "The rest of the dead lived not until," etc.; so that it is clearly used here for resurrection, as the following words confirm: "This is the first resurrection."

and men fall, in number as the sand of the sea, into Satan's hands as soon as tempted; enjoying blessing, where unfaithfulness would have been present loss (perhaps cutting off) and there was nothing to tempt them, but unfaithful as soon as they are tempted, as soon as the heart is tried. It was the last and needed trial of man; needed because they could not have finally enjoyed God with natural hearts, and the natural heart had not been tested where present blessing was on the side of owning a present, visible, glorious Christ. The deceived multitude, not limited now to a third of the earth or a special prophetic district but taking in the breadth of the earth, went up against the camp of the saints, and surrounded it and the beloved city, Jerusalem. It is remarkable here, there is no special presence of Christ amongst them. They are left apparently to be surrounded by their enemies. The Lord has allowed all this testing separation of personal faithfulness. Had He appeared, of course these hostile crowds could not have come up, nor would the thorough trial of the heart have proved the faithfulness of the saints, who would not follow the seductions of Satan. They are pressed upon and surrounded by the enemy, but faithful. Once this separation and full testing had been accomplished, God's judgment fell on them from heaven, and destroyed them. The devil was then cast into the lake of fire, where the beast and the false prophet were already, where they are tormented for ever and ever.

This closed the exercise of wrath, of the destruction of hostile power-a wondrous scene-that God should have enemies in this world! Now judicial power, as such, seated in its own right, comes in. It may be remarked, that the exercise of this on the quick, forms no part of the contents of this book. The hostile power of the beast was destroyed by Him who judges and makes war, the heavenly saints having been taken to glory. The crowds of apostates at the end of the thousand years are destroyed by fire from heaven. But the judgment of Matthew 25 is not found here, unless there be a possible connection with the judgment of chapter 20 : 4.

There now comes the judgment of the dead. There is no coming here. A great white throne is set; judgment is carried on according to the purity of God's nature. It was no dealing with the earth, or the power of evil, but with souls. Heaven and earth-all mere scenes of judgment-disappear. The secrets of men's hearts are judged by Him who knows them all. Heaven and earth flee away before the face of Him that sat on the throne, and the dead, small and great, stand before the throne. Judgment was according to works, as it was written in the books of record. Still another element was brought into view. Sovereign grace alone had saved according to the purpose of God. ² There was a book of life. Whosoever was not written there was cast into the lake of fire. But it was the finally closing and separating scene for the whole race of men and

²Thus purpose and man's responsibility are never confounded, but, from the two trees of the garden on, are in juxtaposition; life brought into connection with responsibility in the law, responsibility being put first, and thus proof given that man cannot stand before God; but the question is solved only in Christ, who bore our sins, died for us to sin, and is life. Counsels and promise of life in Christ come first, then responsibility in the creature on earth, then grace making good counsels, in -righteousness, through the cross.

this world. And though they were judged everyman according to his works, yet sovereign grace only had delivered any; and whoever was not found in grace's book was cast into the lake of fire. The sea gave up the dead in it; death and hades, the dead in them. And death and hades were put an end to for ever by the divine judgment. The heaven and earth passed away, but they were to be revived; but death and hades never. There was for them only divine destruction and judgment. They are looked at as the power of Satan. He has the power of death and the gates of hades; and hence these are for ever destroyed judicially. They will never have power again. They are personified; but of course there is no question of tormenting them or of punishment: when the devil himself is cast in, there is. But death was not then destroyed; for the wicked dead had not been raised for judgment. Now they had; and the last enemy is destroyed. The force of the image, I doubt not, is that all the dead now judged (the whole contents of hades, in whom the power of death had been) were cast into the lake of fire, so that death and hades, which had no existence but in their state, were entirely and judicially ended by their being cast in. The saints had long before passed out of them; but they subsisted in the wicked. Now these were, consequent on the judgment of the white throne, cast into the lake of fire the second death. The limit and measure of escape was the book of life.