

Dr. Dave Mathewson, Revelation, Lecture 27, Revelation 20, The Millennium and Great White Throne Judgment

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This is Dr. Dave Mathewson in his course on the book of Revelation. This is session 27 on Revelation 20, the Millennium and the Great White Throne Judgment.

So, to turn to the issue of the Millennium, I've discussed briefly several principles that I think are important that must be in place, or I think should be in place when we interpret the Millennium.

Another principle is we still need to keep one eye on church history and what it's taught us, how it's wrestled with the text, and what has been important and valuable from that aspect. But I highlighted four things, just to very quickly recap.

Number one, the thousand years, whatever we think it refers to temporally, should be taken as symbolically.

That is, it could refer to a period of virtually any length but 1000, like all the other numbers, symbolic.

This second chapter 20, I think, refers, however we understand it, refers to something that happens at the second coming of Christ in the context of 19 through 21. Chapter 20, I think, still refers to what takes place at the second coming of Christ at the end of history.

Third, we said we should not take this in necessarily a strict chronological sequence. And then finally, I think our interpretation needs to reflect the role that chapter 20 plays within Revelation, that it is not the most significant feature. It is not the primary goal and point of Revelation, the new creation is.

So having said that, let me talk a little bit about the way that I read Revelation chapter 20 and especially verses 4 through 6 and the reference to the Millennium. In my opinion, the millennial reference in Revelation 20 is primarily to be taken simply as symbolic of the vindication of the saints. That is, we've already noted that chapter 20 is meant to be this reference at the end of verse 4 to coming to life and reigning with Christ.

The primary function of that in Revelation is to be seen as a reversal of and a contrast to the career of Satan and the beasts. Satan and the two beasts have been portrayed, and especially now Satan, as kind of the spearhead behind all this. Satan has been portrayed as the one who reigns and rules.

The earth is his kingdom and his rule, now expressed through the Roman Empire for John in the first century, his rule dominates everything. And as a result of that, he has put Christians to death. So his verdict on Christians is to get rid of them and kill them because they resist and refuse to cooperate with his kingdom.

So, he puts them to death. Now, in a complete act of reversal, the verdict now is that in opposition to what was true during the time of the beast reign, in exact opposite, now the saints come to life. The saints who were put to death, they come to life.

In contrast to Satan, who ruled, the saints rule. So I take it that the thousand years then is primarily to be viewed as symbolic of this event. The raising and coming to life and the reigning of the saints as their vindication.

So, I take it that the thousand years doesn't really refer to a specific period of time at all of substantial length. It's simply another way, a symbolic way of referring to what happens when Christ comes back. The saints will be raised and vindicated, and they will reign; they will come to life and reign in direct contrast to how they were treated at the hands of the beast who reigned.

And that event is symbolized by the thousand year period. So I don't think it necessarily refers to a literal period of time at all, as far as a long period of time extending after Christ comes back, but may just be another way of describing what happens at the second coming of Christ. He raises the saints, and they reign as their vindication in the context of the judgment of Satan.

Now they reign, and that is symbolized by a thousand years, or the thousand years simply symbolizes the thousand being the number of completeness and fullness. Now we see the complete full vindication of the saints symbolized by this thousand years. The number of thousand years is probably also to be read in light of other time references that referred to the reign of the saints.

In other words, we might ask, why did he use a thousand years? Probably to draw a contrast to the time periods used to symbolize the reign of Satan and his persecuting violent activity and putting the saints to death. So, for example, elsewhere in Revelation, we saw back in chapters two and three, we saw the period of suffering referred to as ten days, a symbolic period of time probably taken from Daniel. We also saw the period of the dragon's activity as referred to as three and a half years or time times and half a time.

We saw it as referred to 42 months and 1260 days. Now, by contrast, the saints reign for a thousand years. So the point is to draw a contrast between the limited period of time, however intense, the limited period of time that Satan reigned and the period of time that the saints reigned, a thousand years.

But again, the point is not to depict a literal period of time, or I'm suggesting not really a period of time at all in terms of some spread-out period of the saints' reign, but simply the value of the numbers. One thousand years is to be seen in direct contrast to the three and a half years, 42 months, 1260 days, that Satan and the beast were allowed to wreak havoc on the people of God. So once again, the point of the numbers is the full, complete vindication of God's people that shows that by using insignificant or smaller numbers, that shows that the reign of Satan and his persecuting activity is now seen to be insignificant by comparison.

The saints now are fully vindicated and that is all symbolized by the thousand year reign. So now the saints are compensated for their suffering in a way that exceeds anything that they suffered at the hands of the beast, which was only 10 days, three and a half years. Now, their compensation, symbolized by 1000 years, far exceeds anything they had to suffer at the hands of the beast.

Probably at least in my view, we shouldn't read too much more into the Millennium than this and that we should be careful about reading anything else to it. That is the only role I see in Revelation 20 and the rest of Revelation, the only role that it plays, or at least the primary role that the thousand year rule plays is to symbolize the victory and the vindication of the saints. And here we've seen references already to the vindication of the saints in a way.

We've seen them standing victorious by the sea in chapter 15. We've seen them standing before Mount Zion in chapter 14. But now, the author wants to portray the vindication of the saints in a different light.

He wants to portray the vindication of the saints more specifically in contrast to the way they were treated at the hands of Satan by raising them and now them reigning instead of Satan reigning and putting them to life. Now, by contrasting the period of time at which Satan ruled with the period of time that symbolically 1000 years refers to their own reign. So, to then put it back in perspective, you have the scene in chapter 20 where I said, I still think the primary function of chapter 20 is this is the judgment on Satan.

And this is to be seen as the final verdict and judgment on Satan. It's interesting too that we might also need to bring in the idea that elsewhere in Revelation, especially back in chapter 12, Satan was seen as the accuser of the brothers of God's people as the saint. So now we find Satan himself giving an account for what he did in a sense, and now Satan is judged.

But part of Satan's judgment is also to show the vindication of those he has accused and those he has harmed and persecuted. So that's why I think you have verses four through six, this reference to the vindication of the saints in the context of Satan's

judgment, because his judgment, the rendering of the verdict of Satan's judgment, that he is guilty of the blood of the saints. He is guilty of the way he treated them.

Part of his judgment also means that those he has mistreated and harmed and put to death will be vindicated and shown that their witness was valid, that they were right, and that their death was not in vain. Verse five then continues through verse six; verse five refers to the rest of the dead who are raised at the end of the 1,000 years. The question is, who are these dead who were raised after 1,000 years? And is this a further resurrection? In other words, this appears to be a second resurrection.

So, the first resurrection is exactly what John calls it in verse four. Verse four is a reference then to the resurrection of the saints. And now verse five seems to anticipate a further resurrection, another resurrection.

We'll put that together in a moment, but just keep that in your mind. So, verse six then, verse six says, actually, verse five, the rest of the dead did not come to life until the 1,000 years were ended, which seems to be that reference to coming to life, seems to anticipate another resurrection. We've already had a resurrection in verse four, the saints coming to life.

Now, verse five seems to suggest the rest of the dead; there's more to be raised after the 1,000 years. Now, the second part of verse five, the last part of verse five says, this is the first resurrection. What? In verse four, the saints coming to life is the first resurrection.

But then notice verse six says, blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. That is verse four, the saints coming to life. Blessed are those who have a part in the first resurrection.

The second death has no power over them. So, interestingly, you have a reference to a first resurrection, that is, verse four, the saints coming to life and reigning, and you have a reference to a second death, which later on we'll see; John will tell us exactly what the second death is. So, you have a first resurrection and a second death.

That implies a second resurrection and a first death. Does everyone follow that? The first resurrection is in verse four, and now, in verse six, John appeals to a second death. The first resurrection seems to suggest there's a second resurrection somewhere.

Otherwise, why say first twice? And then the mention of a second death seems to assume there's a first death. But John doesn't tell us what; he doesn't talk about a first death. He doesn't mention it and say what it is and uses the words first death.

And he doesn't use the words second resurrection either. Those two elements seem to be missing. So, you have the first resurrection and the second death.

Where is the second resurrection that comes after the first? And where is the first death? Neither of which John explicitly refers to. Probably the way we should understand it is this. The first resurrection is clearly in verse four, the resurrection of the saints symbolized by the thousand years.

Where's the second resurrection? Probably, it is verse five, the first part of verse five. The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. Where do we see that? Verses 11 through 15.

I think verses 11 and 15 are the second resurrection, where now all of the dead, and notice particularly in verse 12, 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 had been done.

Then, in verse 13, the sea gave up the dead that was in it, and death and Hades gave up their dead as well. I think that's the second resurrection. Though John doesn't label it that way, I think that is implied.

In verse five, the rest of the dead did not come to life until after the first resurrection, after the thousand years. That reference to coming to life would be your second resurrection. Then I think verses 11 through 15 describe that, the second resurrection.

There's the first resurrection, verse four, the saints coming to life and reigning, symbolized by a thousand years. Then, the second resurrection is verses 11 through 15, where all the dead are raised in a final act of judgment. Now, we also said that John mentions a second death.

What is the second death? Actually, we find the second death clearly identified in verses 14 and 15 of chapter 20. At this great white throne judgment seat, when they are raised and judged, verse 14, then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death.

So, the final judgment being cast into the lake of fire, where the beast has already been thrown in chapter 19, and where the dragon is thrown, and we'll see he's thrown in chapter 20, the lake of fire, and we'll look at what that is in a moment. That is the second death, and Christians are spared from that second death. John says, blessed are those who participate in the first resurrection, those who are faithful to Christ, and those who refuse to give in to the beast.

They will experience the first resurrection to life, and John says they don't need to worry about that second death, which is being thrown into the lake of fire. That is for those who participate in the second resurrection. But where's the first death? There's a second death, which is being thrown into the lake of fire.

Is there a first death? I think John assumes the first death is physical death, the beheading and the killing and slaying that Christians experienced as part of their faithful witness. So, Christians suffer the first death, that is, physical death and harm at the hands of Satan and the beast, but they will not experience the second death, which is being thrown into the lake of fire. The reason they won't is because they will participate in the first resurrection; that is, they will be raised and vindicated and reign with Christ.

They will experience the first resurrection. But there's a second resurrection, but that resurrection will be of the dead, and it will result in going into the second death. So, hopefully, I've helped you make a little bit of sense of this: that the saints experience the first death, physical death, but they will experience the first resurrection, raising them, vindicating them, and reigning with Christ.

It seems to me that the second resurrection and the second death are reserved then for unbelievers, for those who oppose God and his people. But to reiterate, what happens in verses four through six is, I want to emphasize that the main theme of this is primarily the judgment of Satan, but along with the judgment of Satan, along with the verdict now given to Satan also means showing that his treatment of the saints was wrong and unjust, that his accusations of them were wrong. That also means that God must vindicate his people.

And so we find that happening in verses four through six, where they are raised, and they come to life, and they reign with Christ a thousand years. A thousand years simply symbolizing not a long period of time, but a thousand years, in my opinion, a symbol of their vindication and their reward and their victory. They're raised, and now they reign in contrast to the way that Satan treated them.

So, hopefully you can see what we need to understand the Millennium in terms of chapter 20, in terms of the judgment of Satan. It's almost a necessary piece of the judgment of Satan to also vindicate those that he has harmed. And so the thousand years, however, we understand it, primarily has to play that role.

And all the other questions we ask about who's going to be there and how can there be people who would populate the Millennium and et cetera, et cetera, all of those questions probably are unnecessary because John himself has a very, very specific role for the Millennium in chapter 20. The other thing we noted is the main goal of Revelation then is not the Millennium, but chapter 20 is simply preparing for the finale, for the grand finale and the climax of the book and the focus of the book and

the main goal of the book, which is chapter 21 and 22 that we'll get to in a moment. So, there are two final sections then in Revelation chapter 20.

The first one is in 7 through 10, we read of Satan's final judgment, where now he is actually let out of the abyss in order to, at this point, he's let out of the abyss so that he is able to gather an army and to deceive the nations once more in gathering an army in order to; here they surround the camp of the saints. The camp of the saints here is probably just symbolic of God's people as a whole. The idea here is once again that Satan and the entire world are now seen as in opposition to God and opposition to his people and a threat to God's people.

But this war ends in the same way that chapter 19 did, and that is Satan is simply defeated with no fighting actually taking place. We don't see a skirmish, and people on both sides, casualties on both sides. But in this case, fire simply comes out of heaven and devours Satan and all his enemies so that there's really no fighting takes place at all.

I've already suggested to you that I think the battle in verses 7 through 10 is the same one as chapter 19 and verses 17 through 21 and the same one as chapter 17, where Satan and the 10 kingdoms wage war against the lamb and the lamb defeats them and also the battle of Armageddon back in seal number 6 in Revelation chapter 16. All are simply different ways of looking at the same end-time battle. And I suggested to you that the end-time battle is primarily meant to symbolize judgment.

It's primarily a judgment scene that happens at the end of history. One other reason for thinking this that I already mentioned that thinking that this battle in 20:7 through 11 is the same one as at the end of chapter 19 is the same Old Testament text lies behind it. That is, John is drawing from the same text, Ezekiel 38 and 39, as a model for portraying this battle.

Ezekiel 38 and 39 seem to refer to an end-time battle, and now John has we saw him draw on that language in chapter 19, the language of calling on the birds and beasts to gather and prepare to gorge themselves on the corpses that are a result of the battle. Now, we find John using that same language or using that same text. For example, the fact that fire comes down from heaven to destroy them comes out of Ezekiel chapter 38.

So, John, this is not a contradiction to chapter 19; he destroys them with the sword coming out of his mouth. Now they are destroyed by fire. Does that mean it's a different battle? No, we've seen John can use different images to portray different events.

Now, drawing on Ezekiel and Ezekiel's notion of fire coming out of heaven or the enemies being destroyed by fire, John depicts the enemies being destroyed by fire in

allusion to Ezekiel. Note also the mention of Gog and Magog. Chapter 38 and verse 1 of Ezekiel, this is Ezekiel chapter 38 and verse 1, the word of the Lord came to me, son of man, a reference to Ezekiel, son of man, set your face against Gog of the land of Magog.

So John's reference to Gog and Magog is an indication that he's alluding back to Ezekiel chapter 38. Now, who are Gog and Magog? There have been all kinds of attempts with Ezekiel as well as Revelation that I don't want to go into them, but there have been all kinds of attempts to identify them with modern-day nations such as Russia or somebody else. By doing gymnastics with Gog and Magog and relating them to modern-day phenomenon, we often find Gog and Magog being treated as John prophesying about modern-day nations.

Instead, I think John himself tells us who Gog and Magog are in verse 8. Satan will be released from prison and he will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth, four being symbolic of the entire earth. I think John is using Gog and Magog in allusion to the battle in Ezekiel 38. Now, John sees Gog and Magog as symbols for all the nations of the entire earth.

So this is the entire earth now in final opposition to God and his people, the final earth with Satan lying behind their attempt to oppose God. And again, in fact, in number, they are like the sand of the seashore in verse 8, another indication that this can't just be two nations. This is Gog and Magog are symbolic of, in allusion to Ezekiel 38, symbolic of the entire earth that Satan has now deceived.

And now they are gathered for battle. They surround the saints, which I suggested to you, the camp of the saints is probably symbolic of the people of God themselves. Although one of the things this text does, is not so much suggesting that now the saints have to fear because they're surrounded by enemies and now there's a battle.

Probably, this is more symbolic of the absolute security of the saints. It's almost as if the function of this is to show nothing can reverse that verdict back in chapter 20, verses 4 and 6. Nothing can reverse that. There's no threat, no way that their vindication can be reversed.

And that's indicated by Satan's attempt, his failed attempt to bring all the nations against God's people, and they simply suffer the same fate as we saw back in chapter 19. The other thing to say about this battle, too, even though only Satan is present or the two beasts were present back in chapter 19, once more, this does not indicate separate battles. I think it's a literary technique that John is, as we've already seen, depositing the unholy trinity, Satan, and the two beasts in the opposite order in which they were introduced in chapters 12 and 13.

So, I think that's just a literary device. Again, this is not to be taken in strict chronological order. These, I think, are the same battles.

The idea of Satan and notice in chapter 19, it's the two beasts that gathered the army here at Satan. But back in chapter 16, it was both the beast and Satan who gathered the armies, all three of them from whom the frogs came out that gathered the armies for battle in Armageddon. So again, I think we just find different perspectives or different ways of looking at the end-time battle.

In chapter 19, we saw the end time battle in relationship to the beasts. Now we see the same end time battle in relationship to Satan himself. But we've already noted too that, like chapter 19, there's no fighting taking place.

There's no literal battle here. And probably because, like 19, this is mainly a judgment scene where now Satan is judged in the same manner that the beast and the false prophets were in chapter 19. In fact, verse 10 makes that clear in chapter 20, and the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown.

And they were tormented day and night forever and ever. This is a clear allusion back to Revelation chapter 19. So in the context then of the judgment of Satan in chapter 20, which is the main point of chapter 20, as we've said, now we find that the unholy trinity has finally been removed and judged, and all the nations and the kings of the earth with them.

Now, we still have one final judgment scene left that we'll look at in just a moment. But one other thing I want to emphasize is, notice that in this battle scene, starting with verse 7, you're introduced to Satan in a way that connects you back to one and three. And we said, besides the mention of the number 1,000, which connects all three of these scenes, you could actually remove four through six, and one through three would flow naturally into seven.

So in one through three, Satan is bound for a thousand years. And at the end of three, it mentions the fact that he will be set free. And now we find in verse seven, after the thousand years is over, Satan now is released from his prison.

Now, here are a couple of important things to say. First of all, if we try to read this in strict chronological succession, it doesn't make a lot of sense to see the saints being vindicated and then after the thousand years. In other words, when you read this, it does appear that we are to take this in a temporal way, this language of after a thousand years.

So it does seem the saints are raised first, and they're vindicated for a thousand years. Then it's after that that the judgment comes. But once more, I'm not certain that we're meant to take this too literally as far as chronological succession.

Instead, the reason for this temporal language is that Satan would be bound in the abyss for a thousand years and then released, and he's able to marshal the troops against the saints of God. This language, as we've already noted, this language of binding Satan in order to release him, comes out of the Old Testament books like Isaiah chapter 24 and apocalyptic texts like 1 Enoch and New Testament texts that pick that theme up, like 2 Peter 2 and Jude 6. What, then, is going on here? When we read in verse three, after that, he must be set free for a short time. Anyone who reads this text in light of that apocalyptic motif would understand Satan being set free so he can go into judgment.

And so, in verse seven of chapter 20, when it says, when the thousand years are over, Satan will be released, anyone thinking of 1 Enoch and the Old Testament texts, this concept of binding spirits in prison, and while they're in prison, they are awaiting the day of judgment, they would read this as Satan is released to go into prison. But John, as part of his narrative, adds another feature. Before he goes into judgment, which he does in verse 10, so Satan is bound in the abyss awaiting judgment, where he gets thrown into the lake of fire.

But before he does that, Satan is able to deceive the nations and mount one final attack. But the reason John re-narrates the end time battle again, I think, is simply to demonstrate once more that the verdict on God's people in chapter 20:4 through 6, the verdict of being vindicated and raised and reigning with Christ, cannot be overturned. It cannot be harmed.

Satan is powerless against God's final verdict. Instead, Satan is in the end time battle, is once again defeated, like the two beasts were, he's defeated, and he goes into his destruction in allusion to and following this conception from the Old Testament and other apocalyptic texts. So 7, with verse 10, we finally reach the point where all of Satan now, the two beasts and Satan, have been removed and judged, and all the kings of the earth and all of humanity have been judged.

What is left then is one final judgment in chapter 20 and verse 11 through 15, and this is the so-called great white throne judgment scene. Another way of putting it is this is also the second resurrection, the first resurrection taking place back in verses 4 through 6 in relationship to the saints. This now is the second resurrection, and those raised go to the second death.

Now, how do we understand that? In my opinion, verses 11 through 15, as we've seen, this is the second resurrection, the resurrection of the dead who are judged. In

my opinion, this is a judgment for the unbelieving dead. This is a judgment for unbelievers.

The saints' judgment has already taken place in verses 4 through 6. Their judgment has been rendered on their behalf. They have been raised and vindicated, and especially if the beheaded saints are sort of a representation of the entirety of God's people, all of the saints have been raised and vindicated in verses 4 through 6. So, who is left but the unbelievers, the unbelieving dead who now are raised, and they are judged in verses 11 through 15. So, I don't see Revelation 15 as the judgment of all people, some to eternal life and some to eternal judgment.

I think 11 through 15 is solely a judgment of unbelievers, and now they are judged. The saints have been judged, and the verdict was they are vindicated, they are shown to be right, they are raised, and they reign with Christ. Now, the judgment of the unbelieving dead, they are raised, and they end up in the lake of fire along with the beasts, two beasts, and the dragon himself.

In other words, I think that probably, verses 11 through 15 don't necessarily happen chronologically after the other events. Again, it may just be a further scene or a further way of depicting, here is what happens at the second coming of Christ. And it may not be suggesting after everything in chapter 19 and 20, then finally this happens, but this is simply another way depicting the judgment of God, the unbelieving dead who are now judged.

The point of this is that by the time you get to the end of 20, there is nothing left. You have the two beasts who have been judged and thrown into the lake of fire. You have Satan the dragon who has been judged and thrown into the lake of fire.

You have all the unbelieving dead who have been judged and thrown into the lake of fire. You have all the nations and all the kings of the earth judged and destroyed, punished in judgment, so that by the end of chapter 20, there is nothing left. All of evil has been removed.

The evil satanic trinity has been removed. All of their followers, all of those who followed the beast and worshipped his image, all who refused to acknowledge God's sovereignty, and all those who caused harm to God's faithful people, now have been removed in a series of judgment scenes that don't necessarily follow chronologically, but simply depict what happens when Christ comes at the end of history to judge, so that now you are prepared for chapter 21 and 22. Now, the new creation can arrive.

Now, to go back and look at a couple of details of the section, the great white throne probably is not meant to indicate some different or separate throne, but probably the great white throne, and note how it is described, then I saw a great, great white throne and him who was seated on it. Seems to me to recall chapter 4, the one

seated upon the throne. So I take it this is the same throne as chapter 4. In fact, back in chapter 4, there are clear judgment motifs in chapter 4, the thunder and lightning that rumble in connection with the throne and the one seated on the throne.

We've seen that as a judgment motif throughout the book. So now, the throne seen in chapter 4, God seated on the throne, he begins to enact the final judgment. So the great white throne, probably the same throne back in chapter 4. And now we find all of the dead, and I've suggested this is probably unbelievers.

The judgment for believers took place back in verses 4 and 6. They have been raised now; the unbelieving dead are raised, but they go into judgment; they go to the second death. The mention of books, books function in Revelation, and you see this in other apocalyptic texts as a metaphor, often a metaphor for here for recording works, but also a metaphor for belonging and who are the people of God. Here, the works function as a basis for judgment.

Probably, the books here reflect another Old Testament text once more, Daniel chapter 7, which we've seen playing a crucial role throughout Revelation several times, but Daniel chapter 7 and verse 10 mentions a book. In 7 verse 10, a river of fire was flowing, coming out from before him, and this is a description of the Ancient of Days, thousands upon thousands attended him, ten thousands upon ten times ten thousands stood before him. The court was seated, and the books were opened.

Daniel 7 is a fitting kind of subtext for chapter 20 of Revelation because what we've been suggesting is Revelation appears to kind of be a court scene, just like Daniel chapter 7. And so now books are opened in Daniel chapter 7. Later on, in chapter 12 of Daniel, we read at that time that Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of the nations until then. But at that time, your people, everyone whose name is found written in the book, will be delivered.

Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake, some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt. Here I take at the Daniel section; those who are, some will be raised to shame and everlasting contempt. That is what is portrayed here.

Those who are raised to life are portrayed back in verses four through six. Now, the other half of that, those in the books who are now to be raised for contempt and punishment, that is what is portrayed in verses 11 through 15. So, the books then contain their works.

In other words, I think this is a reference to those, the works primarily being number one, perhaps those who have killed the saints, but also the fact that they have

followed the beast. They participated in the idolatrous, godless activity of the Roman empire. They have followed the beast, and they have killed God's people.

And now they are being judged for that. The Book of Life is here simply because, to emphasize, I think that their names were not found in it. Back in chapter three, in verse five, John promised the church in Smyrna that their names would never be blotted out of the Book of Life.

Now, the Book of Life appears here, I think, to demonstrate that these people's names were not found in the Book of Life. So, the books all here simply form the basis for the judgment of the people of God. Note, interestingly, that to add this notion of the complete removal of all evil, the complete judgment of all evil and all of creation in verse 13, the sea gave up the dead that was in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead.

That's interesting. Death gives up its death. Death, perhaps here, is kind of seen as a power that has authority over the people.

And then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. So here we see a notion that you find elsewhere, even in apocalyptic literature, perhaps of the sea and also Hades as sort of the place of the dead. And now they give up their dead in the context of judgment.

But not only, it's intriguing in this scene, and as I said, to emphasize the finality of judgment and the complete removal of all evil in this final judgment scene. Note how verse 11 begins, then I saw the great white throne and the one seated on it, chapter four of Revelation, earth and sky fled from his presence or the heavens and the earth fled from his presence. And in other words, they also flee in judgment.

And it says there was no place found for them. So heaven, even the heavens and the earth flee in judgment before the one seated upon the throne. Why is that so? Why the earth as well and the sky? We'll return to this when we get to chapter 21, which introduces a new creation, and ask how are we to understand that? Are we to understand it as the complete destruction and obliteration of this creation in a brand new creation out of nothing in chapter 21? Or should we understand it some other way? We'll talk a little bit about that later.

But I think part of the reason for the removal of the earth and the sky as well is to remember that so far in Revelation, the earth and the sky have been ruled over by the beasts and by Satan himself. Satan is the ruler of the world. Satan and the beast have ravished the earth.

They have brought it great harm. They have ruled over the earth and exploited it. So now, in a comprehensive judgment scene, John says the earth and the sky are removed as well.

So, this is not primarily a geographical comment, although it probably includes that. But it's meant ideologically to represent the earth as the sphere of Satan's rule. The earth has been ravaged and destroyed and harmed by Satan and by the beast.

The earth is the place where God's people were harmed. The earth that was ruled over by Rome and godless empires that earth has now been removed and destroyed. So it's not so much a geographical statement as it is a theological and ideological one, I think.

So that even the sea and the earth and the sky now are seen as subject to judgment because of this holistic picture of the present world as one where beast and Satan have ruled and done their harm. Elsewhere, they're described as the destroyers of the earth. One other comment in this section is the reference to the lake of fire.

As you've probably figured out now, and you might be able to guess the way I'm going to handle this, is the lake of fire also is not meant to be taken literally. It is as if we're to think in terms of somewhere a literal a cauldron, an expansive cauldron of flames coming out that people and the beast and the dragon and people are literally thrown into. No more than that the dragon is a literal dragon, as opposed to Satan himself.

So, the lake of fire is not so much a reference to a literal lake or cauldron spewing out fire that people are literally thrown into, but probably simply a symbol of judgment. That is a symbol of complete removal from God's presence. A symbol of humanity being removed from God's presence and basically allowing them to live life separated from God's presence and under the control of Satan and the beasts eternally.

But John doesn't say much about where this is and what it's like. Again, the main point is that the vindication of God's people means the judgment of those who have harmed them and the complete separation of all of humanity from the presence of God. As we'll see in chapters 21 and 22, the blessing of reward that comes to God's people is life in God's presence.

So I take it the lake of fire is then just the opposite of the new Jerusalem, new creation in Revelation chapter 21. But I want to say much more than that except for it's symbolic of the judgment that results in eternal separation from God's presence. So, chapter 20 ends with all evil being removed in a comprehensive judgment scene.

We should probably also though include chapter 19, verses 11 through 21, all the way to the end of chapter 20. In a comprehensive judgment scene, all evil has been removed and judged. As I've already mentioned, the two beasts have been removed and judged.

The kings of the earth have been removed and judged. All the nations of the earth have been removed and judged. Satan himself, the dragon, has been removed and judged.

All of the unbelieving dead have now been raised, removed, and judged. Even creation itself has been judged. The present heavens and the earth, as not just so much geographically but as the place of Satan's dominion, the place where he's caused harm, the place he and the beast have ravaged, all of that has been removed in a comprehensive judgment scene.

And as part of that scene, anticipating chapters 21 and 22, as part of that judgment scene, the judgment of unbelieving humanity and of the beast and Satan also requires to demonstrate that the way they treated and harmed God's people was incorrect. And so part of the judgment means the vindication of God's people, symbolized by the thousand-year reign, being raised to life and resurrected and reigning for a thousand years, symbolizing their vindication. But even that only anticipates chapters 21 and 22, where we'll see the saints will reign forever and ever.

So everything, all evil, every evil thing, every evil place, every evil person, has now been removed in the comprehensive scene, a comprehensive act of judgment, now paving the way for a new creative act, which is the arrival of the new creation in Revelation 21. So all that is left now, all that is left after 20, is for the saints who have been vindicated in chapter 20:4 through six, all that is left is for the saints to enter into their eternal inheritance. And that's exactly what we find beginning with chapters 21 and 22.

So moving on then to chapters 21 and 22, as I've already said, this is not only the final visionary sequence series, the visionary segment of Revelation, it's the climax of the entire book. One could even argue it's the climax, as we'll see when we work through it. One could even argue it's the climax of the entire Bible, beginning with Genesis chapter 1 and Genesis chapter 2, where humanity is created to live on earth with God dwelling in their presence, which was thwarted and ruined because of sin in Genesis chapter 3. The rest of the Bible can be seen at one level as an attempt to restore that.

How is God going to reclaim his creation and restore his people to a relationship with himself? And how is he going to restore his people to a situation where they now reign on earth, where they live on earth and God dwelling in their presence? The rest of the Bible in a sense is how God does that through the person of Jesus Christ. And

now we find the climax of God's story, a redemptive-historical story, now reaching its ultimate consummation with humanity in the same way we saw in Genesis 1 and 2. Now God dwells with his people on earth in a new creation. We'll unpack that a little bit more, but the important point is Revelation 21 is certainly the climax of the book of Revelation and could be understood as the climax of the entire Bible.

It certainly stands out, too, in stark contrast against the visions of judgment that we've seen, especially in chapters 17 through 20 in the context of judgment. Now, in stark contrast to that, this vision of salvation and reward for the people of God on a new creation certainly stands out in bold relief. Now, God's salvation for his people in the form of a new creation has arrived.

There are a handful of other comments on this text in general. Chapter 21 and verses 1 through 8, we said, actually belong to a whole section, including chapters 19 and 20. We said the primary contrast that has clear structural features, such as an angel who held the seven bulls taking John to see the prostitute Babylon and then ending with John bowing down to worship the angel and the angel saying don't do it.

You find those two bookends now also prefacing a vision of the bride, new Jerusalem, starting with 21:9 and going all the way through 22:6 and a couple of verses following. So that means much of chapter 19 all the way through 21:8 is sort of a transition section between the destruction of Babylon, the prostitute Babylon, and the arrival of the bride new Jerusalem. In between, you find a series of judgment scenes, where all of humanity and the beast and the dragon are dealt with, and then everything is removed in a comprehensive judgment. Now, chapter 21, verses 1 through 8, belongs to that, but now it provides a setting, an introduction for the arrival of the bride new Jerusalem in 21:9. And the setting it provides is one of a new creation, the emergence of a brand new order.

And so now following God's judgment and following the new creation in 21 verses 1 through 8, now the bride new Jerusalem in contrast to the harlot or prostitute Babylon, now the bride new Jerusalem will be introduced and now can emerge and the wedding can be concluded that we'll see in chapter 21 and verse 9.

Another way to look at this, too, is that chapters 4 and 5 have finally become a reality in chapters 21 and 22. We said, chapters 4 and 5 introduce us to a scene where all of heaven acknowledges God's sovereignty, the one seated on the throne, and the rest of the book of Revelation can be seen as how is God's will done in heaven, how is God's sovereignty that is acknowledged in heaven, how does that finally get worked out on an earth that can test it. Now we see that the scene of chapters 4 and 5 now becomes a reality on earth in the form of new creation.

Another way of looking at it is that heaven and earth now merge in chapters 21 and 22, as heaven comes down to earth. God's throne and dwelling in heaven in chapters

4 and 5 are now coextensive with the new creation in Revelation 21 and 22. I heard, or I saw a sermon title, I didn't hear the sermon, I saw a sermon title not long ago on Revelation 21 and 22, and it was entitled God's New Home, and I was puzzled for a few seconds, but the more I thought about it, the more accurate I think that is.

We often think of chapter 21 as our new home, the main goal and the heavenly destiny, the main reward of God's people, and that's certainly true; that's the way it's presented. But did you ever stop and think that Revelation 21 and 22 are also about God getting a new home? God comes down from heaven and now God's throne and his dwelling is now with his people on a new earth.

In other words, in chapters 21 and 22, God does something he has not done since Genesis 1 and 2, dwell immediately and directly with his people on earth. Something he has not done since 1 and 2, something that was ruined and thwarted and disrupted because of sin, now becomes a reality once again. So it's chapters 21 and 22 are not just about us getting a new home, it's about God's new home as well because we find God doing something he hasn't done since Genesis, and that is dwelling directly in the midst of his people on a new creation, on a new earth.

So now that in chapters 19 and 20, everything has been judged, the only thing left is for God's people to enter into their inheritance, to enjoy their inheritance, which is a new creation, living life in a new creation on a new earth with God and the Lamb living in their midst. In the next section, I will look a little bit more detail at the depiction of the new creation, new Jerusalem, the depiction of the final order, the end time reality in chapters 21 and 22 and look at its function in the context of all of Revelation but also look at some of the detailed parts of the depiction of the new creation in chapters 21 and 22.

This is Dr. Dave Mathewson in his course on the book of Revelation. This is session 27 on Revelation 20, the Millennium and the Great White Throne Judgment.