

Study 42: Revelation 20:7-15

7 When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison

8 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.

- Let me quote what I wrote from last week's study: "Our job is not to figure out who the antichrist is or isn't, or whether the millennium is to be taken literally. Our job is to impact the world for Christ in our generation, whether we face extreme persecution or relative freedom." Do you agree or disagree? Why?
- Historically, there seem to be seasons for the gospel and the Church. There are seasons of great grace, influence and peace, and then there are seasons of persecution and pressure. God uses both seasons to spread His Word. For instance, during the first three centuries, the more Rome tried to wipe out the Church, the more it seemed to flourish and prosper.
- Reports from modern Communist countries report a vibrant Church exists, although the believers are "malnourished" and doctrinally ignorant due to lack of teaching and resources. But God is not limited to work even when His enemies are as numerous as "sand on the seashore."
- It is important to recognize the "times and seasons" of God. According to the writer of Ecclesiastes:

There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven: a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot, a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build, a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance, a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them, a time to embrace and a time to refrain, a time to search and a time to give up, a time to keep and a time to throw away, a time to tear and a time to mend, a time to be silent and a time to speak, a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace (Ecclesiastes 3:1-8).

- What time are you in right now? What season is your nation enduring? What are you doing about this season? Complaining or trying to use your spiritual authority to get out of that particular season? Or armed with the knowledge of what season it is, are you using the power of God to spread the gospel according to the reality of the moment and season?
- It may be a time of great openness in one country, and a time of persecution and tension in another. Remember what we discussed in previous studies: Jesus is in control. There is no power, especially that of the devil, that can oppose the Lamb on

the throne. That doesn't mean that Satan has no power. He does and it should be feared to some extent, for no human without Jesus can withstand him. And he has followers as numerous as "sand on the seashore."

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.

- Thank God for the fire from heaven! But sometimes the fire from heaven also engulfs the people of God while God's enemies are being burned up. When this happens, God uses the fire to do good things in our lives, to purge that which is unnecessary or even unclean. Consider Daniel's three friends:

Furious with rage, Nebuchadnezzar summoned Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. So these men were brought before the king, and Nebuchadnezzar said to them, "Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the image of gold I have set up? Now when you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes and all kinds of music, if you are ready to fall down and worship the image I made, very good. But if you do not worship it, you will be thrown immediately into a blazing furnace. Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?" Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up." Then Nebuchadnezzar was furious with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and his attitude toward them changed. He ordered the furnace heated seven times hotter than usual and commanded some of the strongest soldiers in his army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and throw them into the blazing furnace. So these men, wearing their robes, trousers, turbans and other clothes, were bound and thrown into the blazing furnace. The king's command was so urgent and the furnace so hot that the flames of the fire killed the soldiers who took up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and these three men, firmly tied, fell into the blazing furnace. Then King Nebuchadnezzar leaped to his feet in amazement and asked his advisers, "Weren't there three men that we tied up and threw into the fire?" They replied, "Certainly, O king." He said, "Look! I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods." Nebuchadnezzar then approached the opening of the blazing furnace and shouted, "Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out! Come here!" So Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego came out of the fire, and the satraps, prefects, governors and royal

advisers crowded around them. They saw that the fire had not harmed their bodies, nor was a hair of their heads singed; their robes were not scorched, and there was no smell of fire on them. Then Nebuchadnezzar said, "Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who has sent his angel and rescued his servants! They trusted in him and defied the king's command and were willing to give up their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own God. Therefore I decree that the people of any nation or language who say anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego be cut into pieces and their houses be turned into piles of rubble, for no other god can save in this way." Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the province of Babylon (Daniel 3:13-30)

- God used the fire to burn up the things that bound Daniel's three friends. Jesus also met them in the midst of the fire, while the men who carried them to the fire were themselves consumed. I would like to be with Jesus, but not while I'm in the middle of a raging furnace.
- Oh dear reader, when will we fully comprehend that God is in control and works good in all things for those who know and love Him. Revelation is not a book of fear, nor is fire from heaven something to dread. God can deal with His enemies through fire and use that same fire to deliver and cleanse His people.

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.

- Now we are looking at the eternal judgment for the devil and his followers. They will spend eternity apart from God in the real torment of hell's fires. No matter how powerful we perceive the devil to be, God can still "pick him up" and throw him into the lake of fire.
- It appears that the devil is "God's devil," under His oversight. Consider what is written in the book of Job:

One day the angels came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came with them. The LORD said to Satan, "Where have you come from?" Satan answered the LORD, "From roaming through the earth and going back and forth in it." (Job 1:6-7)

- I don't fully understand all this and there are many questions about evil and how it occurs if this is an accurate picture of spiritual reality. I do think that mankind and the devil have freewill, but God has the last word. Someone once said, "God is playing chess with man; He matches his every move." God matched every one of Satan's moves in the life of Job and eventually brought great victory to Job's life.

11 Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them.

- When God acts, where can anyone go to flee from His presence? He is all powerful!
- Remember that Revelation uses what is referred to as apocalyptic language. It is a vocabulary of strong images that is not to be taken literally. The earth and sky won't literally try to escape God's presence. It is symbolic language that speaks of a tumultuous time when men will try everything they know to avoid God's judgment. Nothing will work.

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.

- Do you think there is a literal book of life, or does this present a powerful image of God's ability to remember all the deeds that men and women performed (or didn't perform)?

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.

- There is a final judgment in God that everyone who has ever lived must pass through. This is an irrefutable tenet of the Christian faith: God will judge all men.

He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead (Acts 10:42).

In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge (2 Timothy 4:1).

But they will have to give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead (1 Peter 4:5).

- At that point, everyone will be assigned to their eternal reward, whether heaven or hell.

14 Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death.

- We saw in last week's study that the first resurrection is in this life when men and women are raised in Christ through faith in His name and blood. But there is a second resurrection and death and that is the final judgment.

- Paul gave instruction of this great judgment time to the Thessalonian church, which was being unnerved by false teachings that the resurrection had already taken place:

Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words (1Thessalonians 4:13-18)

- The above passage has been used to develop a “rapture” theology that has led to much speculation about when the believers will be removed from the earth. Many believe that this will happen prior to a great tribulation on the earth. What is my thought on this? It is hard for me to get excited about any doctrine that does not exalt the power and glory of God first and foremost. The focus of a lot of rapture theology is the power of the devil and the weakness of the church. I find this inconsistent with the teachings of Revelation, which is a book of absolute triumph and victory for Jesus and His followers. Revelation is clear that there will be hard times and even martyrdom for some, but that is not the central theme as I have repeated almost every week this year. The central theme is the supremacy of Christ over every earthly government and demonic power.

15 If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

- The book of life is referenced also in Revelation 3:5, 13:8 and 17:8. Jesus referred to this book when He said: **“However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven” (Luke 10:20).**
- Jesus also referred to the reality of hell. If hell is only a folk tale and Jesus “played along” with the beliefs of His contemporaries, then Jesus’ entire message or gospel is rendered suspect. That of course is not the case. If Jesus “believed” in a literal hell, everyone should believe in hell! It is a real place reserved for those who are not in right standing with God through faith in Christ. Here are a few of Jesus’ references to hell:

But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, 'Raca,' is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell (Matthew 5:22).

If your hand or your foot causes you to sin cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life maimed or crippled than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into eternal fire (Matthew 18:8).

"Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels: (Matthew 25:41).

"And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell, where ""their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched." (Mark 9:47-48).

- Some say that Jesus was only "catering" to the superstitions of His audience when He referred to hell. If Jesus was willing to accommodate the "ignorance" of His audience on that topic, that would allow that He did the same on other topics. Then how could we know what was fact and what was fiction in Jesus' teaching?
- It seems to me that people have a choice to meet God's fire in such a way that brings them new life or final death. The writer of Hebrews warned that God is a consuming fire. I wonder if hell isn't meeting God in that capacity with no hope of ever meeting Him in any other way!

Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our "God is a consuming fire." (Heb 12:28-29)