

Notes on the Greek New Testament
Day 363 – December 29th – Revelation 20:1-15

Works frequently referenced in these notes on the book of Revelation

Morris, Leon	<i>The Revelation of St John</i> (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries), Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1969
Mounce, Robert H	<i>The Book of Revelation</i> (New International Commentary on the New Testament), Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1977
Peterson, Eugene H	<i>Reversed Thunder</i> , San Francisco, HarperCollins, 1991
Witherington, Ben	<i>Revelation</i> (New Cambridge Bible Commentary), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2003

Revelation 20

Witherington writes, “Certainly Rev 20 is the most controversial portion of the book of Revelation. Two contextual issues need to be considered before we look in depth at the first six verses. First, this material must be viewed in the light of its immediate context in Revelation itself. The sequence of preliminary judgment, millennium, final judgment, new heaven and new earth in Rev 19-22 must be taken seriously. Second, the larger context of Jewish literature, including intertestamental literature, which has to do with the fate of fallen angels and the Devil, needs to be kept in view.” Witherington cites and briefly considers Isa 24:21ff.; Dan 7 and Ezek 36-39. He comments, “It is important to keep the entire flow of Ezek 36-39 in view. Ezekiel’s vision of ‘death valley’ has to do with the corporate revival of a spiritually dead people, using the concept of bodily resurrection, and the hope is for a restoration of Israel to the holy land with a new David ruling over them. After an unspecified amount of time, the rebellion of Gog from Magog (apparently a region in Ezekiel) is followed by the promise of the New Jerusalem with a new temple under paradisaical-like conditions. There is little reason to doubt that the flow of events recounted in Ezek 36-39 is being followed to some degree in Rev 20-21, though the imagery and details are freely modified.”

Building on Witherington’s comments, but producing a rather different construction, it may be helpful to consider also the Babylon/Rome analogy in Revelation. May not John be picturing the fall of Rome, the great persecutor of the church in his day, along with the peace that might follow. The subsequent release of Satan followed by his final defeat is John’s method (patterned on Ezekiel) of asserting that whatever further powers arise they will at last finally and definitively be overthrown and destroyed before God brings in his new Jerusalem/ new creation.

Witherington also comments, “Since we know that John has earlier drawn on the Babylonian legends either directly or indirectly ... it is of some relevance that Tiamat, the chaos monster, was imprisoned and then released again at the end of time, where it is defeated once for all by Marduk, the god of light.” Finally, it may be helpful to note the comment by Giblin, “In terms of clock-and-calendar time, of course, the end of Babylon and all other adversaries will take place simultaneously in an instant. Apocalyptic, however, requires sequences of particular visions in order adequately to present its theology. For it has no alternative to spelling out its relatively ‘pre-conceptual’ theology in images, especially such as will move its readers to religious awe and a keenly felt hope for salvation.”

Verses 1-3

Witherington comments, “Rev 20:1-3 is transitional. In a sense 20:1-3 is the climax of the material in Rev 19, for here the third member of the unholy trinity, the Devil, is finally dealt with, as the false prophet and the Beast were in Rev 19. Like both of them, Satan is seized and cast somewhere.”

Verse 1

Καὶ εἶδον ἄγγελον καταβαίνοντα ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ, ἔχοντα τὴν κλεῖν τῆς ἀβύσσου καὶ ἄλυσιν μεγάλην ἐπὶ τὴν χεῖρα αὐτοῦ.

Probably the same angel as the one who, in Ch 9, released the demonic locusts by opening the shaft of the Abyss.

καταβαινω come or go down, descend
κλεις, εἶδος f key
ἀβυσσος, ου f abyss, underworld
ἀλυσις, εως f chain
χειρ, χειρος f hand

Verse 2

καὶ ἐκράτησεν τὸν δράκοντα, ὁ ὄφις ὁ ἀρχαῖος, ὅς ἐστιν Διάβολος καὶ ὁ Σατανᾶς, καὶ ἔδησεν αὐτὸν χίλια ἔτη,

κρατεω hold, hold fast, seize

δρακων, οντος m dragon

ὄφις, εως m snake, serpent

ἀρχαῖος, α, ον old, ancient

διαβολος, ου m the devil

Σατανας, α the Adversary, Satan

Witherington comments, "Beasley-Murray notes how the various names of Satan relate to his various roles. As the Dragon, he is the primeval foe of heaven (remember the echo of the Tiamat story). As the Serpent, he is the deceiver of humanity from the beginning. He is called Ha Satan or the Devil because he has been the accuser of believers ever since the fall."

δεω bind, tie

χιλιοι, αι, α thousand

ἔτη Noun, nom & acc pl ἔτος, ους n year

Cf. vv 7-10. Amillennial writers such as Hendriksen view this as a picture of the current Gospel age in which Satan's powers are limited and he is unable to prevent the growth of the kingdom of God. Such verses as Mt 12:29; Lk 19:17-18; Jn 13:31; Col 2:15 are cited in support of this view. Millennial writers believe this refers to the millennium, the period of Christ's reign on earth during which Satan is completely inactive. Arguments over such interpretations tend often to be over-simplistic and fail to pay enough attention to the literary context and background (see the introductory comments to this chapter above).

Verse 3

καὶ ἔβαλεν αὐτὸν εἰς τὴν ἄβυσσον, καὶ ἔκλεισεν καὶ ἐσφράγισεν ἐπάνω αὐτοῦ, ἵνα μὴ πλανήσῃ ἔτι τὰ ἔθνη, ἄχρι τελεσθῆ τὰ χίλια ἔτη· μετὰ ταῦτα δεῖ λυθῆναι αὐτὸν μικρὸν χρόνον.

κλειω shut, shut up, lock

σφραγιζω seal, secure with a seal

ἐπάνω prep with gen. on, upon, over

πλαναω lead astray, mislead, deceive

ἔτι still, yet, any more

ἄχρι prep and conj until, as far as

τελεω complete, finish, fulfill

δεῖ impersonal verb it is necessary, must

λυθῆναι Verb, aor pass infin λυω loose,

untie, release, set free

μικρον adv a little while, a little further

χρονος, ου m time, period of time

Witherington comments, "As Caird says, we are hereby warned about the resiliency of evil in this world. It will never be entirely eliminated before the new heavens and the new earth."

Verse 4

Καὶ εἶδον θρόνους, καὶ ἐκάθισαν ἐπ' αὐτούς, καὶ κρίμα ἐδόθη αὐτοῖς, καὶ τὰς ψυχὰς τῶν πεπελεκισμένων διὰ τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ καὶ διὰ τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ, καὶ οἵτινες οὐ προσεκύνησαν τὸ θηρίον οὐδὲ τὴν εἰκόνα αὐτοῦ καὶ οὐκ ἔλαβον τὸ χάραγμα ἐπὶ τὸ μέτωπον καὶ ἐπὶ τὴν χεῖρα αὐτῶν· καὶ ἔζησαν καὶ ἐβασίλευσαν μετὰ τοῦ χριστοῦ χίλια ἔτη.

Cf. Dan 7:9-14, which seems to shape the picture here.

θρονος, ου m throne

καθιζω sit down, sit

κριμα, τος n judgement

Cf. 1 Cor 6:2-3.

ἐδόθη Verb, aor pass indic, 3 s διδομι

ψυχη, ης f self, life, 'soul'

πεπελεκισμένων Verb, perf pass ptc, gen pl

πελεκιζω behead

The connection between those seated on the thrones, those beheaded for their witness to the gospel and those who resisted the worship of the beast is not clear. Comparison with 1 Cor 6:2-3 may suggest that *all* those who resisted worship of the beast are seated on thrones while at the same time the focus is particularly upon those who were martyred for their testimony – though put to death, they yet live and reign with Christ.

μαρτυρια, ας f testimony, witness

ὅστις, ἡτις, ὁ τι who, which

προσκυνεω worship

θηριον, ου n animal, beast

εικων, ονος f likeness, image, statue

χαραγμα, τος n mark, stamp, image

μετωπον, ου n forehead

ζωω live, be alive

Ladd says that the meaning given to this verb lies at the heart of the millennial question.

Premillennialists translate it "they came back to life again" (cf. v.6), while Amillennialists "they lived".

Witherington argues from the parallel with Rev 2:8 that the reference is to bodily resurrection. Cf. also v 5.

βασιλευω rule, reign

Supplementary Note

Though a millennialist himself, Mounce provides helpful insight into the origins of millennial views. "In earlier times the Jews pictured a messianic kingdom which would last on the present earth forever (Isa 11:10-16; 65:20-25; Dan 7:14,27). Under the influence of dualism there developed from about 100 BC onward an increasing pessimism about this earth as a proper place for such a glorious period... Charles says that the millennium is really 'a late and attenuated form of the old Jewish expectation of an eternal Messianic Kingdom on the present earth'."

Verse 5

οἱ λοιποὶ τῶν νεκρῶν οὐκ ἔζησαν ἄχρι τελεσθῆ τὰ χίλια ἔτη. αὕτη ἡ ἀνάστασις ἡ πρώτη.

λοιπος, η, ον rest, remaining, other

νεκρος, α, ον dead

ζωω live, be alive

ἄχρι see v.3

τελεω see v.3

ἀναστασις, εως f resurrection, raising up

πρωτος, η, ον first

This final phrase continues the thought of v.4.

Verse 6

μακάριος καὶ ἅγιος ὁ ἔχων μέρος ἐν τῇ ἀναστάσει τῇ πρώτῃ· ἐπὶ τούτων ὁ δευτερος θάνατος οὐκ ἔχει ἐξουσίαν, ἀλλ' ἔσονται ἱερεῖς τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τοῦ χριστοῦ, καὶ βασιλεύσουσιν μετ' αὐτοῦ χίλια ἔτη.

μακαριος, α, ον blessed, fortunate, happy

ἅγιος, α, ον holy

μερος, ους n part

δευτερος, α, ον second

θανατος, ου m death

"The second death is defined in 20:14 and 21:8 as being cast into the lake that burns with fire and brimstone. It is to share the eternal fate of the devil, the beast, and the false prophet (19:20; 20:10, 14-15), which is to endure torment day and night for ever and ever (20:10)." Mounce.

ἐξουσια, ας f authority, power

ἔσονται Verb, fut indic, 3 pl εἶμι

ἱερευς, εως m priest

βασιλευω rule, reign

Cf. Ex 19:6; 1 Peter 2:5,9; Rev 1:6; 5:10.

Verses 7-10

Verses 7-10 echo the cataclysmic battle of Ezekiel 38-39. Mounce says, "It is worth noting that in Ezekiel and Revelation the assault *follows* the period of the messianic kingdom. In Ezekiel 36-37 Israel is restored to the land; then comes the warfare in chapters 38 and 39. This is followed by a portrayal of the eternal state under the figure of a rebuilt temple in the New Jerusalem (chaps. 40-48)."

Verse 7

Καὶ ὅταν τελεσθῆ τὰ χίλια ἔτη, λυθήσεται ὁ Σατανᾶς ἐκ τῆς φυλακῆς αὐτοῦ,

ὅταν when

τελεω see v.3

λυω see v.3

φυλακη, ης f prison, imprisonment

Verse 8

καὶ ἐξελεύσεται πλανῆσαι τὰ ἔθνη τὰ ἐν ταῖς τέσσαρσι γωνίαις τῆς γῆς, τὸν Γὼγ καὶ Μαγὼγ, συναγαγεῖν αὐτοὺς εἰς τὸν πόλεμον, ὧν ὁ ἀριθμὸς αὐτῶν ὡς ἡ ἄμμος τῆς θαλάσσης.

ἐξελεύσεται Verb, fut midd dep indic, 3 s

ἐξερχομαι

πλαναω see v.3

τεσσαρες neut τεσσαρα gen τεσσαρων four

γωνια, ας f corner

"Gog and Magog are symbolic figures representing the nations of the world which band together for a final assault upon God and his people." Mounce. Witherington quotes Reddish who writes concerning Gog and Magog, "Clearly they do not represent two specific nations or peoples, for John locates them 'at the four corners of the earth' and says 'they are as numerous as the sands of the sea'."

συναγαγεῖν Verb, aor infin συναγω gather, gather together, assemble

πολεμος, ου m war, battle

ἀριθμος, ου m number, total

ἄμμος, ου f sand

θαλασσα, ης f sea

Verse 9

καὶ ἀνέβησαν ἐπὶ τὸ πλάτος τῆς γῆς, καὶ ἐκύκλευσαν τὴν παρεμβολὴν τῶν ἁγίων καὶ τὴν πόλιν τὴν ἡγαπημένην. καὶ κατέβη πῦρ ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καὶ κατέφαγεν αὐτούς·

ἀναβαινω go up, come up

πλατος, ους n breadth, width

Cf. Hab 1:6 where a similar expression is used of the invading Chaldeans.

ἐκύκλευσαν Verb, aor act indic, 3 pl κυκλω surround, gather round

παραμβολη, ης f barracks; camp; army

"The camp of the saints is to be understood in the OT sense of the Israelite encampments during their wilderness wanderings (Ex 14:19f; Num 2:2ff; Deut 23:14). It is a reminder that while on earth the people of God will always be pilgrims in a foreign land." Mounce.

πολις, εως f city, town
 ἠγαπημένην Verb, perf pass ptc, f acc s
 ἀγαπαω love, show love for

The pictures of a camp for pilgrim people and a beloved city seem incongruous. Witherington suggests that the latter "is another way of speaking of the society or the saints who are attacked." However, there may also be echoes of OT history concerning attacks on Jerusalem.

καταβαινω come or go down, descend
 πυρ, ος n fire
 κατέφαγεν Verb, aor act indic, 3 s κατεσθιω
 eat up, devour

Cf. 2 Kings 1; Ezek 38:22; 39:6. Witherington comments, "Just when things look bleak, God sends down fire from heaven to consume the evil ones (cf. Ezek 39:6). This amounts to taking the Devil and his minions and throwing them into the lake of fire to be tormented forever (vs 10)."

Verse 10

καὶ ὁ διάβολος ὁ πλανῶν αὐτοὺς ἐβλήθη εἰς τὴν λίμνην τοῦ πυρὸς καὶ θείου, ὅπου καὶ τὸ θηρίον καὶ ὁ ψευδοπροφήτης, καὶ βασανισθήσονται ἡμέρας καὶ νυκτὸς εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων.

διαβολος, ου m the devil
 ἐβλήθη Verb, aor pass indic, 3 s βαλλω
 throw, throw down
 λιμνη, ης f see 19:20
 θειον, ου n see 19:20
 ὅπου adv. where
 θηριον, ου n see 19:19
 ψευδοπροφητης, ου m see 19:20
 βασανισθήσονται Verb, aor pass subj, 3 pl
 βασανίζω torment
 νύξ, νυκτος f night
 αἰων, αἰωνος m age, eternity

"Following the great white throne judgement, Death, Hades, and all whose names are not found in the book of life are to be cast into the same fiery grave (20:14-15; cf. 14:10)." Mounce.

Verse 11

Καὶ εἶδον θρόνον μέγαν λευκὸν καὶ τὸν καθήμενον ἐπ' αὐτοῦ, οὗ ἀπὸ τοῦ προσώπου ἔφυγεν ἡ γῆ καὶ ὁ οὐρανός, καὶ τόπος οὐχ εὐρέθη αὐτοῖς.

θρονος, ου m throne

λευκος, η, ον white, shining
 καθημαί sit, sit down
 προσωπον, ου n face, appearance,
 presence
 φευγω flee, run away from
 τοπος, ου m place
 εὐρέθη Verb, aor pass indic, 3 s εὐρισκω
 find, discover

Witherington comments, "The prospect of judgment causes the earth metaphorically to shrink or even flee in fear. But fleeing is of no use. There is nowhere to run and nowhere to hide."

Verse 12

καὶ εἶδον τοὺς νεκρούς, τοὺς μεγάλους καὶ τοὺς μικρούς, ἐστῶτας ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου, καὶ βιβλία ἠνοιχθησαν· καὶ ἄλλο βιβλίον ἠνοιχθη, ὃ ἐστὶν τῆς ζωῆς· καὶ ἐκρίθησαν οἱ νεκροὶ ἐκ τῶν γεγραμμένων ἐν τοῖς βιβλίοις κατὰ τὰ ἔργα αὐτῶν.

νεκρος, α, ον dead
 μικρος, α, ον little, small, insignificant
 ἐστῶτας Verb, perf act ptc, m acc pl ἵστημι
 stand
 ἐνώπιον prep with gen before

No one is so important as to be immune from judgment, and no one is so unimportant as to make judgment inappropriate." Mounce.

βιβλιον, ου n book, scroll
 ἠνοιχθησαν Verb, aor pass indic, 3 pl ἀνοίγω
 open
 ἄλλος, η, ο another, other
 ζωη, ης f life

Cf. Is 4:3; Dan 12:1; Mal 3:6; Rev 3:5; 17:18; 21:27.

ἐκρίθησαν Verb, aor pass indic, 3 pl κρινω
 judge, pass judgement on
 γεγραμμένων Verb, perf pass ptc, gen pl
 γραφω write

Cf. Rom 2:6; 1 Peter 1:17. Witherington comments, "There are two books that settle the issue – the book of deeds and the book of life. We have an image of God fairly reviewing all the deeds of a person's life. God will not be unjust in his judgment, for he will take everything into account."

Verse 13

καὶ ἔδωκεν ἡ θάλασσα τοὺς νεκρούς τοὺς ἐν αὐτῇ, καὶ ὁ θάνατος καὶ ὁ ἄδης ἔδωκαν τοὺς νεκρούς τοὺς ἐν αὐτοῖς, καὶ ἐκρίθησαν ἕκαστος κατὰ τὰ ἔργα αὐτῶν.

ἔδωκεν Verb, aor act indic, 3 s δίδωμι
 θαλασσα, ης f sea

Witherington comments, “The dead from the sea are likely to be mentioned separately because of ancient beliefs that those not properly buried did not make it to Sheol or the land of the dead called Hades (see Achilles Tatius 5.16.2).”

θανατος, ου m death

ᾠδης, ου m Hades, the world of the dead

ἕκαστος, η, ον each, every

Emphasises the universal nature of the judgement – no-one can escape.

Verse 14

καὶ ὁ θάνατος καὶ ὁ ᾠδης ἐβλήθησαν εἰς τὴν λίμνην τοῦ πυρός. οὗτος ὁ θάνατος ὁ δευτερός ἐστίν, ἡ λίμνη τοῦ πυρός.

ἐβλήθησαν Verb, aor pass indic, 3 pl βαλλω
throw

λίμνη, ης f see 19:20; 20:10

δευτερος, α, ον second

Cf. 20:6.

"Death is the last enemy to be destroyed (cf. 1 Cor 15:54-55). Coupled with Hades (that 'grim receptacle of death's prey'; Moffatt...), it symbolises the effects of sin and wickedness that entered the world through the sin of the first man (Rom 5:12). In a great psalm of thanksgiving the prophet Isaiah declares that God 'will swallow up death for ever' (Isa 25:8). The last vestige of sin's unlawful hegemony is cast into the lake of fire." Mounce.

Verse 15

καὶ εἴ τις οὐχ εὐρέθη ἐν τῇ βίβλῳ τῆς ζωῆς γεγραμμένος, ἐβλήθη εἰς τὴν λίμνην τοῦ πυρός.

εὐρέθη see v.11

Witherington comments, “Presumably the book of life is opened because believers are also present on this occasion, and though their deeds may fall short, they are not cast into the lake of fire because they have believed in the Lamb and the life he gives.”

"In Matthew 25:41 Jesus indicated that the eternal fire was prepared for the devil and his angels. In the final judgement all whose names do not appear in the book of life will share their fate." Mounce.