

Redemption¹



SABBATH—MARCH 19

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Revelation 20:1–3; Jeremiah 4:23–26; 1 Corinthians 4:5; Revelation 20:7–15; Philippians 2:9–11; 2 Peter 3:10.

MEMORY VERSE: “ ‘He [God] will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or sadness. There will be no more crying or pain. Things are no longer the way they used to be’ ” (Revelation 21:4, NIV).

PEOPLE OFTEN ASK, WHY DID EVIL ARISE IN THE FIRST PLACE? The important answer is freedom. True freedom, true *moral* freedom (the ability to choose between right and wrong), involves risk. If people are truly free, then they must have the choice to do wrong.

Fair enough, but the next question arises: Why then did God not just wipe them out when they did wrong and save the rest of us the horrible results of rebellion (war against God)?

The answer gets to the heart of the great controversy (war between Christ and Satan). As we will learn this week, the Lord runs a kind of “open” government. Much about Him and His ways is mysterious, but He will solve the problem of the great controversy.

Really, we will be given 1,000 years to get answers. They are the answers about why the wicked were lost. (We will have an eternity for the rest of our questions.) After the Second Coming, saved people will live and rule with Christ for 1,000 years. And, even more wonderful, they will have an active part in judgment. Let us look at the final steps in the long drama (play) of the great controversy.

DEFINITIONS

1. redemption—Jesus dying on the cross as humanity's sacrifice for payment of the sins of all people.

TYING UP SATAN (Revelation 20:1–3)

Read Revelation 20:1–3. What is being described here, and what hope does it offer us?

The word picture or idea of being tied up is used in many ways in the Bible. On the simplest level, it means a prisoner. Jesus freed many who had been tied up by Satan. Furthermore, the act of tying up is used to describe the power that God gives the church over evil. He makes the church a symbol of judgment.

When a dangerous criminal is captured, it is necessary to imprison or tie him or her up. But many times in the Bible when people are tied up, they are not criminals. John the Baptist was put in chains because he criticized the evils of the king (Matthew 14:3, 4). Jesus was tied up in the Garden (John 18:12), at His trial (John 18:24), and in death (John 19:40). Paul (Acts 21:33) and Peter (Acts 12:6) were also both tied up.

Jesus also spent a lot of face-to-face time with people whom Satan had tied up. There was a demoniac (a person filled with a demon or demons) with broken chains on his wrists and ankles (Mark 5:3, 4). The demoniac's life was bound to the demons inside him. Before Jesus loosed him from the demons, nobody had been able to stop the control of evil in his life. Jesus met a woman whose back had been bent over. He freed her (Luke 13:11, 12, 16). He also freed Lazarus from the tomb and from his grave clothes (John 11:43, 44). Then there was the chained Barabbas, who was set free so that Jesus, not he, would be crucified (put to death on a cross; Mark 15:7–15). In all of these examples, we find Satan either trying to keep people imprisoned with pain and suffering or tying up the innocent in order to allow evil to increase. But we also find Jesus breaking the chains of death in order to bring freedom to the world.

Also, part of Jesus' mission was to set free those whom Satan tied up and to empower² His followers. He promised them that Satan ("the strong man") could be tied up and his house robbed (Matthew 12:26–29, NKJV). In other words, Satan has no power against Christ and Christ's followers because Christ has released His people from the chains of Satan.

As Paul said, "The word of God is not chained" (2 Timothy 2:9, NKJV). This is how Jesus silenced Satan (Matthew 4:4, 7, 10), and we can use the same power to fight him, too.

What promises can you use that will free you from whatever chains the evil one uses to try to tie you up?



John the Baptist was put in chains because he criticized the evils of the king.

DEFINITIONS

2. empower—to give power to someone to do something.

THE “WHY” QUESTIONS (Revelation 20:4)



Every city on earth is “broken down at the presence of the LORD” (Jeremiah 4:25).

The opening verses of Genesis describe the earth as being “without form, and void” (Genesis 1:2). This same wording is used by Jeremiah to describe the earth after it has been destroyed by the seven last plagues and the Second Coming. Every city on earth is “broken down at the presence of the LORD” (Jeremiah 4:26, NKJV). In Jeremiah’s description, there are no people left on earth at that time (Jeremiah 4:25). In John’s description, Satan cannot deceive (trick) anyone (Revelation 20:3).

The worldwide results of the Second Coming can explain what is happening here in Revelation. First, Jesus promises to take His followers to the place (heaven) He left earth to prepare (John 14:1–3). Paul adds that those followers are among the living and those who have been raised from their graves (1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17). John adds another point: after the first resurrection (return to life from the dead) at the Second Coming, the remainder of the dead will stay dead until the 1,000 years end (Revelation 20:5).

Read Revelation 20:4. What is being described in this verse?

“In union [joined as one] with Christ they [the saved] judge the wicked. They compare³ their acts with the Bible. They decide every case according to the deeds [acts] done in the body. Then every measure of punishment is given to the wicked according to their works. And then it is recorded against their names in the book of death.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, page 661.

During this time of opening the records, we will understand the many times that God’s still, small voice warned the lost with words of kindness and love. How patiently He continued, only to be drowned out by worldly temptations. Silently God waited, hoping for an opportunity to be recognized as the One who paid a great price so they could have life. But they chose death instead. Is there anything in your life that is keeping you from hearing His voice? He is still patiently waiting for you. Choose life.

DEFINITIONS

3. compare—show how two or more things are the same or different.

Read 1 Corinthians 4:5. What promise is given here about the Second Coming? How can you depend on this promise now, when you have a lot of unanswered questions?

FINAL JUDGMENT (Revelation 20:7–15)

In Bible times, there were two places for judgment: the city gate and in front of the king's throne. The elders at the gate decided all the small cases. But the king decided all the large issues. His was the final word in making justice sure. In the same way, the Bible pictures God on the throne as King of the universe, making sure that justice is finally done (Revelation 20:11–15).

Read Revelation 20:7–15. What do we understand these important events to mean?

Revelation 20 is all about the 1,000 years. So, this kind of judgment goes on in that time period. It is not the same scene that is described in verse 4. Instead, there are many thrones, while in verse 11 there is only one. Rather than being at the beginning of the 1,000 years, this judgment is at the end. It takes place after the second resurrection (Revelation 20:5) and after Satan gathers together all unsaved people to surround the Holy City (Revelation 20:7–9). God's great white throne is seen above the city at that point. In that scene is every person ever born: some inside the city and some outside. This is the time that Jesus spoke about when He said that there would be some people who ask God why they did not make it into God's kingdom (Matthew 7:22, 23). It is also the time that Paul spoke of when he said that one day every knee shall bow down in front of Jesus, "of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and . . . every tongue [will] confess that Jesus Christ is Lord" (Philippians 2:9–11, NKJV).

The purpose of judgment is not to teach God anything that He does not already know. This is because He already knows everything. The purpose is to make sure that everybody knows exactly why God has judged the way that He has. Every person, every angel, will be able to say, " 'You are just [fair] in these judgments, O Holy One, you who are and who were' " (Revelation 16:5, NIV). The saved and lost, both among humans and angels, will know the justice and righteousness (goodness) of God.

The final act in this drama is the destruction of "Death and Hades [the grave]," and those not "written in the Book of Life" (Revelation 20:14, 15, NKJV). Jesus holds the keys to death and Hades (Revelation 1:18). None of these has any reason to hold power over us any longer. Rather than suffering for all eternity, the lost are destroyed.



Jesus holds the keys to death and Hades.

NEW HEAVENS AND A NEW EARTH
(Revelation 21:1, 2, 9, 10)

Sin and rebellion have been unwelcome visitors. They were never meant to be here. They caused unbelievable damage. But now that the cause of that damage is no longer here, it is time to restore (make new; return) everything to perfection. When that happens, the great controversy will be completed.

Read Revelation 21:1, 2, 9, 10 and Revelation 22:1–3. What are the important points of John’s description? What do they mean?

When John describes new heavens as well as a new earth, he is talking again about what Peter said, “The [old] heavens will disappear with a roar. Fire will destroy everything in them” (2 Peter 3:10, NIV). As we know so well, the earth needs far more than just a “remodeling.” Everything here is going to be completely destroyed to make a whole new life possible.

John also talks about no more sea (Revelation 21:1). He wrote this from a prison island (Patmos) where the sea prevented his escape. Even in a modern boat, it takes hours to reach the island where John wrote these words. In the earth made new, there will be no more seas that prevent saved people from moving freely or seeing their loved ones.

The New Jerusalem sounds wonderful! It is described in terms of a city from Bible times because that is all John knew about. But artists’ pictures of the city with first-century Roman-style buildings are false. It will be unlike anything man has made because the New Jerusalem is a city “whose builder and maker is God” (Hebrews 11:10).

Our minds cannot understand these descriptions. How fun it is to let our minds imagine what is planned for us in the future. We cannot even begin to imagine it. Also, the huge measurements of the city inform us that there is plenty of space. There is room for everyone.

Look around at the beauty of the natural world and what it tells us about the character (thoughts; feelings; actions) of God, even though sin has damaged it some. How can what we see here now help inspire (encourage) us to trust in the hope of what we do not see yet?

NO MORE TEARS (Revelation 21:3–5)

Read Revelation 21:3–5. What do the tears in these verses mean?

We all know what it means to cry. We are also familiar with the action of wiping tears from another's eyes: (1) a mother gently comforting her child; (2) a close friend comforting another person; or (3) one parent comforting the other in the midst (middle) of heartache or tragedy. The fact that God touches our faces surely means that we have a very close tie with our Maker.

It is hard to imagine a world without death, sorrow, or crying. Pain, sweat, tears, and death have been common in this life ever since the Fall (Genesis 3:16–19). But from that time on, God has promised the human race that there will be no failure and loss in heaven. God will one day save us and bless us with His presence.

God does so first with the promise of a Savior (Genesis 3:15); then with the promise of His presence in a sanctuary (place of worship in the wilderness) (Exodus 25:8); then with the Word (Jesus) becoming a human who lived among us (John 1:14); and finally, by one day putting the throne of the universe with us (Revelation 21:3).

Many Bible verses give a summary of this promise using such words as, "I will be their God," "you shall be my people," and "I will dwell [live] among you." One example is " 'I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people' " (2 Corinthians 6:16, NIV).

Jesus came the first time to stop the results of the broken covenant (agreement between God and His people). Jeremiah described the results of this broken promise this way: " 'Why do you cry out about your wound? Your pain can't [cannot] be healed. Your guilt is very great. And you have committed [done] many sins. That is why I have done all of those things to you' " (Jeremiah 30:15, NIV). Thanks to Jesus, that is now history. Revelation 21:3 gives us the closing scenes of the Bible. Perhaps our tears are for the final destruction of the lost. But God Himself wipes them away, and sorrow and suffering are forever gone.

These verses suggest a closeness with God once we are in heaven. But we do not have to wait until then to have that kind of relationship with Him. How can you walk, even now, closely with the Lord?



God Himself will wipe away our tears.

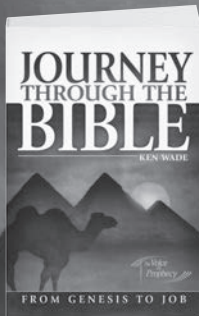
ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: Think about the millennium (1,000 years) and about our understanding of it. We are not told much about it. But we are told enough to know a few things. First, the millennium starts *before* the final destruction of the lost. Second, before that final destruction, the saved spend this time getting a lot of questions answered. So much that they themselves become involved in that judgment. In fact, they themselves are judging. “Do you not know that the saints will judge the world?” (1 Corinthians 6:2, NKJV). And “do you not know that we shall judge angels?” (1 Corinthians 6:3, NKJV). Also, as we read this week, during this 1,000 years “judgment was committed to them [made their responsibility]” (Revelation 20:4, NKJV); that is, the saints judge. So, these two points together explain an important truth: none of the lost will face final judgment until after the millennium, until the saved (1) understand why the wicked are lost and (2) also play a part in passing judgment upon them. Think about what this tells us about the character of God and the openness of His government. Before a single person faces the final end, God’s people will get to understand very clearly the justice and fairness of God’s final judgment upon the lost. It is going to be painful, but when it is finished, we will shout: “ ‘The way you judge is fair. You are the Holy One. You are the One who is and who was’ ” (Revelation 16:5, NlrV).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

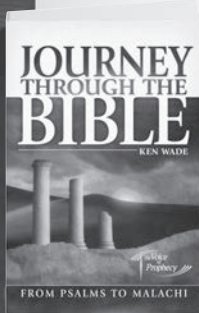
- ① How does the great controversy help us to better understand why suffering and death are all around us now, even though many difficult questions remain unanswered?
- ② If someone were to ask you, “How can I have a closer and more intimate walk with the Lord?” what would you say?
- ③ Think more deeply about the idea of being prepared now for heaven. What does that mean? How do we understand this idea according to the gospel?
- ④ What are some of the questions that you would like answered? Until they are answered, how do you learn to trust in the goodness and righteousness of God among so much sadness?

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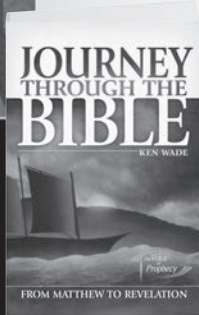
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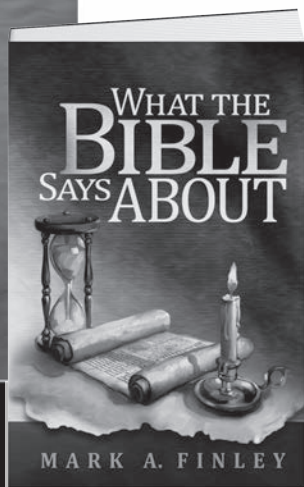
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