

Discover Bible Studies

#22: Is God Fair?

A boy in the inner city is killed by stray gang bullets as he does his homework at the family table.

A young mother in the suburbs finds that her child has contracted AIDS from a contaminated blood transfusion.

The tragedies go on and on in our world. And we long so much for an answer to it all. Where is God in a world of meaningless suffering and death? The psalmist assures us that "the earth is full of his unfailing love" (Psalm 33:5).

But if that is true, Why doesn't He bring an end to suffering and tragedy? The 20th chapter of Revelation shows us how and when God will bring sin and suffering to an end.

1. THE ONE THOUSAND YEARS UNVEILED

Revelation 20 zeros in on a 1,000-year period that follows the second coming of Christ. The events surrounding this 1,000- year period are the final act in the conflict between Christ and Satan that has been going on since sin entered the universe.

This drama began in heaven when Lucifer became jealous of Christ, started a war with the unfallen angels, was expelled, and fled to our world. The drama continued on earth in the Garden of Eden, then down through the centuries until it reached its first climax when the Devil impelled human beings to crucify Christ. (You may wish to review this sad story in Guide 3.) The drama will reach its final climax at the close of the 1,000-year period when our sinful world is cleansed and placed under Christ's control. Revelation 20 shows us that the 1,000-year period is separated by two resurrections.

Who does God raise from the dead in the first resurrection that takes place at the beginning of the 1,000 years?

"Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years." -Revelation 20:6. (Unless otherwise noted, all Scriptural texts in the DISCOVER guides are from the New International Version of the Bible [NIV].)

The "blessed and holy," those who have accepted Jesus as their Saviour, come up in the "first resurrection." If the righteous are to "reign with" Christ during the 1,000 years, they must be resurrected at the beginning of the 1,000 years.

Who are raised in the second resurrection at the close of the thousand-year period?

"The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended." -Revelation 20:5.

The "rest of the dead" can refer only to the wicked dead, because the righteous, "the blessed and holy," are resurrected at the beginning of the 1,000 years.

So the 1,000-year period is marked off by two resurrections: the resurrection of the righteous at its beginning, and the resurrection of the wicked at its close.

2. RESURRECTED AT CHRIST'S COMING

The first resurrection, that of the righteous, takes place at the second coming of Christ.

"For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, 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." -1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17.

When Jesus comes to this earth again, He raises "the dead in Christ" and takes them, along with the righteous who are alive, to heaven. Because the wicked still cling to sin, they can't exist in God's presence, and they are destroyed at Christ's coming (Luke 17:26-30). (You may wish to review in Guide 8 the events surrounding Jesus' return.)

3. SATAN CHAINED TO EARTH FOR ONE THOUSAND YEARS

When the 1,000 years begin, the righteous have all gone to heaven and the wicked are all dead. What will happen on this world during the 1,000 years?

"And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended." -Revelation 20:1-3.

At Jesus' coming Satan is bound and will remain in chains during the 1,000 years. Where is Satan imprisoned? In the "Abyss," a Greek word that means "very deep" or "bottomless." In Genesis 1:2 the Greek version of the Old Testament uses the word "Abyss" to describe the earth in its undeveloped state before the days of creation began. So our earth is the Abyss where God imprisons Satan.

Scripture describes Satan as bound by "a great chain." Is this a literal chain? No, it is symbolic, a chain of circumstances. Satan would like very much to continue deceiving people during the 1,000 years. But he can find no righteous people to tempt, because they are all in heaven. And he can find no wicked to lead, because they are all dead, asleep in the dust of the earth. Unable to deceive or tempt anyone, he roams an empty world forced to ponder all the heartaches and tragedy he has caused.

4. THE RIGHTEOUS JUDGE THE WICKED

The thousand-year period is also a time of judgment. But remember that the judgment consists of four main stages:

- (1) The pre-advent judgment of the righteous before Christ's second coming.
- (2) The reward of the righteous at the Second Coming.
- (3) The judgment of the wicked during the 1,000 years.
- (4) The reward of Satan and the wicked at the end of that period. (You may wish to review Guide 13 that deals with stages 1 and 2 of the judgment, the investigation and reward of the righteous.) We will now look at stages 3 and 4, the investigation and reward of the wicked.

We've seen that the righteous dead who have been resurrected and the righteous who are alive are taken to heaven together at the second coming of Christ. They are at home in heaven during the 1,000 years. What will they be doing?

"Do you not know that THE SAINTS [the saved] WILL JUDGE THE WORLD? . . . Do you not know that we will JUDGE ANGELS?" -1 Corinthians 6:2-3.

"I SAW THRONES ON WHICH WERE SEATED THOSE WHO HAD BEEN GIVEN AUTHORITY TO JUDGE. . . . THEY CAME TO LIFE AND REIGNED WITH CHRIST A THOUSAND YEARS." Revelation 20:4.

During the 1,000 years, the righteous will review the cases of wicked human beings and fallen angels, including their leader, Satan. How fitting for the martyrs, the overcomers, and the battle-scarred adherents of the gospel to examine and understand God's judgment of the wicked.

God has graciously given redeemed human beings the chance to evaluate His dealings with the wicked. We may have a lot of questions, like: "Why isn't my aunt here? She seemed like such a good person." When we go over the records and judge the dead "according to what they had done as recorded in the books" (verse 12), we will see for ourselves that in all His dealings with human beings, God has been just and fair with everyone. We'll see how the Holy Spirit offered people chance after chance to yield to God, and the fairness of each sentence will become plain.

5. SATAN UNCHAINED WHEN THE ONE THOUSAND YEARS END

At the close of the 1,000 years, the Bible declares:

"I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband." -Revelation 21:2.

This wonderful city has been our home for a thousand years. Now the Holy City-with Christ and all the people He's redeemed inside-descends from heaven to our world.

What does Satan do at the close of the 1,000 years?

"When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth . . . to gather them for battle. In number they are like the sand on the seashore. They marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of God's people, the city he loves." -Revelation 20:7-9.

The wicked are resurrected in the second resurrection at the close of the 1,000 years (verse 5).

When the righteous descend to earth in the Holy City and the wicked are resurrected, Satan will be "set free for a short time" (verse 3). He again has the wicked to lead and the righteous as his target. Not wasting a moment, He immediately begins to organize the wicked into a vast army. Satan gives the command to march against the city. As the wicked take up positions around the New Jerusalem (verse 9), they catch a glimpse of the horror of being lost-forever.

6. THE FINAL JUDGMENT SCENE

Here, for the first time, all the human race meets together face-to-face. Jesus leads the redeemed children of God who are inside the city. Satan heads the throngs of the wicked who are outside the walls. At this critical moment, God carries out the final stage of judgment and the wicked receive their day in court.

"Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. . . . And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and . . . the dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books." -Revelation 20:11, 12.

As the wicked stand before the throne of justice, their whole life opens before them. From the records contained in heaven, Jesus, the righteous Judge, formally unfolds the full story of His dealings with fallen men, women, and angels.

The entire universe looks on with intense interest. Standing before the throne of God, Jesus gives everyone a comprehensive view of His redemptive work. He reveals that He came to seek and save the lost. He entered our world in human flesh, lived a sinless life amid struggles and temptations, made the ultimate sacrifice on the cross, and served as our Priest in heaven. Finally, when Christ sorrowfully steps forward and passes sentence on those who've persisted in rejecting His grace, every being in the universe will acknowledge the justice and necessity of this final act of divine judgment.

"We will all stand before God's judgment seat. It is written: 'As surely as I live,' says the Lord, 'every knee will bow before me; every tongue will confess to God.'" -Romans 14:10-11.

"Christ Jesus . . . became obedient to death—even death on a cross! . . . At the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth . . . and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." -Philippians 2:5-11.

Ever since sin began, the Devil has been slandering God's character, accusing Him of being unfair. But now all the questions are answered, all the perplexities resolved. Now every being in the universe acknowledges that Jesus, the Lamb of God, is worthy of our love and worship. The whole plan and purpose of God is now fully revealed, and God's character stands vindicated.

Not only the saved, but also evil angels and Satan himself will confess that Satan's way has been wrong and that God's ways are just and true. All see that evil and selfishness has led only to unhappiness and discontent and is not worth continuing.

7. SIN MEETS ITS FINAL END

Even though Satan and the vast throng of wicked people admit that God's way is right, their hearts are not changed, their characters remain evil. And after judgment is pronounced, the wicked:

"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. And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulphur. . . . Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire." -Revelation 20:9-15.

In the final judgment the fires of the eternal God will destroy sin and those who stubbornly cling to it. Satan and all the lost perish in this "second death," an eternal death from which there is no awakening. Their course of rebellion has left the wicked unfit for real happiness, and they are destroyed with the Devil and his angels. The heavenly fire completely cleanses the earth of the ravages of sin; God has a clean universe at last, never again to be scarred by evil. The epic struggle between good and evil, between Christ and Satan, is finally over, and Christ reigns. The curtain falls on the ancient drama of sin, and rises on the glory of a new world of limitless possibilities.

8. THE EARTH CLEANSED AND MADE NEW

From the ashes of this final, cleansing holocaust, God will create a new world:

"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. . . . I saw the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. . . . Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away. . . . I am making everything new!" -Revelation 21:1-5.

Restored to its original beauty, the earth becomes the home of the redeemed for endless ages. Freed from selfishness, sickness, and suffering, we have a whole universe to explore, wonderful relationships to develop, and an eternity in which to sit at Jesus' feet to listen,

learn, and love. (For a full description of that new world, you may wish to again read Guide 9.)

Where do you plan to be in that day? Have you decided to be with Christ inside the city and saved forever? Or will you be outside the city without Christ and lost forever?

If you have placed your life in the hands of Jesus, you need never experience the unspeakable horror of those on the outside of the city who realize they are lost forever. No matter what life has brought to you, if you place your life in the hands of Jesus now, you can be inside the city with Christ and the redeemed. If you have not done so, give your heart to Jesus now, and He will surround you with His love and forgiveness. This is your opportunity. This is your day of salvation.

1. Second Coming of Christ
2. Righteous Taken to Heaven
3. Wicked Slain
4. Righteous Dead Raised
5. FIRST RESURRECTION
6. Righteous in Heaven Judging the Wicked
7. Wicked are Dead on This Desolate Earth
8. Satan Bound to a Desolate Earth with No One to Tempt
9. THE MILLENNIUM (1000 YEARS)
10. New Jerusalem Descends to Earth with Christ & the Righteous
11. Wicked March on New Jerusalem
12. Wicked Judged & Destroyed by Fire
13. A New Earth Is Made
14. Wicked Dead Raised
15. SECOND RESURRECTION

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