

The following article presents beliefs and ideas for you to ponder, explore, and perhaps make your own.

The End of Evil

In C. S. Lewis' Christian space trilogy, sinless creatures on the planet "Malacandra" look through a telescope and point to a faraway blue dot: Thulcandra — the silent planet. Somehow a great rebellion in that distant world has blocked all communication with the rest of God's pure universe — though rumor has it a siege may soon commence.



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It's an exciting challenge to study the doctrine of the millennium — partly because John's Revelation timeline is not precisely chronological. But in chapter 20, he writes about "two resurrections" and a second death, then refers several times to an important thousand-year period of time. What happens during this "millennium," and why is it a time of such global desolation?

John 14 has Jesus promising that the saved of earth will enjoy heavenly mansions. "You will be where I am." The resurrection passage in I Thess. 4 describes how those called to life will meet Christ "in the air," along with the living saints who are blessed to see Jesus' second coming. Now, during this thousand-year time of heavenly joy and earthly desolation, God's people will reign with Christ (v. 4) and even participate in the judging of those who have spurned the gift of grace (v. 4; see also 1 Corinthians 6:2, 3).

This reality leads to an abrupt adjustment in earth's population count! Recall that rebellious sinners will have been destroyed by the glory of Jesus' return to earth (2 Thessalonians 2:8). Any unsaved person already dead remains in the grave during that cataclysmic event; in verse 5, John explains: The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. Like in a dystopian sci-fi film, earth is completely depopulated. Houses, buildings, freeways, hospitals . . . all are empty. All saved believers have been reclaimed by Jesus and taken to heaven for this great thousand-year celebration; all those who have rejected that opportunity are rendered lifeless.

This leads John to employ a colorful metaphor where he describes Satan — "the dragon, that ancient serpent" — as being bound and thrown into a bottomless pit or abyss. (Verse 7 calls it a prison.) And for how long? Those exact same one thousand years.

Some well-meaning believers have read into this passage a more literal interpretation than is warranted. One Christian decided that Satan would actually be chained up; in fact, she was sure this time period had already begun . . . and told her pastor so. He replied: "Well, it must be a rubber chain then, because Lucifer still makes it out to my house on a pretty regular basis!" But

if the Devil's main objectives are to tempt the human race, to harass and persecute God's people, these one thousand years of ruling Thulcandra, a silent, lifeless world, will be a very real prison sentence for him and his evil angels.

Far away in heaven, the redeemed will be savoring fellowship with Jesus and the perfect abundance of God's eternal kingdom. Additionally, just as a presidential candidate sometimes allows a press conference where he answers every single question that's raised, the "judgment" phase of the millennium gives us an opportunity to fully understand God's cosmic dealings with a rebellious world. Before moving to a final and permanent resolution of the issue of sin, we will grow to a full and humble confidence in God's impeccable fairness as ruler of the universe.

At the close of the millennium several dramatic things happen in rapid fashion. Heaven — the "new Jerusalem" — descends from heaven to earth. The rebellious generations sprawling across the earth are brought back to life, and immediately resume their hate-infected attitudes. This means that Lucifer suddenly has plenty of projects; sure enough, John describes him as being loosed a little season (NIV: set free for a short time). He and his followers begin a march on the holy city.

And now, in one blinding moment, God must do the one thing He has never wanted to do; in fact, Isaiah 28 refers to it as His "strange act" (NIV: alien task). With an aching heart, John writes the inescapable conclusion to the great rebellion: But fire came down from heaven and devoured them (v. 9). Those who have rebelled still persist in rejecting the opportunity of living under the rule of Jesus . . . and so there is no other solution but to honor their choice.

In recent years, there's been diligent and renewed emphasis on the biblical study of hell. Good theologians are reexamining the traditional belief, based on selected Bible passages, that the torture of hellfire flames lasts for all eternity. Even here in chapter 20, however, John does say that the rebels are "devoured" by the fire; verses like Romans 6:23 describe the wages of sin as death, not eternal life in a conscious state of agony. Words like "destroyed" and "consumed" are commonly used in both Testament to describe the fate of the wicked.

Two points are worth noting. First, the Greek word for "eternal," *aiōnios*, assuredly does mean "eternal" when referring to an immortal and everlasting God. But when it refers to fallen man, which it does in many scenarios, it simply means for as long as that person is still living. Sodom and Gomorrah suffered the vengeance of "eternal fire" — but those fires went out centuries ago, and the rebellious citizens there have been dead and unconscious for a very long time.

The second study conclusion we must make is that God is God! He does what is right and just in His own heart and according to the unchangeable principles of His government of love. Our pronouncements regarding hell can't be made based on our own feelings and emotions. We have

to read these verses humbly and accept the verdicts of our loving Savior with thankfulness that, whatever the nature of this cleansing fire, we can gratefully choose to be standing with Jesus inside the walls of the New Jerusalem.

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