



DISCOVER
BIBLE STUDY GUIDE

22

**Is God
Fair?**



PICK UP a newspaper in any city on any day, or read the news online, and you'll find headlines such as these:

"SIX-YEAR-OLD ACCIDENTALLY SHOT BY GANG MEMBER"

"HUNDREDS HOMELESS AFTER HEAVY FLOODING"

"POLICE RECOVER BODY OF MISSING TEENAGER"

"POLITICAL UNREST THWARTS FAMINE RELIEF EFFORTS"

The tragedies go on and on—inexplicable and heart-rending. We long for an answer—a permanent answer. Where is God in this world of meaningless suffering and death?

The Bible assures us that God is fair and just:

"He [God] loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of the goodness of the Lord" (Psalm 33:5).

However, if that is true, then why is there so much suffering? Is God ever going to make things right? And if so, how?

Revelation 20 shows us how and when God will bring sin and suffering to a complete end. And when He does, every being in the universe will testify that God is loving and just.

1 | The One Thousand Years Unveiled

Revelation 20 zeroes in on a thousand-year period that follows the Second Coming of Christ. The events surrounding this millennium mark the final act in the conflict between Christ and Satan, which has been going on since sin entered the universe.

This cosmic drama began in heaven when Lucifer became jealous of Christ, started a war in heaven, 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 compelled 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 thousand-year period, when our sinful world is cleansed and placed under Christ's control.

Revelation 20 shows us that two resurrections will mark the beginning and ending of this thousand-year period. Who will be raised from the dead in the first resurrection at the beginning of the thousand years?

“Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years” (Revelation 20:6).

Those who come to life in the first resurrection are “blessed and holy.” They have accepted Jesus as their Savior. Since they “reign” with Christ during the thousand years, the “first resurrection” obviously occurs at the beginning of this time period.

Who will be raised in the second resurrection at the close of the thousand years?

“The rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished” (Revelation 20:5).



If the “blessed and holy” are raised at the beginning of the thousand years, then the “rest of the dead” can refer only to the wicked dead. Their resurrection takes place when the thousand years are “finished.”

So the one-thousand-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 Bible tells us that this first resurrection, that of the righteous, takes place at the Second Coming of Christ.

“For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout. . . . And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17).

When Jesus comes to this earth again, He raises “the dead in Christ” and takes them to heaven, along with the righteous who are alive (John 14:1-3). At that time, all the righteous become immortal—no longer subject to disease, old age, or death (1 Corinthians 15:51-57).

What happens to the wicked people who are still alive when Jesus comes? Because they still cling to sin and haven't accepted Christ, they can't exist in God's presence; therefore, they are destroyed “by the brightness” at the return of Christ (Luke 17:29, 30; 2 Thessalonians 2:7, 8). (You may wish to review in Guide 8 the events surrounding Jesus' return.)

3 | Satan Chained to the Earth for One Thousand Years

When the thousand-year period begins, all the righteous have gone to heaven and all the wicked are dead. What will happen in this world during the thousand years?

“Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished. But after these things he must be released for a little while” (Revelation 20:1-3).

At Jesus’ coming, Satan is bound and will remain in chains during the thousand years. Where is Satan imprisoned? In the “bottomless pit.” The Greek word used here is *abyssos*—from which we get the English word *abyss*. It’s the same word that appears in Genesis 1:2 of the Septuagint (the Greek version of the Old Testament, which was translated from Hebrew in pre-Christian times) to describe the earth in its undeveloped state before the days of creation began. It seems clear, then, that our earth is the “bottomless pit,” or abyss, where God imprisons Satan.

Scripture describes Satan as bound by “a great chain.” Is this a literal chain? No, the context clearly indicates that it is symbolic—sort of a chain of circumstances. The phrase brings to mind an expression we use when we can’t do someone a favor: “I’d like to help you, *but my hands are tied*.”

Satan would very much like to continue deceiving and oppressing individuals during the thousand years, but his hands are bound by a chain of circumstances. He can find no righteous

people to tempt during this period, because they are all in heaven. And he can't find any wicked to lead, because they are all dead— asleep in the dust of the earth. Satan simply wanders across the desolate, ruined earth without any people under his control. Under these circumstances, he can “deceive the nations no more till the thousand years [are] finished” (Revelation 20:3).

Here we find Satan in the last act of his age-long struggle against God. His evil character remains unchanged. He and his angels are confined to our empty world. Unable to deceive or tempt anyone, Satan roams an empty world, forced to ponder all the heartache and tragedy he has caused throughout the centuries.

4 | The Righteous Judge the Wicked

The thousand-year period is also a time of judgment. As you'll recall, 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 judging of the wicked during the thousand years.
4. The “reward” of Satan and the wicked at the end of that period.

You may wish to review Guide 13, which deals with stages one and two of the judgment: the investigation and the reward of the righteous. We will now look at stages three and four: the investigation and the “reward” of the wicked.

We've already seen that the righteous dead come up from their graves at the Second Coming of Christ. Along with the righteous who have never died, they then leave this earth and are taken to heaven to be with Jesus and the holy angels. Those redeemed by Christ find their home in heaven during the thousand years.



What will the righteous be doing in heaven during this thousand-year period?

“Do you not know that the saints [the saved] will judge the world? . . . Do you not know that we shall judge angels?” (1 Corinthians 6:2, 3).

“I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. Then I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God. . . . And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years” (Revelation 20:4).

During the thousand years, the righteous will review the cases of wicked human beings and fallen angels, including their leader, Satan. How fitting for the martyrs, overcomers, and 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 know what it's like to struggle in a sinful world; we've rubbed shoulders with these people day after day. We may have a lot of questions, such as: "Why isn't my neighbor here? He seemed like such a good person." Or "Why didn't my aunt make it?"

All of our questions will be answered in this phase of the judgment. When we go over the records and judge the dead "according to their works, by the things which were written in the books" (Revelation 20:12), we will see for ourselves that in all His dealings with human beings, God has been just and fair with everyone.

5 | Satan Unchained at the End of One Thousand Years

At the close of the thousand years, the curtain lifts on the final act in the judgment drama.

"I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband" (Revelation 21:2).

This wonderful city, whose streets of gold and pearly gates have echoed with our exultant shouts of praise, 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 happens to the wicked then?

“The rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished” (Revelation 20:5).

The “rest of the dead” must refer to the wicked dead, because the righteous dead came to life in the first resurrection at the beginning of the thousand years. So it is the wicked who are resurrected in the second resurrection at the close of the thousand years.

What does Satan do at the close of the thousand years?

“When the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations . . . to gather them together to battle, whose number is as the sand of the sea. They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city” (Revelation 20:7-9).

When the righteous descend to earth in the Holy City and the wicked are resurrected, “Satan will be released.” 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.

To Satan, this seems like a perfect opportunity. The Holy City is not fortified; its inhabitants are not armed. Deciding to take it by force and plunder its riches, Satan convinces his followers that, because they outnumber the righteous, victory is certain.

Satan can plot strategy with military geniuses from all periods of earth’s history.



Generals who have conquered empires can organize his armies. Scientists can try to create new weapons of mass destruction.

This second resurrection reveals a sad reality: in death, the characters of the wicked have experienced no change. They come from the grave with the same ambitions and selfish desires.

Finally, Satan gives the command to march against the city. The vast multitude moves with military precision to claim this glittering metropolis as their capital. Satan and the wicked lay siege to the New Jerusalem; this is their last chance to sabotage Jesus' plan to rescue humanity forever from the curse of sin.

However, as they take up positions around the New Jerusalem, a horrible truth begins to sink into their hearts: "We're on the outside! We're outside in the dark!"

The wicked catch a glimpse of the real horror of being lost—lost forever.

6 | The Final Judgment Scene

Here, for the first and last time, the entirety of the human race meets together face-to-face. Jesus is the leader of the redeemed children of God who are inside the city, and Satan heads the throngs of the wicked who are just 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 sat on it. . . . And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up

the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works” (Revelation 20:11-13).

As the wicked stand before the throne of justice, their lives open 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 indeed came to seek and to save the lost. He entered our world in human flesh, lived a sinless life amid our 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 to the end in rejecting His grace, every being in the universe will acknowledge the justice and necessity of this final act of divine judgment.

“We shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written: ‘As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall confess to God’” (Romans 14:10, 11).

“He [Jesus] humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:8-11).

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. At the end, not even Satan himself, the great accuser, will have a word to say in his own defense. Now every being in the universe acknowledges that even in judgment—especially in judgment—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.

"All nations shall come and worship before You, for Your judgments have been manifested" (Revelation 15:4).

"And every creature which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, I heard saying: 'Blessing and honor and glory and power be to Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, forever and ever!'" (Revelation 5:13).

And it's not just the saved. The 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 have led only to unhappiness and discontent—that such a life 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 have not changed—their characters remain evil—and after judgment is pronounced, the wicked accept their tragic fate:

"They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved

city. And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them. The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone. . . . Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire” (Revelation 20:9, 10, 14, 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.

Where do you plan to be on that day? Have you decided to be with Christ inside the city—saved forever? Or will you be outside the city without Christ—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.

8 | The Earth Cleansed and Made New

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

“I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. . . .

I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. . . . And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, 'Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.' . . . 'Behold, I make all things new'" (Revelation 21:1-5).



Restored to its original beauty, the earth becomes the home of redeemed humanity through 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 read Guide 9 again.)

The curtain falls on the ancient drama of sin and rises to the glory of a new world of limitless possibilities. Of Jesus, the Ruler of that coming world, we read:

"And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end" (Isaiah 9:6, 7).

Continued on page 16

WordSearch

If you want to go deeper into this study topic, complete this section.

1. What is one reason why sin has continued as long as it has?
(2 Peter 3:9)

2. How does the Bible describe the conditions of this world during the thousand years? (Jeremiah 4:23-26)

3. What will God create after this earth and its sinful works are burned up? (2 Peter 3:10-13)

4. Who are the only ones who can enter the New Jerusalem?
(Revelation 21:27)

5. After God destroys Satan and sinners, will sin ever rise up again? (Nahum 1:9)



You can live forever with that Wonderful Counselor and Everlasting Father. You can stand inside the New Jerusalem on that day when all of humanity confronts each other face-to-face.

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. By giving your trust to

Christ as Savior, you can be assured that, when the record of your life appears in the judgment, Jesus will say, “I died for that person; the record of My perfect life belongs to My beloved one!”

My Decision

- I choose to be with Jesus for eternity in the earth made new. Thank You, Jesus, for Your promise that I can have a home with You.

My Prayer

Dear Father, how thankful I am that You are not only fair, but loving and merciful as well! How thankful I am for Jesus and all that He has done and is doing for me every day. How thankful I am that He died to save me so that I can be inside the Holy City and be saved forever! Yes, Father, I plan to be there inside that city. Keep me faithful, I pray. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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