



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Revelation 20: 7-15

"The Lake of Fire"

Revelation

TRANSCRIPT

Our text this morning is Revelation chapter 20. We're going to finish the chapter. We'll begin with verse 7 and go through verse 15. You remember, last week we covered the millennium, the thousand year reign of Christ. And so, we come to verse 7.

"When the thousand years are completed, Satan will be released from his prison, and will come out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together for the war; the number of them is like the sand of the seashore. And they came up on the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, and fire came down from heaven and devoured them. And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

"Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their . Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was

thrown into the lake of fire." May the Lord bless this reading of His word. Let's bow together in prayer.

[Message] Jeremiah asks the question: can a leopard change its spots? The answer, of course, is no. So he says: those who are accustomed to doing evil cannot do good. Men are natural-born rebels and cannot change their nature. That's not a very popular thought and I'm sure it's an offense to many. Maybe not to you here, but it was an offense to those in Jeremiah's day. Those to whom he preached those very things. He was not a very popular preacher. They tried to quiet him on numerous occasions. But the truth of his statement finds support everywhere in nature, and in history.

Napoleon is an example of that. His most famous battle was his last battle, the Battle of Waterloo. He had already been defeated. He'd been exiled to the island of Elba in the Mediterranean Sea. He was actually quite comfortable there. He was allowed to be Elba's king. But the emperor of Europe couldn't stand to be the king of an island.

He soon escaped, he gathered a great army of loyal soldiers, and he met Wellington on the plains of Waterloo outside Brussels where he was completely, soundly defeated. He spent his last days as a prisoner on the barren island of St. Helena in the South Atlantic. He was a man driven by his pride, driven by a hunger for power and glory, and he couldn't change that. That was his nature.

Now, that's somewhat of an illustration, I think, of Satan's end. He'll be defeated. He'll be arrested. He will be exiled for a time, cast into the abyss for a thousand years. And then, he will be released only to lead one last great rebellion in a final attempt to gain the world. But there, he meets his end, his Waterloo, and he's cast into the lake of fire forever.

Well, that's Satan's end, but it's also the end of unbelieving mankind, which will follow him eagerly in a final attempt to overthrow God's rule. It's insane. But, that's the nature of man. Men are unable to change that rebellious nature within them, and that is proof of the need that we have of grace. We just sang of grace. We need that. We need sovereign grace. We need a God who takes the initiative, because will not and cannot take the initiative. We need a God who reaches down and snatches souls from the burning.

Well, as I say, these last events of history prove the need for that. When we come to verse 7, that time has come. The thousand years is complete, and John writes that Satan will be released from his prison. Now, you would think that after a millennium of reflection, after thinking about his long career of evil, the misery he has caused, the many defeats that he experienced, so often, Satan came up with ashes in his mouth, reflecting on the nature of the God he has been in opposition to, his unlimited power. You would think that the devil would have learned his lesson and been rehabilitated in that prison of a thousand years.

But, then, can a leopard change his spots? Well, neither can Satan change his heart. As soon as he is released from his prison, he will break parole. In verse 8, John writes that "he will come out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together for the war." The last war. In fact, he will go out for the very purpose of causing this great final conflict and drawing the nations into it. He will have spent a millennium, a thousand years, brooding over this, and plotting this.

Now, you wonder how that could be, at least, that thought occurred to me as I read through this and reflected on the text, and what happens. You wonder how that could be, how Satan, who is an intelligent being, a brilliant spirit, could think that he could defeat the omnipotent God, especially after having suffered such a stunning defeat a thousand years earlier when he was bound with a great chain and cast into the abyss.

Well, I think Paul gives us some insight on this in 2 Timothy chapter 3 and verse 13 when he says that, of evil men, he speaks of evil men in the last days, and he says that they will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. Now, that last statement, being deceived, I think gives us some insight here. Deceivers begin to believe their own lie. That's the penalty God gives to them. He gives them over to their own deception. Sin distorts the perception. It distorts the mind. It distorts one's perspective on things. People think that it's really worth it to do that thing that they want to do. They think that they can really get away with it. That's the deluding effect of sin on the mind, and Satan's no different. He's not immune to that at all. Satan is completely given over to the deception of sin, and he will think that he can defeat God. He is the proud spirit, and his pride will bring him to that position, and

he will be so driven by it and his desire for glory and power that he will rush headlong into his own destruction.

And drag multitudes down with him, because he will deceive the nations. John says, "The number of them is like the sand of the seashore." Vast host of unbelieving people will go up to make war on God and His people. Now, this is an amazing thing, and I think it's an enlightening, revealing fact. For a thousand years, the world, mankind, will have had purity, peace, and prosperity. The very thing that men seem to long for, and try to achieve, and are never able to do it. They will have it, and they will have it for a thousand years. It will be paradise regained, the earth's golden age. And yet, at the end of it, at the first opportunity, multitudes will throw in their lot with the devil and rebel.

Now, that tells us a number of things. First of all, it tells us something about the millennial kingdom, at least by implication. That is, it will have a large population. Many people will be destroyed during the seven years of tribulation. But during this millennial kingdom, there'll be an increased population. The righteous on the earth, when Christ returns, who entered the kingdom will have children. They'll have many children. It'll be a very fruitful age in every respect. So, there'll be children born to the righteous, but not all of those, of the succeeding generations, those that follow the righteous generation, will be righteous themselves. The regeneration of the parents doesn't guarantee the regeneration of their children. It never does. The fact that a child is born into a Christian home doesn't mean that child is going to be saved.

It's only when they respond with personal faith in Christ that they have eternal life. Being born into a Christian home doesn't make one a Christian. So, we are responsible, and I speak to us who are parents. We are responsible to give our children the truth and to do it carefully, wisely, diligently so that they may believe.

But even then, not all believe. We can sow spiritual seed. We can't make it germinate. That's God's work. Multitudes in the kingdom will be unbelieving. And because they will be unbelieving, because they don't have the Spirit of God within them, because they don't have a regenerated mind, they will be easy prey for the devil's wiles. He's had a thousand years to plot and scheme, and he is a great deceiver, and many, many will follow him.

Which tells us a lot about human nature and suggests one reason for the millennium. We considered that last week. The question is often asked of premillennialists is: why the millennium? Why don't we just go straight into the new heavens and the new earth? Oh, there are different answers that can be given to that, but I think one is found here, at least by implication, and that is: the millennial kingdom, that period, will vindicate the righteousness of God and prove the justice of His judgment. Men are, by nature, sinners. They are, as I said at the beginning, by nature, rebels. Now, I don't mean by that that they are all criminals, that every one is a murderer and a thief. Men can be moral in many respects, but rebels in that they will not submit to God, who speak of total depravity that's often misunderstood. It doesn't mean that people are as bad as they possibly can be; that's often how it's characterized by those who don't like that doctrine. What it simply means is: sin has affected every aspect of mankind. Every aspect of the individual's constitution. It's somewhat like taking a glass of clear, pure water, and then taking a drop of poison. Well, that drop pollutes the whole glass. All the water.

And sin has affected the fallen race in every aspect. Some, the effects are more obvious in some than in others. But it's tainted everything about us. And one of the great evidences of that, of sin in the life of an individual, is men and women all want to be their own masters. They do not want to submit to their God. So, even after Christ has reigned over them for a thousand years with perfect wisdom and goodness, they will still rebel at the first opportunity.

Satan won't make them rebel. Don't think that this rebellion occurs because he in some way coerced them into following him. Not at all. They will follow willingly. They will choose to follow Satan in this great rebellion, gladly follow him because they will not have Christ to rule over them. That's the natural man. This final rebellion will make it plain that the root of sin is not poverty. It's not deficient social conditions. It's not due to a bad environment or poor upbringing. Those things can contribute. I know that. But, what all of this demonstrates is that the real root of the problem is the heart of man, because these people come out of a perfect environment. It's the heart of man, and men cannot change their hearts.

George Ladd put it this way: the millennium and the subsequent rebellion of men will prove that men cannot blame their sinfulness on their environment or unfortunate circumstances. In the final judgment, the decrees of God will be shown

to be just and righteous. I think that's reason enough for a millennial kingdom, just to make that clear demonstration, finally, and completely, at the end of history.

The rebels, who are gathered from the four corners of the earth, are called Gog and Magog. That's taken from Ezekiel chapter 38 and verse 32 where Gog is the prince of the land of Magog. But in later Judaism, the rabbis made those two names, Gog and Magog, a kind of standard expression for the enemies of God's people. And here, John seems to be using it like that as a description of all of the nations from the four corners of the earth who have rebelled against God and against His people. They come up against the city of God. They come up against Jerusalem. They surround it. The description in verse 9 of these hordes marching on the city prepares us in our mind, as we read that, for a great battle to follow.

But, there isn't one. John writes that fire came down from heaven and devoured them. The power of God is so overwhelming that not even the suggestion of a battle is given. God doesn't struggle with evil. He simply wills it to be destroyed, and it is. That's a comforting fact. That's a comforting scene when you consider it, because it shows that nothing, nothing can shake God. His purpose for the world, His purpose for His people, is absolutely secure. We know that from Scripture. We sing that in our hymns: "The soul that on Jesus hath leaned for repose, I will not, I will not desert to his foe. That soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake, I'll never, no never, no never forsake." That's true. And here, we have a great demonstration of it when you have this massive army, like the sand of the seashore, determined to overthrow God and His people, comes up to the great city, and the camp of the saints, and in a moment, they're swept away.

Nothing can frustrate the God that we serve. Nothing can overthrow His purpose. This is the waves break against Gibraltar, but it continues to stand. So too with the Lord God. Men and angels may rebel against Him, may rail against Him, may attack Him in any way, with all of their force and their fury, and it cannot even touch Him. Cannot shake His purpose. Cannot shake us from His grip and His purpose for us.. In fact, it only achieves His purpose.

You would think Satan would've learned that by the time he comes to this fine rebellion, but what has taken place throughout his career will take place then, and that is: Satan will only serve God's purpose, and all of this, and then he'll meet his doom, to God's glory.

Well, that is described, his doom, in verse 10. The nations that followed him, Gog and Magog, are all destroyed. "And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever."

And with that, the chapter on Satan is closed. What a story it was. There are lessons to be learned from it. From the accounts of Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28, he had a glorious beginning. He was Lucifer, the morning star. Ezekiel calls him the anointed cherub. He was in the very presence of God. He was blameless, Ezekiel says, until unrighteousness was found in him. His heart was lifted up in pride because of his beauty.

And he fell. God cast him down to the earth. So, from the highest heights, he fell to the lowest depths. In Isaiah 14:16, men will look on him, we're told, and they will be amazed at his great fall and humiliation. In that text, Isaiah is describing the king of Babylon. But, the king's career and his end is a type of Satan. And people will see him, and in the bottom of the pit, and say, "Is this the man who made the earth tremble, who shook the kingdoms?" They'll say that about the king of Babylon. They'll say that about the one who stood behind the king of Babylon and all of the kings of this world who are in rebellion against God, and they'll be amazed at how lowly he has become.

Well, there's a lesson there, as I say, and the lesson is: a person can have great privilege and opportunity, then be lifted up in pride and fall terribly. That's a warning to us. Satan's career, Lucifer's career, stands as a great warning to all of us, and it reminds us?: we're no better. If a perfect angel covered over in beauty, with great privilege of being in the very presence of God. If he could fall, any one of us could fall, and would fall, and will certainly fall, apart from the grace of God. But the grace of God keeps us from stumbling and falling. That's why we must never forget that we have nothing except what God has given to us: our faith, our abilities, our possessions, our deeds. Go down the list. All of that is a gift from God.

Read Ephesians chapter 2 verses 8, 9, and 10. It's very clear there. We have no grounds for boasting in ourselves. We have no reason for pride. We are debtors to mercy alone. Now, the rest of the chapter's not about mercy; it's about justice. It's about God's pure and inflexible justice. What only His grace can deliver us from. The scene that rises before John is an awesome scene, in its solemnity and grandeur.

John writes in verse 11 that he saw a great white throne. It is colossal in size because it is the throne of the infinite God. It is white, because it is pure. It reflects His holiness. The justice that will be given from that throne is perfect. It is right. It is just.

And John sees an amazing thing. Earth and heaven fled away from before the throne. It's hard to visualize that. I'm not sure we can visualize heaven and earth, the universe, fleeing away from this great white throne. The language is figurative. The language is poetic. It describes, perhaps in a figurative way, what Peter explains will happen at the end, when the universe will be burned up with an intense heat and cease to be, 2 Peter chapter 3 and verse 12.

But John's description of heaven and earth fleeing suggests, I think, and I think this is the thought that he has in mind in describing these things. It suggests the shame that the universe has before God, because it's under the curse. It has been under the curse since Adam fell, and that is due to man's sin. And so, there is this sense of that in what he describes here. But, that will be changed. It will be changed at this time. The old order will end and a new order will begin. In fact, the old order will be brought to an end so that the new order, the eternal order, the new heavens and the new earth, can occur, can begin. The world to come will come out of the ashes of the old world. But now, in the picture John gives us, in the vastness of space, God holds court.

The scene has been called the great _____, the last judgment, and it involves all the unbelievers. We read in verse 12 and verse 13 that every part of the world will give up its dead. The sea, and death, and Hades, bodies that had long ago been destroyed, been devoured, turned to dust will be restored. You wonder: how can that happen? You can contemplate the difficulties of bodies that have decayed, that have been consumed by the fish in the sea or whatever and you wonder: how could they possibly be regathered? We can vaguely sense that a grave would open and the bones that were there would be resurrected, but what about some of these other cases? Well, remember, we're dealing with an omniscient God and an omnipotent God. He knows where every molecule is, where it's gone. He'll assemble it all and bring it back. It's where He tells us it's not a difficulty for Him.

So, as John says, he saw this great scene in which the great and the small were standing before the throne, all brought before Him, resurrected from all corners of the

earth and all parts of the earth. Someone said: no one is so important as to be immune from judgment, and no one is so unimportant as to make judgment inappropriate. The small and the great will be judged. All will be called to this great _____, this great judgment. And all of these who are called, these are unbelievers. The first resurrection happened at the second coming. John said in verse 6 that those who had a part in it are blessed and holy. They're not in this resurrection. They're not at this great white throne. So this, by implication, is the second resurrection. These are not the blessed. They are not exempt from the second death. They will be judged according the strictest standard of God's righteousness. There will be nothing arbitrary at all about God's judgment. John says, and books were opened, and another book was opened, which is the Book of Life, and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds.

So, the record of each individual will be made known. Everything that an individual has done, thought, whether it's a thought or a deed, it's all recorded in God's book. Everything is being recorded, every detail. And that will be made known. And on the evidence of what people have done, on the evidence of their deeds, they will be judged. Each life will speak for itself. And as I say, God has a precise record of all of that. Our lives are written down in detail and recorded in His books. They will be opened and examined, and all who are being examined will fall short of God's standard of perfection.

But, there is another book. There are these books on the one hand, and then there is a book. And so, there is another possibility, and that book is the Book of Life. The books are about works. The book is about grace. It's about election. It's about redemption. It is about those who believed in Christ. And John says in verse 15, that if "anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire."

So, God will take men to court and judge them as they would want to be judged, on the basis of their own actions. You sometimes hear the complaint against federal theology, the idea of representation, that Adam was our representative head. And because Adam fell, we fell. When he sinned, we sinned. His sin was imputed to us, and people don't like that. Want to be judged on their own works. Don't judge me for another man's failure. Forgetting the fact that he was a perfect man in a perfect

environment. We couldn't have had a better situation than to have the best man representing us, a man better than we are.

So, men will have that situation if they want. Do you want to be judged on your own merits and your own works? Well, that day will come, and not one man, woman, or child, whoever stands before the great white throne, will be able to stand. All will be found guilty. All will be condemned because of their sin. Both books will condemn them. Both sets of books, I should say. They will be condemned by the books that expose their sins, and they will be condemned by the book that reveals their own belief. There will be a two-fold witness against them. None will be without sin, and none of their names will be found in the Book of Life, proving that they are all unbelievers.

And so, the end will come, verse 14. "Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire." Then, as William GT Shedd put it: "Hell without the body becomes hell with the body." The scene John gives here of judgment and of a place where people are tormented day and night forever and ever has been called impossible to visualize. I think that's true. But men have tried to do that. We can't but try to do that, but men have made a serious attempt to visualize this. Ignatius Loyola, who founded the Society of Jesus, the Jesuits, required as a spiritual exercise, that men, the men of his order, enter a cell for a month of silence, and think about hell. They were to imagine its length, and its breadth, and its depth. They were to use every sense of their imagination to hear men screaming, to smell them burning, to feel the pain that they suffer. That was the exercise. A month-long exercise. But it's a futile exercise because whatever we can imagine cannot approach the reality.

Now, that's not a criticism of the Jesuits. We have plenty that we could criticize them about, that we disagree with them about. But I would say this, at least they were thinking seriously about hell and eternity. Today, men dismiss it as a fable and a fiction. One of the early errors of the church was restorationism. Origin. One of the church fathers taught that based on his own belief in free will. This is the kind of idea that would follow from a belief in free will, that he believed that because men have free will and because the angels have free will, there's always the possibility of self-conversion.

Later, John Milton suggested the same thing in "Paradise Lost" that with time, the torments may become less, and the devil's temper, his character, changed into that of the saints. Well, that's an unusual idea. The church, historically, has rejected any belief that the lost will be rehabilitated and reclaimed. If Revelation 20 proves anything, it is the impossibility of self-improvement of the lost. A leopard cannot change his spots. And after a thousand years of punishment and imprisonment, Satan will be unchanged and unrepentant. After a thousand years of blessing, mankind will still be inclined to rebel. Time doesn't change men's hearts. Punishment doesn't change men's hearts. And blessing doesn't change men's hearts. Only sovereign grace changes people.

But still, having said that, the doctrine of damnation is hard. So, many reject it for annihilationism. That the soul ceases to exist at death, or they opt for a form of that, a form of annihilationism in the doctrine of conditional immortality. That's the view that the soul is not naturally immortal. It gains immortality through the redemption of Christ. So, it's through faith that we gain immortality. If we don't have faith, we don't have immortality. So, the unredeemed are extinguished at death.

But I think, to quote Dr. Shedd again, I think he was right when he said that, of all forms of annihilationism, that the chief objections to the doctrine of endless punishment are not biblical, but speculative. You can't find a verse in Scripture that says that immortality is conditioned on faith. Scriptures, to my mind, are clear that man, from the beginning, from the moment of conception, is an eternal soul. But it's a speculation on the part of people, and often times for certain reasons. I think we have an example of that in John Stott, who is a man I respect highly, whose writings have been a great help to me, and a man whose writings I recommend to your reading. Unfortunately, he believes in conditional immortality. But he said, emotionally. That's his word. Emotionally, he finds the idea of hell intolerable, and can't understand how people who believe it keep from cracking under the strain.

Now, I appreciate his sensitivity to this issue, which is a very serious one. But his comments indicate that it is really an emotional issue with him. I grant, it's probably true that we would crack if we got a view into hell and we saw what is taking place there. We've got a full sense of it. But that doesn't alter the teaching of Scripture. It only reminds us of how terrible the lake of fire will be, and how sinful sin is, that it merits such eternal punishment. That's the issue. How great sin is.

When Jesus saw the judgment coming on Jerusalem, He wept. He wept bitterly over the city. He felt deeply about its judgment. But He didn't deny it. The reality of it moved Him to tears, not to denying the truth of it.

Regardless of what our feelings indicate, the Bible is clear: eternal judgment is reserved for everyone whose name is not written in the Book of Life. Significantly, the one who speaks most frequently on the subject of hell in the New Testament is Jesus. The word Gehenna, translated hell, is used by Him more than anyone else. He repeatedly warned people about being cast into the fiery hell. He warned the city of Capernaum, His town, that it would descend into Hades. In fact, in Matthew 11 and verse 24, He tells Capernaum that it will be more tolerable for Sodom in the day of judgment than it will be for Capernaum, which means that there are degrees of punishment, that those who have great light are more responsible than those who had less light, and their punishment will be greater.

Now, there is indicated by that, degrees of punishment, but there cannot be degrees of punishment if souls are extinguished at death. That would suggest, by implication, that they're not extinguished. It is a real place where those who are in unbelief will be, and their torment there will be conscious. That's clear from the explicit and the implicit statements of Scripture. It's clear from that. The story of Lazarus and the rich man in Luke chapter 16 and verse 23. The Lord says that in Hades, he lifted his eyes, being in torment, and saw Abraham far away. He was fully conscious of it. He was in torment. Men can speculate all they want on things they have not seen. But the Bible is revelation, and it teaches very plainly that hell is real, and it is forever. It must be forever because of the nature of sin. It is against God, who is infinite and eternal in His being. The object of sin determines the greatness of guilt.

Let me illustrate that. A person can kill a bug and there's no crime in that. But if he kills the neighbor's cat, that's a crime. And if he kills the neighbor, that's a far greater crime. And if he sins against God, who is an infinite and eternal God, that is an infinite and eternal crime. Men do that all day long. So, hell is reserved for them, and here in Revelation chapter 20 and verse 10, we are told that those who are in the lake of fire will be tormented "day and night forever and ever."

Why's it called the "lake of fire?" Have you ever wondered that? I've wondered that. Dr. Johnson wondered that. I heard one of his lessons speaking of

that, and gave what he thought might be an explanation. I don't know if it's original with him, if he heard someone else say it, but he said he didn't know why it was called the lake of fire, but he suggested that it's because a lake has no outlet. That's a very sobering thought. No exit. It is forever and ever. Day and night. What will it be like? Well, I can't imagine. Those there will have physical bodies of some kind that occurs after their resurrection, so I assume that will assume some kind of physical pain. But, it's something far more than that, I think. I think the greater pain will be that which is spiritual and moral. I think it will be that people will be made to face the reality of their sin and the awfulness of it, and they will live with their guilt forever.

Men today can rationalize their sin. They can explain it away. They can comfort themselves by their rationale. Their consciences are made callous by their resistance, and pretty soon they don't feel the pain of their guilt, but the day is coming when that will be removed. There will be no rationalization. There will be no hardened conscience against it. It will all be laid bare, and they will feel the full weight of their guilt, and there's nothing more painful than guilt. It can drive a man insane. It drove Judas to suicide. It didn't solve his problem, though. That only increased his guilt from which there was no escape. And men will be tormented by what they did forever and ever. The books will always be open on them, because they rejected the only means of removing their guilt, and that is the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

Well, that's still available for all who are alive. So, if there's anyone here who's not believed in Christ, look to Him. Trust in Him. Repent. Change. Ah, but you can't change. Didn't we say that? Can a leopard change its spots? No. And neither can you change your heart. But you must, if you are to be saved. Well, that's a difficult position to be in, isn't it? What can we do? Well, you can recognize your need, realize your complete inability to change, and look to the only one who can change you: the Lord Jesus Christ. Look to Him only, flee to Him, flee the wrath to come, and He will receive you gladly and immediately. So, may God help you to do that, to trust in Him. And may God bless all of us with a sense of the great grace that He has blessed us with in bringing us to Himself and delivering us from that terrible end, of the lake of fire. Let's end in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank You for Your goodness and Your grace, and we thank You for that truth, that by Your grace we've been delivered from that place,

which will be, there will be a great lake of fire, and many will be in it. But by Your grace, multitudes have escaped it, through the sacrifice of Your Son. We thank You for Him, for His death for us. May we live in light of that, in great appreciation of all that we have in Him. We pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.