

The Binding of Satan

REVELATION 20 Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. ²And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, ³and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he might not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be released for a little while.

⁴Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. ⁵The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection. ⁶Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years.

These first verses of Revelation Chapter 20 have probably been the source of more controversy, probably, than any other passage in the book. Likely it is one of the most contentious areas amongst Christians in the entire Bible. Six times in the first seven verses of Revelation we see a reference to “a thousand years.” This period has been referred to as the millennium, which means thousand year period. When people discuss their varying eschatologies they line up their positions based on where they stand in terms of the millennium. This is why the three major positions that are discussed are known as Pre-Millennialism, Post-Millennialism, and Amillennialism. Of course, there are different variations on each of these views, but these are the three heads if you will.

We will take a look at the events of this chapter today, but we also have to remember these events that are detailed here are part of a larger context. One of the mistakes many people I believe make when reading through this

Book is that they forget or they ignore the fact that it is part of a much larger story.

If I were to be given the task of assigning a name to this chapter I would call this chapter, "The defeat, or the Binding of Satan." Now that may sound rather dull or inane, as we have seen this defeat working itself out throughout the entire Book, but here in Chapter 20 we get perhaps our most detailed picture of what that will look like.

The Chapter begins with the now familiar words, "And I saw." But what he sees here is a Great Angel coming down from heaven. We are right to see this Great Angel as Christ. He is holding in his hand the key to the abyss or the bottomless pit and he also has a great chain. We do not have to look very far to find out who this is. Revelation 1:18 we read the following description of Christ: "I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death."

Here we are looking at the risen and ascended savior carrying two of His great symbols of authority. A Key for loosing, and a chain for binding. In Matthew 16 there is the all important passage where Jesus says to His disciples, "Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am? So they said. "Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah, or one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter answered and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus answered and said, "Blessed are you Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. And I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." Then He commanded His disciples that they should tell no one that He was Jesus the Christ.

Jesus, has been given all authority in Heaven and Earth, He tells us this clearly in Matthew 28:18. But he gives this authority to His disciples at the

Great commission. “And Jesus came and spoke to them saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”

What we are seeing here at the beginning of Revelation 20 is Christ proclaiming and announcing the power and dominion of His kingdom.

At Christ’s death on the cross, Satan was definitively defeated. His Kingdom was in fact crushed. The Gospel of John in the 12th chapter Jesus proclaims “Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out. And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all *peoples* to Myself.” This He said, signifying by what death He would die.

Please note carefully in this passage, Jesus proclaims that this judgment is NOW. It is not future, it is now. Satan would be definitively judged at the Cross of Calvary. And if somehow people might try and play exegetical gymnastics with the clear meaning of the text we have the numerous New Testament authors who further clarify what took place at the cross of Christ.

Colossians 2:14-15 the Apostle Paul writes “having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. ¹⁵ Having DISARMED principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it.”

The author of the Hebrews tells us again in Hebrews 2:14-15 “Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might DESTROY him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.”

In 1 John 3:8 a familiar text we read “He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might DESTROY the works of the devil.”

All of these references are in the epistolary books of the New Testament and they are speaking of the definitive defeat of the works of the devil and in the Book of Revelation 12, we read these words. "Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, "Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been CAST DOWN. And they overcame him by the blood of the lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death." Revelation, as we have said quite often through this survey is a portrait or a Revelation of Jesus Christ in His glorious Kingdom.

There are many who await Christ's Kingdom, and in a sense, the Kingdom is still coming it is being manifest more and more every day. But we miss the key meaning if we take all of this events and place them into our distant future. Christ Jesus has already defeated Satan and His Kingdom. He has ascended on high and he currently rules and reigns with His saints. Every Lord's day after we have confessed our sins and we have received the absolution we hear these words. "Truly it is proper and right that we should at all times and in all places give praise to you O Lord, so with the angels and all the company of heaven and with the Church on earth, we praise and magnify your glorious Name, evermore praising you & singing." These are more than mere words, we have actually been raised up into heavenly places and in our worship we are ruling and reigning with Christ.

Ephesians 2:6 says of the Church, That He raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. Greg Uttinger, in his excellent little book "A Whole New World, The Gospel According to Revelation" said it this way, *"That victory was covenantal and representative. Jesus died for His Church. His death was ours and now His life is ours. We live and reign in Christ."*

The text in Revelation 20 continues by telling us that He seized the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years.

I think it is important that we look at this thousand years and understand what is being spoken of. The number One thousand has very often in the Bible a symbolic meaning. Psalms 50:10 is one of these examples. "For every beast of the forest is Mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills." Psalms 68:17, which we spoke about in our review of Revelation Chapter 9 tells us that the chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of thousands. Psalm 84:10 says that a day in your courts is better than a thousand. And then there is Psalms 90: 4 that says "For a thousand years in Your sight are like yesterday when it is past and like a watch in the night."

In the past when I have explained this to people I often like to go to Psalm 50 where it speaks of God owning the cattle on a thousand hills. To those who follow the interpretive principle of rigid literalness, I like to ask the question, "Does not God own the cattle on hill 1001?"

The Book of Revelation, as we have discussed in the past is probably the most symbolic book in the Bible. But remember these symbols are not symbols that we can nonchalantly throw our own meaning onto. Each of the symbols in the book is drawn from elsewhere in the Scripture. I truly believe our biggest issue in understanding the meaning of this book comes from our lack of familiarity with the rest of Scripture. This period of a thousand years, is symbolic for a great lengthy period of time. It began, in my opinion with God's judgment upon Jerusalem, and it will only culminate at the very end of the age.

Notice that this Key and this chain are used to bind the dragon from a specific purpose. He is bound from deceiving the nations. Prior to the coming of Christ, the message of the Kingdom of God, had been exclusively tied to one nation. The nation of Israel. We have spoken many times in the past of God's purpose through Israel. They were to be a light to the nations to show them the glories of the Kingdom of God. But, as we have seen rather than showing God's glory to the nations they instead became haughty and proud and rather than being a light they were instead a hindrance, and now God has sent His son, the true light, that lights the whole world, and he has bound the enemy from his deceiving of the

nations. The glorious and victorious gospel of Jesus Christ has been sent out to all nations. Now, the gospel promise that “All who call upon the name of the Lord, will be saved is a present reality.” Truly Satan HAS been bound.

This binding of Satan we are told would be until the thousand years are completed. And then he must be released for a short time. This release at the end of the thousand years it is declared that it must happen. This implies that it is a necessity. Why it is a necessity is difficult to say. But the Scripture tells us plainly that it is a necessity. Pastor Stoos and I have spoken about this verse a time or two in the past, as I admit it has troubled me. One of the things we read about in the Scripture is the reign of Christ where the nations are ruled by a rod of iron. Perhaps this brief period of Satan’s release is a time where those who are not truly regenerate in their hearts make one last grasp but ultimately they are put down. And also it should be noted that even this last grasp was only permitted because the one who hold the keys had to release the defeated devil.

Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. ⁵ The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection. ⁶ Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years.

With the defeat and binding of Satan we come to another “Then I saw” phrase. John see’s thrones, on these thrones are the one to whom judgment was committed unto. He also sees the souls of them who had been beheaded because of the testimony of of Jesus and because of the Word of God.

It is so interesting that this passage has led to, not a few scary Christian apocalyptic movies. I remember being fascinated by this passage when I was a kid after watching one of those films. I can remember reading many prophecy books where they all wanted to speak about the guillotine which was going to be coming back into frequent use in our not too distant future because of this passage. I can also remember being absolutely terrified.

But, and again, familiarity with the rest of Scripture should make this verse not a verse that fills us with dread or terror, but a verse that is full of victorious hope. The verse is very similar to an earlier verse in Revelation, in Chapter 6. There we read about the opening of the fifth seal, *When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held. And they cried with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?"*

The difference in the text is the use of the word "beheaded" as opposed to "slain." Most commentators, and I agree with them see this as a general reference to all martyrs of the faith, by whatever means they were slain, but the word for beheaded is not used at any other passage in the Bible, it is the Greek word, *pelekizo*. Beheading in general is mentioned in each of the synoptic Gospels when speaking of the beheading of John the Baptizer, who as we know was the forerunner of Christ and the last of the Old Testament prophets. David Chilton says of this, that "It seems likely that St. John is here drawing our attention to the fact that the Old Covenant witnesses, which were symbolized by John the Forerunner, are to be counted amount the faithful martyrs who "live and reign with Christ Jesus for a thousand years."

The text continues with a great clarifying statement in the middle of all of this. It tells us, "This is the first resurrection." Perhaps the definitive teaching on the first resurrection is given to us in John 5. Beginning in the 24th verse, and this is Jesus speaking we read. "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life. ²⁵ Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, AND

NOW IS. When the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live. ²⁶ For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself, ²⁷ and has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man. ²⁸ Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming (Notice what is missing here) in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice ²⁹ and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.

In this passage Jesus makes a very clear distinction between the dead, and those who are in their graves. In John Chapter 5 Jesus is beginning the Age of the Resurrection on which all those who believe on His name will be raised up.

Blessed and Holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years.

1 Peter 2:9-10 speaking of the Church of Jesus Christ says "But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are not the people of God, who had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy."

Church of God we must see that these words here in Revelation 20 are a present reality in the Church of Jesus Christ. Christ has definitively defeated Satan and He has raised us up and brought us into heavenly places, where we rule and reign with Him. This does not mean that everything is easy, and there are no struggles. I have said many times in this survey that what I consider to be a theme verse is in Revelation 12 And they overcame him by the blood of the lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death. Yes Satan is bound from deceiving the nations, but this does not mean that all of his activity on earth has ceased. Yes the demons have been disarmed and bound, yet they are still active.

They are merely restricted. And as the Gospel of Jesus Christ moves to the furthest reaches of the earth they will become more limited. Satan and all his minions cannot stop the spread of the glorious gospel of the Kingdom of Christ because He has been definitively bound and kept under lock and key.

Christ presently rules and reigns the earth from His throne and according to Psalms 110verse 1 there He will remain until His last enemy is ultimately and finally defeated. In Christ's life, death and resurrection the power of the enemy was ultimately defeated, and at his ascension into Glory and his coming to the ancient of days this victory was made manifest not only in heaven but also on earth. In a moment we will be singing a song of ultimate victory. We will be singing of Christ's ascension and the glory that came from that:

Up through endless ranks of angels,
Cries of triumph in His ears.
To His heavenly throne ascending,
having vanquished all our fears.
Christ looks down upon His faithful,
leaving them in happy tears.

Let us pray!