

Revelation

Part Fifty
Binding Satan
(Revelation 20:1-3)

With Study Questions

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Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. ²He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is *the Devil and Satan*, and bound him for a thousand years; ³and 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).

Preface

W. G. T. Shedd said that the preaching of the Gospel to a pagan world apart from the power and promise of God “is the sheerest Quixotism.” Let us recognize as we embark upon this twentieth chapter of Revelation, with all of its attending quarrels, it is above all a missionary chapter.

Introduction

I was in a discussion with a gentleman who was convinced that God is not overly concerned with the “little things.” Help in choosing whether he wore blue socks or brown socks was not something that reached God’s to-do list. This was a discussion I had more than once with more than one person.

Another gentleman who I served in the ministry with made it clear that he wasn’t convinced that God was in control of the minutia. The sovereignty of God did not, according to his example, dictate the hovering patterns of the fly circling the table.

I didn’t make a big deal of it at the time. It did dawn on me at some point that Jesus used the smallest things imaginable to express the extent of the hand of God in the affairs of creation.

Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father's will (Matthew 10:29).

Add to this how a child confronted me with the idea that there really are no (at least very few) big things. What he meant was that big things tend to be an aggregate of small things. In a famine (a big thing), one person starves at a time. In a plague a very small germ joins with other germs to sicken victims, one at a time. In the Great Commission we are called to disciple the nations (big thing). And even though a large group of people might hear, believe and obey, the large group is made up of individuals.

I open with this as we embark upon this very difficult and controversial chapter because this chapter is massive in many ways. It's massive in its length of time. Of all the time periods mentioned in Revelation ("**ten days...half hour...1260 days**" etc.), this chapter contains the longest period, "**a thousand years**" (very likely meaning longer than that).

It's massive in terms of its geographical impact. The deceptions of "**the nations**" is at stake. It's massive in terms of its judgment, culminating with the "**great white throne...from whose face the earth and heaven fled away.**" It is also massive in terms of who is hamshackled. Almost every word used to describe the evil one is contained in one verse, "**dragon, serpent, Devil and Satan.**"

Because of the massive nature of this massive chapter that has caused more divisions and disruptions than any chapter in history (the millennium has been called a thousand years of peace over which the church can't stop fighting), we may be tempted to view ourselves as the mere audience in a grand spectacle. That is a very unhealthy way to read your Bible.

But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves (James 1:22).

It would be a significant mistake for us to think that John's vision of this angel coming down from heaven has not, or does not, impact each of us personally, then all of us corporately.

Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand ² He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is *the* Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years (Revelation 20:1, 2).

Some view this angel as Christ Himself, since we have learned earlier that He is the one with the key; a key being a symbol of sovereignty.

***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 (Revelation 1:18).**

He is also the one who does the binding. When Jesus was accused of casting out demons by "**Beelzebub, the ruler of demons**" His answer to this accusation was loaded. First, He tells them a house divided "**will not stand**" anticipating the inevitable failure of Satan's effort. As someone once said, "The bad news is, we're fighting a dragon. The good news is, the dragon is suicidal."

He also taught that if He has "**cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you.**" Over and against a premillennial understanding that the kingdom is still yet future. The necessary force of this statement (since He had just cast out demons) is that the kingdom of God has come.

But to our current point. Jesus then says this:

Or how can one enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds¹ the strong man? And then he will plunder his house (Matthew 12:29).

This is Jesus saying He is now taking back that which is rightly His. Of course, this involves a great deal more than having a key and a chain. It

¹ *deo*, meaning 'to bind' is the same verb Revelation 20:2

involves a paid ransom. He is worthy because He has redeemed us by His blood (Revelation 5:9).

Let's also notice (over and against certain amillennial interpretations) that this is not to be viewed from a merely heavenly vantage point. The angel is **"coming down from heaven."** The effect of this binding is very much on the earth. And the time frame is not merely future but now.

Remember, the binding is equated with the inauguration of the King and His kingdom. Jesus was adamantly repetitious about this.

Assuredly, I say to you, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom (Matthew 16:28).

And He said to them, "Assuredly, I say to you that there are some standing here who will not taste death till they see the kingdom of God present with power" (Mark 9:1).

But I tell you truly, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the kingdom of God (Luke 9:27).

After detailed instruction regarding what many people today view as the end of the world (sun darkened, moon not giving its light, powers of the heavens shaken, etc.) Jesus is not unclear regarding the timing.

Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place (Matthew 24:34).

When the seventy returned with joy saying, **"Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name" (Luke 10:17)**, Jesus says something that must be grappled with (actually rejoiced over).

And He said to them, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven" (Luke 10:18).

Jesus wasn't speaking of some distant event when He said,

Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out (John 12:31).

When Jesus spoke of the sending of the Spirit (something we saw at Pentecost), it was to be concurrent with the judgment of Satan.

And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: ⁹ concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; ¹⁰ concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer; ¹¹ concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged (John 16:8-11).

Christ's accomplished work of redemption had a significant impact on Satan. Satan, at least in a certain sense, has been judged. A very solid argument is made that in Revelation 12:9 we see Satan "**cast to the earth**" wreaking havoc because he knew "**he has[d] a short time.**" This explains all the demonic activity during the time of Christ.

In Revelation 9:1 the angel opens the key to the bottomless pit. But here, again see the key used, as it were, to throw Satan back into the bottomless pit. In Revelation 12:9 Satan is cast to the earth. In Revelation 20:1-3 he is bound and sealed in a pit.

All of this should not be shocking to Christians, unless they are allowing one of the most difficult chapters in all of Scripture to undermine the clear teaching of Scripture elsewhere. At the resurrection and ascension, all of this was accomplished.

...which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated *Him* at His right hand in the heavenly *places*, ²¹ far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come (Ephesians 1:20, 21).

Here, again, we see a big event. But let us not lose sight of a point Paul makes in reference to this massive event. It is the "**exceeding greatness**" of the power of the resurrection and ascension that is extended to "**us who believe**" (Ephesians 1:19). This includes you...individually.

This is a war that has been won on two fronts. Not only has the enemy, who has come to **“steal, and to kill, and to destroy”** been overcome, but those who have called upon the name of the Lord have been given true life and power.

It may do us well to briefly review this cosmic conflict. Directly after the deceiver had his way with Adam and Eve, God made a promise that through the seed of the woman the head of the enemy would be crushed (Genesis 3:15). Until the coming of Christ, **“the whole world [lay] under the sway of the wicked one” (1 John 5:19)**. But it is a mistake to understand John’s words as some type of prescription for all of history. The victory of Christ meant the destruction of the kingdom of Satan.

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 (1 John 3:8).

Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out. ³² And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all *peoples* to Myself (John 12:31, 32).

It is because of this massive victory that we, individually, have power over the evil one. As we saw, the seventy marveled at the demons being subject to them (Luke 10:17). As Jesus conveyed to Paul the commission to reach out to the gentiles that might turn **“from the power of Satan to God” (Acts 26:18)**. We tend to refer very casually to the astonishing statement of James that if we **“resist the devil...he will flee from you” (James 4:7)**.

How do we resist the devil? Paul presents it as a battle plan in the sixth chapter of Ephesians. Things like truth, righteousness, the gospel, that we may **“be able to stand against the wiles of the devil” (Ephesians 6:10)**. Our victory in all of this is, in one way or another, tied to the victory of Christ and His binding of Satan. Do we really think we would subdue and stand against an entirely unfettered Devil apart from the conquest of Christ? Yet this is the effort of the natural man!

There is a great deal more to address as we work through this chapter. Things like multiple resurrections and the idea that the millennium is a yet future event where Christ reigns while living in a

remade temple, etc. For now, I would like to conclude by addressing two topics: the *thousand years* and the primary impact of the *binding of Satan*.

...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 20:3).

The thousand years (often called the millennium) is the period between the first and second advents of Christ. This is not the current popular view. Most evangelicals see the millennium as a literal thousand-year period that begins after the Second Coming. More on this at another time, for now, let it be said that one is hard-pressed to find a single verse in the Bible that indicates the fulfilled promises associated with the Messiah happening after the Second Coming.

For now, let us recognize that the thousand years mentioned in Revelation twenty is a designation for a very long period of time. Almost never in the Bible does this exact number literally mean one thousand. Yet numerous times, it refers to a larger number or is a metaphor for a large number. A few examples:

One man of you shall chase a thousand, for the Lord your God is He who fights for you, as He promised you (Joshua 23:10).

For every beast of the forest is Mine, And the cattle on a thousand hills (Psalm 50:10).

For a thousand years in Your sight Are like yesterday when it is past, And like a watch in the night (Psalm 90:4).

...even if he lives a thousand years twice – but has not seen goodness. Do not all go to one place (Ecclesiastes 6:6)?

It goes on and on. Yet there are those who would accuse you of overly massaging your Bible to deny the literal thousand years. Even though people are quite comfortable extending **“things which must**

shortly take place” and “the time is near” (Revelation 1:1, 3) to thousands of years. Many of these same people unwaveringly assert that we’re living in the last days of history.

One more thing to consider in this type of conversation is that thirty-five hundred years ago God promised to show mercy to a thousand generations to those who love Him (Exodus 20:6). A generation is a minimum of forty years. In order for God to literally keep that promise, history must extend for at least another 36,500 years.

Finally, what is meant by the binding of Satan? Satan, as an immaterial being cannot be bound by a literal chain in a literal pit. Also, we should not conclude that the binding of Satan means he is entirely inactive in human affairs. Jude 6 and 2 Peter 2:4 both speak of demons in chains, yet clearly demons are, in some sense, active.

The very passage tells us what the binding accomplishes. He is the father of lies, yet his ability to deceive the nations has come to an end. Revelation twenty complements Matthew twenty-eight. In one passage we told to make disciples. In the other we are told why we will succeed. I am not blind to the fact that this success appears to be waning if not reversing in our current culture and era. But know this, God is capable of accomplishing many things at once.

With its ups and downs, God is bringing His glory to **“all the ends of the world” (Psalm 22:27)**. And He is using you and me in His accomplishment of that. And in doing so, He is refining us through the resistance of rebellious people. But make no mistake, the leaven will continue to leaven the loaf. But as has been suggested, leavened bread still requires kneading. A pounding if you will. And sometimes it appears that there is no yeast in it at all. But once there is yeast in the dough, there is no stopping it. Was this not the case with Paul?

We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; ⁹ persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; ¹⁰ always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. ¹¹ For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus’ sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. ¹² So death is at work in us, but life in you (2 Corinthians 4:8-12).

Questions for Study

1. What kind of chapter is Revelation 20? Why (page 2)?
2. Discuss big things and little things. Is God concerned with little things (pages 2, 3)?
3. How does Revelation 20 address massive events? What does this mean to you, individually (page 3)?
4. Has the kingdom of God already begun? Can you provide biblical support? What difference does that make (pages 4, 5)?
5. What has the victory of Christ affected Satan (pages 5, 6)?
6. Review the cosmic conflict between Christ and Satan. What does this mean to you individually and to humanity (pages 6, 7)?
7. What is meant by a thousand years in this chapter (pages 7, 8)?
8. In what respect is Satan bound and how does this complement the Great Commission (pages 8, 9)?