

Unlocking Revelation

Satan in Chains

The twentieth chapter of Revelation takes in three major events that are all yet to transpire. It opens in the context of Armageddon, “the battle of the great day of God Almighty” (Revelation 16:14, 16; 17:12-14; 19:11-21). The first few verses deal with what is to happen, specifically to Satan, as the thousand-year period or the millennium begins (see Revelation 20:1-3). The next few verses touch on what will transpire during the millennium, focusing on the redeemed in heaven with Christ (see Revelation 20:4-6). And then the last portion of this chapter describe the events to transpire at the conclusion of the millennium and actually open to our view a closing scene to the battle of Armageddon (see Revelation 20:7-15).

The Bottomless Pit

We begin the chapter with the complete discomfiture of Satan and his vast army (see Revelation 19:19-21). Christ has come forth with the armies of heaven to deliver His people (see Revelation 19:11-16). All the wicked have been slain and their dead bodies lie unburied for the fowl of the air (see Revelation 19:21). The righteous are caught up in the air (raptured) to reign with Christ for a thousand years (see 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17). The earth exists in a state of desolation and waste (see Jeremiah 4:26-27). With all the righteous taken to heaven and all the wicked slain, Satan is the only one left upon the earth. It is in this context that we are shown an angel which comes down from heaven “having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, and cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season” (Revelation 20:1-3).

What is this bottomless pit in which Satan is bound? The word *bottomless* means “abyss.” It is similar to the description of this world just before creation when “the earth was without form and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep” [or the “abyss”] (Genesis 1:2). This condition of the earth in Revelation 20 was prophesied by Jeremiah. “I beheld the earth, and, lo, it was without form, and void; and the heavens,

and they had no light. I beheld the mountains, and, lo, they trembled, and all the hills moved lightly. I beheld, and, lo, there was no man, and all the birds of the heavens were fled. I beheld, and, lo, the fruitful place was a wilderness, and all the cities thereof were broken down at the presence of the Lord, and by His fierce anger. For thus hath the Lord said, The whole land shall be desolate; yet will I not make a full end” (Jeremiah 4:23-27).

The context of the first few verses in Revelation 20 is the latter part of Revelation 19. There we find a description of the enemies of God being slain and thrown into the “lake of fire burning with brimstone” (Revelation 19:20). Isaiah captured this same event when he spoke of the armies of the earth fighting against God (see Isaiah 34:1-10). Picturing the earth during this time the prophet saw that “the streams thereof shall be turned into pitch, and the dust thereof into brimstone, and the land thereof shall become burning pitch. It shall not be quenched night nor day; the smoke thereof shall go up for ever: from generation to generation it shall lie waste; none shall pass through it for ever and ever” (Isaiah 34:9, 10). The prophet called this the “indignation of the Lord. . . upon all nations” (Isaiah 34:2).

This understanding is quite different from some views. “The idea has become popular that the millennium will be a golden age for planet Earth. According to these Bible prophecies, however, the thousand years will be ‘the world’s millennial night’” (C. Mervyn Maxwell, *God Cares 2*, p. 495). Yet it is Biblical and definitely does justice to the context of the chapter which will become even clearer as we continue.

Bound By a Chain

This background will help us to understand how it is that Satan is bound with the “great chain” in the hand of the angel (see Revelation 20:1). We may be assured that this is not a literal chain (see Jude 6). Satan is a spiritual being. Neither he nor his evil angels can be bound by a literal chain (see Mark 5:1-4). Rather, Satan is bound by a chain of circumstances. The earth is as a bottomless pit, without form and void. It is desolate and broken down. All the inhabitants have been slain.

God, they are overwhelmed with guilt and anguish. The burning pain can only be relieved as they are finally consumed to ashes in the “lake of fire” (Revelation 20:14; Malachi 4:1, 3). Then they will be totally destroyed by “fire and brimstone: which is the second death” (Revelation 21:8). They will be “devoured” by the fire “in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb” (see Revelation 20:9; 14:10).

Speaking of the second coming of Christ, the thousand years of earth’s desolation, and the final execution of judgment against the wicked, Isaiah prophesied, “And it shall come to pass in that day, that the Lord shall punish the host of the high ones that are on high, and the kings of the earth upon the earth. And they shall be gathered together, as prisoners are gathered in the pit, and shall be shut up in prison, and after many days shall they be visited” (Isaiah 24:21, 22). The word *visited* here means “found wanting” (see marginal reading). This is the final decree against all those who have refused the precious gift of forgiveness made possible by the sacrifice of Christ Jesus.

Conclusion

The main subject of Revelation 20 is the millennium or “a thousand years” (Revelation 20:2). During this time Satan will be shut up upon this earth as it lies desolate and “broken down” (Jeremiah 4:26). He will have all this time to review the influence of his sin and consider the result of the course he has pursued.

The redeemed will also have opportunity to review the effect of sin upon this earth. Every question they have in regard to sin’s six-thousand-year reign and how God has dealt with it will be answered. Why the flood? What about Uzza? Why isn’t my friend or family member here? This will be our opportunity to investigate the heavenly records and understand everything that troubles or perplexes us.

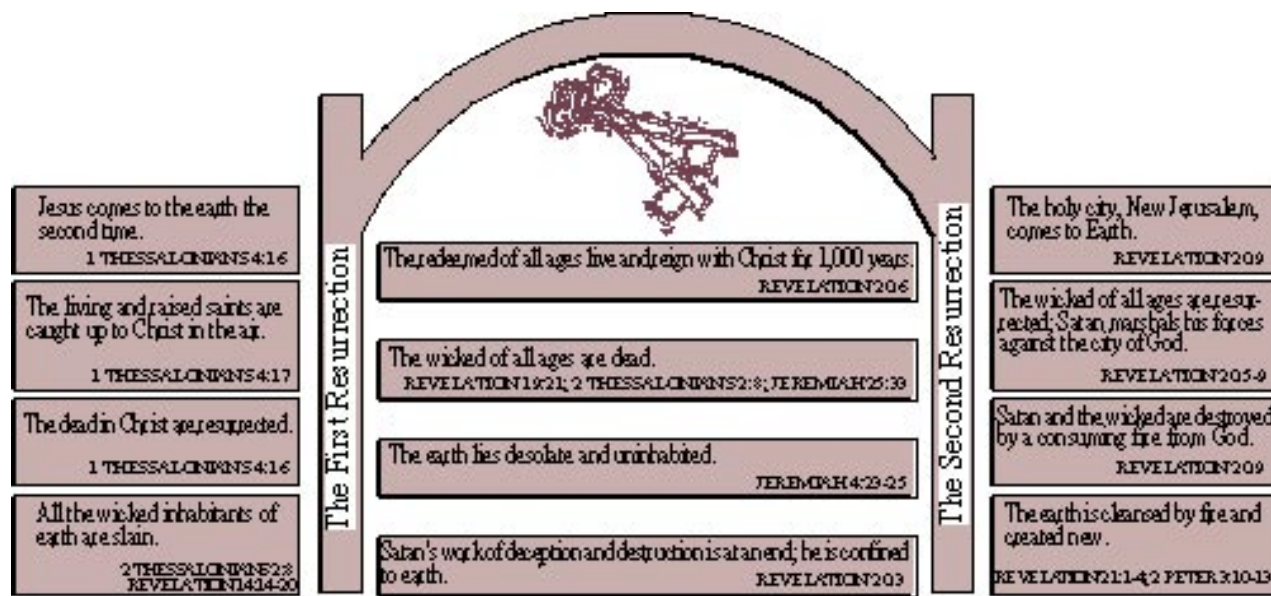
Beyond this, Revelation 20 reveals the judgment or punishment, “krino,” of evil (see Revelation 20:12, 13). Every act of wickedness, every hurtful and unholy deed has been faithfully recorded in heaven (see Revelation 20:12). The good news is that we have a Savior. None need face the record of their sins without Christ who is an advocate and propitiation “for the sins of the whole world” (see 1 John 2:1, 2). We don’t have to reap the result of our selfishness, yet many will. If we fail to avail ourselves of Jesus, if we reject His great sacrifice in our behalf, we treasure up wrath which will be as coals of fire upon our heads in that day of wrath and judgment. May the grace of God implant a steadfast purpose and earnest desire to accept as our own the merits of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.



we find that there is not one instance in the 66 books of the Bible that would give positive credibility to the present-day phenomenon of out-of-body experiences or communication with the dead. If what the Bible says is true, then speaking to the dead is an illusion created by Satan and his servants. As with King Saul, the spirits of devils conjured up by witches can take the form of men, even righteous men, and predict future events (see 1 Samuel 28:7-19; 2 Corinthians 11:13-15; Revelation 16:13, 14). The Bible says that we should not seek after these familiar spirits but should seek unto God to find out about the dead (see Isaiah 8:19).

The commonly quoted story of the rich man and Lazarus also makes sense. It is a parable, the fifth in a line of parables warning the Jewish leaders of their self-righteous ways (see Luke 15:1-3; 16:15). If taken literally, this story would pose some serious problems, such as trying to fit millions of saved people into “Abraham’s bosom,” or the spirit’s of dead people in heaven and hell with body parts—eyes, fingers, and tongues—when we know that our bodies and parts remain in the grave when we die (see Luke 16:19-31). God’s Word says that the righteous do not go directly to heaven to view the sorrow and pain of their loved ones on this earth. “For David is not ascended into the heavens” (Acts 2:34) and neither have the majority of God’s people. Paul states clearly that the saved “sleep in Jesus” and “that God will take back [to heaven] with Jesus those who have died believing in Him” (1 Thessalonians 4:14, Good News Bible). To make sure we don’t make the same mistake as the disciples did when Jesus spoke of Lazarus’s death, Paul restates in a following verse, “the dead in Christ shall rise first” (1 Thessalonians 4:16). Thus, the Bible only mentions Enoch, Moses and Elijah and some at Christ’s resurrection as going *bodily* to heaven before the final resurrection of the saints (see Genesis 5:24; 2 Kings 2:11; Jude 9; Ephesians 4:8).

It also makes sense in relation to the wicked. God does not send them to a place called “hell” when they die to burn and suffer there until the judgment, only to pluck them out of hell, judge them lost and then put them back there. The wicked are now in an unconscious sleep. They will be raised out of that sleep to face the record of their works. This resurrection is called the “resurrection of damnation” (see John 5:28, 29). As they face the life record of their sin and guilt, they experience the “second death” (Revelation 20:6, 14; 21:8). This is the death that Jesus tasted for us all that we might have the free gift of eternal life (see Hebrews 2:9; Romans 6:23). The wicked will then face the selfishness of their sin in the very presence of the purity of God (see Revelation 14:10). As they review the works of their lives in relation to the goodness of



The righteous are in heaven with Christ for a thousand years. Satan is stuck here in this dark and desolate pit with no one to deceive (see Revelation 20:3). He cannot go to heaven to accuse God as he once did because he was “cast down” at the cross (see Job 1:6-7; John 12:31, 32; Revelation 12:10). In his treatment of the Son of God, Satan revealed himself as a murderer and a liar before the onlooking universe (see John 8:44). At Calvary all the sympathies of heaven were broken. In this sense he is now restricted or “cast unto the earth” where all his energy has been devoted to deceiving mankind (see Revelation 12:12, 13). Of all God’s vast creation, planet earth is the one place where darkness reigns, where there is still found sympathy for the devil (see John 3:19).

Yet now, at the second coming of Christ, Satan is cast into the bottomless pit. As we just learned, the bottomless pit is the earth, but in a state of desolation with no living person present. The bottomless pit is a place where Satan can “deceive the nations nor more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled” (Revelation 20:3). It is a desolate earth, a virtual “prison” for the enemy of souls. The righteous are in heaven. The wicked are dead. For a being whose only aim is to deceive, he is chained up or imprisoned by these circumstances. Imprisoned, that is, until “the thousand years are expired” and he is “loosed out of his prison” and goes to “deceive the nations” one last time (see Revelation 20:7, 8). During the thousands years this earth is Satan’s Alcatraz—an isolated prison from the rest of the universe where he has no one to tempt or harm.

In Heaven During the Millennium

The second section of this chapter opens up an important event that will take place during the thousand years. John saw “thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them” (Revelation 20:4). The word for judgment here is *krima* in the Greek. As in Revelation 17:1 this word means “a decision.” It infers the process of going to law or the function of the law. Those who sit on these thrones are not executing judgment, rather they are making a decision of judgment in relation to evidence.

Who are “they that sat” upon the thrones? In the context of this verse John also mentions the “souls of them that were

beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshiped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands” (Revelation 20:4). It is obvious from the mark-of-the-beast context that these would include God’s end-time people. Yet they also include other generations. Remember the “beast” mentioned here, that they do not worship, is the one with seven heads and ten horns. According to our last study in Revelation 17, this beast represents the manifestation of Satan’s false worship throughout the history of the nations—from Babylon past to the end of time. Those who have not worshiped this beast would include, therefore, the faithful of all ages. Paul reminds all believers that they “shall judge the world” and “angels” (1 Corinthians 6:2, 3).

This judgment is not to decide who are to be saved and lost, for that has already been decided. The importance of this judgment has to do with God Himself. Once the redeemed arrive in heaven there will be inquiries concerning their loved ones. Among the innumerable throng of the redeemed it may take some time to find those whom they have longed to see in the kingdom of God. Eventually though we will find that all who have been saved are there. Then questions concerning the missing will arise. Before the final outpouring of God’s eternally destroying fire, those who are saved must understand the reasons for the destruction of those who are lost. Perhaps we will go all the way back to the beginning of the rebellion in heaven to see the part that each angel played. Then down through the ages, the life of every person will be considered. As evidenced by our study in Revelation 17, God’s people will investigate the lives of the wicked and have a part in the process of God’s law which will make a decision about their guilt. All this will take place in heaven during the thousand years (see Revelation 20:4).

The Books of Heaven

The Bible is clear that God keeps a record of every aspect of life that has taken place on planet earth. “While the world has been making history, heaven has been keeping the records” (Stephen N. Haskell, *Story of the Seer of Patmos*, p. 330). Christ tells us plainly that in “the day of judgment” we shall

have to give an account of every “idle word” that we have ever spoken (Matthew 12:36, 37). Even David understood that God had kept a record of our lives. Our tears and wanderings are all recorded in a “book” (Psalm 56:8). And Malachi points to a “book of remembrance” that was written before God (see Malachi 3:16).

“Besides the Book of Remembrance there is the Book of Life. This is referred to many times in the Scriptures. On its pages appear the names of all who have ever professed the name of Christ; all who have reached heavenward for help. The Saviour gently rebuked His disciples when they gloried over the success which attended their first missionary trip, and said, ‘Rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven.’ Those who remain true to God have their names retained in the Lamb’s Book of Life; and the good deeds from the Book of Remembrance are written opposite these names. Those who grow weary, and turn away from the Lord, have their names blotted out of the Book of Life; and at the same time, the record in the Book of Remembrance shows only the sins they have committed. When a name is enrolled in the Book of Life, the name of Christ is taken, and by faith the works of Christ are imputed to the believer. When man forsakes Christ, there is no record of good deeds, for without Him we can do nothing; and the page is soon filled with a record of pride, selfishness, and all the works of the flesh. ‘For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption.’

“On the other hand, when a soul repents, it matters not what the past record of sin may have been, his name is entered on the pages of the Book of Life: those sins are covered by the blood of Christ, and are finally blotted out” (Stephen N. Haskell, *Story of the Seer of Patmos*, pp. 332, 333).

The Millennium Ends

As the thousand-year period ends, John is shown that “Satan shall be loosed out of his prison” (Revelation 20:7). This infers that there has been a resurrection of the wicked. “The rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished” (Revelation 20:5). Remember, Satan has been imprisoned by a chain of circumstances. He has been restricted by the fact that there has been nobody for him to deceive for one thousand years. Now that the “nations which are in the four corners of the earth” have been “delivered up” to life again, Satan is released from his chains and goes “out to deceive” (Revelation 20:8, 13). Through his falsehoods Satan marshals this vast host “to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea” (Revelation 20:8).

Then ensues the consummation of the great battle of Armageddon. In this mighty company there must be scores of the most experienced men of war. Masterminds and hardened killers confederate together around the New Jerusalem walls. They surround the “beloved city” of God (see Revelation 20:9). Then, in view of the vast host of redeemed and the lost, there is seen a “great white throne” (Revelation 20:11). As all the wicked resurrected stand before God, books are opened (see Revelation 20:12). Now the record of their lives comes into view before all (see Ecclesiastics 12:14; Matthew 12:36, 37). Their rejection of the “goodness of God,” the evil they heaped upon God’s people, all this falls upon their heads like “coals of fire” (Romans 12:20; 2:4). They have treasured up

unto themselves “wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God; Who will render to every man according to his deeds” (Romans 2:5, 6).

“The dead were judged,” that is, “krino,” “punished,” according to “those things which were written in the books, according to their works” (Revelation 20:12). All the earth has delivered up her dead, whether they came from the “sea” or the “grave” (see Revelation 20:13). The grave refers to the condition or the state of people when they die. Contrary to popular belief, the Bible teaches that “the dead know not anything” (Ecclesiastes 9:5). When they go to the grave they do not have eyes, ears, or any physical functions. In death the “dust” from which our bodies were formed, returns “to the earth as it was: and the spirit” returns to God “who gave it” (Ecclesiastes 12:7). It was the dust and the spirit which God combined to make a “living soul” (Genesis 2:7). The spirit is the “breath of life” (Genesis 2:7). When the breath or spirit of life is separated from the body, the soul ceases to exist. That is why the Bible nowhere speaks of an immortal soul. It teaches that God alone has “immortality” (1 Timothy 6:16; 1:17).

Consider this in the example of the humanity of Jesus. When He died on Friday He committed His spirit into God’s hands (see Luke 23:46). Three days later, on resurrection morning (Sunday), He had not yet gone to heaven and seen the Father (see John 20:17). Though Jesus was God, in His human form He submitted to the laws of our humanity and waited in the grave until Sunday morning when His Father sent an angel for Him (see Galatians 4:4; Matthew 28:2-6). Just so, the bodies of the dead in Christ wait in the grave for angels to be sent for them at Christ’s second coming (see Matthew 24:31). Then the spirit or breath of life from God will again be united with the dust of the earth and God’s people will be raised to life as living souls. The Bible is clear that it is not until then that they are given immortality (see 1 Corinthians 15:51-54). The wicked are never given immortality and will eventually perish (see John 3:16; Obadiah 16).

In John 11 Jesus addressed the state of the dead with His disciples. There Christ likened death to a sleep, as the Bible does over 60 different times (see John 11:11). Yet Christ’s disciples thought that Christ meant the act of resting in sleep, and so Jesus clarified that He was speaking of death (see John 11:12-14). The idea of death being a sleep allows all the information on this subject to make sense. If the soul ceases to exist at death, with the body resting in the grave while the breath or spirit returns to God, then the resurrection of the righteous at the second coming of Christ makes sense. The apostle Paul speaks of our mortal bodies putting on “immortality” at “the last trump” (1 Corinthians 15:52, 53). He says we “shall not all sleep,” or die, but that we “shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed” (1 Corinthians 15:51, 52). If death is like an unconscious sleep, then the idea of being “absent from the body,” and “present with the Lord” makes sense (see 2 Corinthians 5:8). When the Christian dies, the next thing he knows, the very next conscious moment of his life, is being caught up to be with the Lord.

God’s prohibition concerning speaking to dead spirits also makes sense (see Deuteronomy 18:10-12). Especially when