

The Revelation of Jesus Christ

Lesson # 67 Revelation 20:1-3 Satan & the 1,000 Years

Date: February 3, 2013

¹Then 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. Revelation 20:1-3 (ESV)

I. Introduction

We have spent a lot of time examining the competing eschatological systems, the covenants & their relationship to the Millennium, Dispensationalism (briefly) and reviewed Romans 9-11 to reveal something important regarding the Millennial Kingdom and the nation of Israel, so that when we finally look at Revelation 20:1-10, we will see that it is not the only place in Scripture that speaks of a Millennial Kingdom, it is simply the only one that tells us it will last for 1,000 years, and having laid down our background, we can be pretty certain that is yet future and that the 1,000 years is literal, not symbolic.

In a fulfillment sense, a correct understanding of Rev. 20:1-10 is a key element in bringing together the fulfillment of all 4 unconditional covenants – AC, PC, DC, & NC. Revelation 20 also helps us understand God’s entire program of redemptive history including the setting aside of Israel so that the gospel goes to the gentiles until the time of the gentiles is fulfilled; the restoration of Israel as God’s people and their possession of God’s land which they have technically owned the title of since the Abrahamic Covenant. The Millennial Kingdom is a culmination & a restoration of paradise lost when Adam sinned.

J. Dwight Pentecost comments, *“At the second advent, all four of the eternal, unconditional covenants will be fulfilled; and the remnant from Israel will enter into the blessings and benefits provided by those covenants. They will have been preserved as a nation. They will have been redeemed. They will be installed in their own land under the beneficent, righteous reign of their Davidic King. Israel’s hope rests on the promises and covenants of God. The physical, visible return of Jesus Christ to this earth, the enthronement of Christ as King, the subjugation of all Israel’s enemies to the authority of her King, and Israel’s experience of the benefits of the salvation provided through the New Covenant enacted at the cross. As Christ came the first time in fulfillment of the covenants, so He will come the second time to complete all that was covenanted.”*ⁱ

A number of events take place during the period of time specified as 1,000 years in Revelation 20. The initial event is the fact that an angel captures and binds

Satan with a great chain and locks him away in the Abyss (vv. 1-3). As a result, Satan (& his demonic host) is not able to deceive the nations again until the expiration of the time period. Verses 4-6 describe thrones and judgment, resurrection, and the priesthood of believers for that same period of time – 1,000 years. Satan’s short-lived release after the 1,000 years and attempt to surround and defeat the saints (& Christ Himself) ends in his destruction and eternal damnation in the Lake of Fire, and the rebels he leads are killed (vv. 7-10). The remainder of the chapter – vv. 11-14 – describes the Great White Throne judgment, leading into the eternal state for believers in heaven and eternal torment in Hell for all unbelievers and demons.

II. The Incarceration of Satan

vv. 1-2

“Few verses in the Bible are more crucial to the interpretation of the Bible as a whole than the opening verses of Revelation 20. They are determinative in their support or contradiction of the three major millennial views – postmillennialism, Amillennialism and Premillennialism. They are of vital importance to the doctrine of the righteousness of God and His ultimate triumph over evil. They relate pointedly to the question of the resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked. Further, they are essential to the doctrine of Satanology, that is, the present power and program of Satan as well as his destiny.”ⁱⁱ

“Then I saw an angel coming down...”. John again uses “then” as an expression of time advancing, as he has throughout the book of Revelation. This angel holds the key to the Abyss or Bottomless Pit, and he holds a great chain. He seizes - & note the 4 descriptors so we won’t mistake who he seizes – “the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan.” ②

The Antichrist & False Prophet are already in the Lake of Fire by this time – cf. Rev. 19:20 – so Satan is the last member of the unholy trinity left alive, but he is now captured and incarcerated in the recently emptied Abyss (it was emptied during the 5th and 6th Trumpet judgments – Rev. 9).

This angel has great strength and God’s authority, so he is able to seize Satan, bind him and then seal him in the Pit. As mentioned by John Walvoort’s quote above, this scene validates the historicity and the actual existence of a being named Satan, who is evil, but whose end is determined in advance by God, and part of that end is described here.

Some argue that it would be impossible for a key and chain to lock away a spiritual being, so this must mean something else – likely the defeat of Satan at Calvary put into apocalyptic prose. But remember, there were spiritual beings locked away in this Pit before and they did not escape, they were released in Rev. 9:1-2 by a ‘star’ or angel who has a key to unlock the pit. Notice how Peter describes their imprisonment in **2 Pet. 2:4**, “in chains”. To my knowledge no one attempts to spiritualize that text. So, somehow, either these are real chains which God has designed to hold fast spiritual beings or they are symbolic, but

either way, they are apparently effective for holding Satan bound for the duration of the 1,000 years once he has been caught and tossed in.

AMils interpret this passage to be a symbolic picture and the imprisonment of Satan is not after Christ returns, but took place at Christ's death, resurrection and ascension. One passage that is cited in defense of this concept is **Matt. 12:22-29**. But, if that idea were true, how could he still be described in the NT to be "roaming around like a roaring lion, seeking whom to devour"? Note – **Luke 22:3; Acts 5:3; 2 Cor. 4:3-4; 11:14; Eph. 2:2; I Thess. 2:18; 2 Tim. 2:26; I Pet. 5:8; Rev. 2:10**. According to some theologians, this 'chain' is like a symbolic long leash, and he has some power, it is just limited. William E. Cox says, "*Satan, though bound, still goes about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. The chain with which he is bound is a long one, allowing him much freedom of movement.*"ⁱⁱⁱ The argument follows the path of saying that there is only one way that Satan's power has been limited, and that is so that he might not deceive the nations any longer, but he can still deceive the church and prevent its spread across the globe.^{iv}

Alva J. McClain hits the nail on the head when he says of these verses in Rev. 20, "*If this language does not mean that the immobilization of Satan is complete, so far as his deception of the nations is concerned, then there is no way to express the idea.*"^v

Even if it is symbolic, it does not have to mean something other than what is being said. Satan is under control and is put in a place where he cannot access anyone to afflict them, hurt them kill them, or accuse them. This makes perfect sense in the flow of the book and of the entire Bible. It sets up the 7th Dispensation – the long awaited Millennial Kingdom. The real problem for Covenant Theologians, and especially A-Mil thinkers is the 1,000 years mentioned in v. 2.

III. The 1,000 Years

v. 2

Chiliasm is the term given to the 1,000 years as a distinct time period. In this passage, from v. 2 to v. 7, the numerical phrase, "1,000 years" is used 6 times. We've noticed as we've gone through Revelation that a major aspect of the argument of A-Mils and Post-Mil theologians has been to spiritualize or interpret as merely symbolic the numbers used by John. Some even go so far as to say that there are virtually no actual numbers used in Revelation, that all the numbers are symbolic. They do this so they can manipulate their interpretation into the texts to support their positions. Those who interpret the numbers literally are seen as naïve bumpkins and are often ridiculed.

We have seen that, in virtually every instance of numbers in this book, that there is no need to spiritualize them, as they stand perfectly fine as literal numbers. The numbers are often supported as literal by John himself, as he provides the numbers in different ways – ie. 1,260 days, 3 ½ years, 42 months, a

time, times and a half time; or the 144,000 in Rev. 7 – 12,000 from this tribe, 12,000 from that tribe until 144,000 people are accounted for literally! The book of Daniel does the same thing, especially with the Tribulation timing and duration. The only two numbers in Revelation which must almost certainly be symbolic numbers are found in Rev. 1:4 (the 7 Spirits), and Rev. 13:18 (666). The fact that 1,000 is repeated here 6 times verifies that it is a real time period of 1,000 years, not simply a long, indeterminate time. The A-Mils can support their contention of us being in the Millennium now only if they can make a case that the 1,000 years are symbolic, because obviously, if it began at Christ's ascension, we've been in it for just shy of 2,000 literal years.

There are 25 references to time in Revelation, and only two of these must be seen as something other than literal – Rev. 6:17 (the Day of God's wrath – is not a literal 24 hour day), and 14:7 (the Hour of His judgment – is not referring to 60 minutes).^{vi}

We must acknowledge that the Bible sometimes does use 1,000 as a symbolic number, as in **Ps. 50:10**. There are more than 1,000 hills in the world, so this is a literary device to show that God does not need anyone's sacrifice to supply something He lacks. Likewise, the 1,000 in II Peter 3:8 , “one day is as a thousand years” to God, is not a literal 1,000 years. Instead, the point of the passage is that to us, a 1,000 years is a long time, but to God, to whom time really has no meaning except for what He has designed it to do, a short time could just as easily be a long time. He is not bound to a calendar or clock, and He is never late, and always purposeful. Just a simple reading of the passage tells you that. Revelation 20 is not using 1,000 in that way at all. It means a literal 1,000 trips around the sun, and even if John had said it that way too, someone for whom this interpretation does not fit their theology would find a ways to make it mean something else. Satan is bound for 1,000 real years. ④

“Never in the Bible is “year” used with a numerical adjective when it does not refer to the actual period of time that it mathematically represents. Unless evidence to the contrary can be provided, Revelation 20 is not the one exception to the entire Scripture.”^{vii}

There is also another point of theology to deal with here. In vv. 1-2, John is seeing the angel, seeing Satan, the chain and lock and the putting of Satan (and his demons – see lesson 63) into the Pit. However, he cannot ‘see’ the time determination - that had to be given to him by revelation. This is an important distinction because it shows that John was not just throwing that number out there – it is God's number.

Furthermore, prior to this, even Michael the Archangel could not bind Satan. Although he may have had the strength, he apparently did not have the authority - cf. **Jude 9** – all he could do was ask the Lord to rebuke Satan as they argued over the body of Moses. Throughout Rev. 4-18, Satan has clearly dominated the scenes on earth (under God's authority), plunging earth's people into open blasphemy and rebellion against God, but now he is captured by

another angel, which may be & I believe is Michael, but he is not named, and Satan is tossed into prison and locked in.

Why 1,000 Years?

Why does God not now do at this point or earlier in history what is described at Rev. 20:10? Alva McClain describes 2 unique contributions of the 1,000 year millennium;

“The unique contributions of Revelation 20 are at least 2:

- i.) a chronology of the coming kingdom; and ii.) a concise outline of constitutive events in their proper order, so clear that there should be no cause for misunderstanding.”^{viii}*

He further points out the following:

“Of all the divine acts described in Revelation 20, none appears to be more reasonable than the binding & imprisonment of Satan. In the first place, if there is ever to be a kingdom of God on earth, a reign characterized by the total absence of war and by rigid control of disease and death, it should be evident that there can be no place left for the great deceiver of the nations, who is said to have not only the power of inflicting disease upon men (Job 2:7) but also “the power of death” itself (Heb. 2:14), to say nothing of his control over the demonic world (Matt. 12:22-26). To be sure, the vast powers of Satan have never been outside the permissive control of our sovereign God, but the continued exercise of such powers would be utterly incongruous within an established Kingdom of God⑤ on earth.”^{ix}

And then, *“In the second place, such a binding of Satan for a thousand years will constitute a conclusive demonstration of man’s personal responsibility for his own depravity. Although Satan has indeed been the originator of much of the evil of our fallen race, he cannot be charged with all of it...But sinful men have never been given an opportunity to ‘prove’ what they will do in an environment from which the great deceiver of souls has been completely banished. The purpose here is not to acquaint God with something which He does not know now, but rather to prove to men themselves how desperately wicked they really are.”^x*

The Millennium will be used by God to demonstrate to man, with Satan out of the way, with a perfect, righteous King on the throne, in an environment of absolute paradise amongst a population that starts out as saved individuals, that once unsaved people begin to be born into that mixture (the children and grandchildren of those who enter the Kingdom), sin will erupt because the problem of sin is within natural man because of our ancestor, Adam. This period of 1,000 years will serve to dispel any second thoughts about unsaved man’s innate ‘goodness’, which will be shown to be non-existent.

IV. The Release of Satan v. 3

A. The Reason for His Incarceration

We have already touched on verse 3 with our last discussion. He is shut away, and we have looked at why that is necessary. The reason given in v. 3 supports our discussion above – note the “so that” purpose clause, “so that he might not deceive the nations any longer until the 1,000 years were ended.”

Words have meaning. If the reason that Satan is placed in the Pit and sealed and locked in is so that he might not deceive the nations any longer, then this is describing an era of human history that has never been experienced before. There is no indication that this is describing that his influence has merely been reduced or scaled back, but that it has been completely curtailed!

This verse clearly tells us there will be nations in the Kingdom, not just Israel, but gentiles who have been saved during the Tribulation will also inhabit the Kingdom. We will look at the cultural, geographic and political aspects of the Kingdom in later lessons.

Note again the 2nd use of 1,000 years in the passage. The first one was “a thousand years”, now, “the thousand years” to validate that it is a real number, “the” or “that” 1,000 years. For that period of time no one on earth will be influenced or deceived by Satan or his demons. Everyone who enters the Millennial Kingdom right after the Judgment of the Sheep & Goats (Matt. 25: 31-46) will be saved, so there is no danger that they will fall away, but their children, and children’s children will be born unsaved. Many will likely be saved, but some, especially in later generations, will refuse to repent and will rebel against Christ’s Kingship (hence the need for a rule of iron in the Millennium as mentioned in Ps. 2:9; Rev. 2:27; 12:5; 19:15). There will be no need for that sort of rule in heaven, as a result of Rev. 21:4-8. When these Millennial people sin, they will not be able to claim, “the devil made me do it.”

⑥

It cannot be overstressed that the 1,000 year Kingdom will reveal is that man is not innately good – he is dead in sin, by nature a sinner. The depravity of man, so prevalent throughout the Bible will rear its’ ugly head again in a crisis after the 1,000 years has ended – as a result of Satan’s release.

B. The Reason for Satan’s Release v. 3c (& read vv. 7-10)

The Millennium ends. The next stage in God’s plan is startling and unexpected because we now see why Satan and his demonic followers were not immediately sent to join his cohorts in the Lake of Fire 1,000 years earlier. God has further need of him. Did you notice the wording of v. 3c? “After that, he **must** be released for a little while.”

Since no demons remain outside of the Lake of Fire, and Satan has no allies in the Abyss, this release is not describing his escape. He is released the same way he was put away – see. V. 7. Apparently, God sends an angel to release him, so once again we see a sovereign God working out His will in His history. It says, “...he must be released”. Why “must”? Because God has foreordained it.

Verse 3 tells us that he was locked away so that he could not deceive the nations until the 1,000 years ended. “Until” tends to signify that the action which is being curtailed will resume after the restriction time comes to an end, and that is what is being depicted here. When the 1,000 years end, Satan will be released & again will be able to deceive the nations “for a little while” – the very reason he was shut away at the start of the Kingdom.

When we get to the lesson after the next one, and look at vv. 7-10, we’ll look in detail at how this deception of the nations take place and the result. In the meantime, we realize that, even during the earthly reign of our glorious Saviour, Jesus Christ, under ideal, paradisiacal conditions, without supernatural compulsion to sin, and with no evil inherent in the first inhabitants, people become practicing sinners. Because of that, Satan finds people willing and ready to follow him into war against Jesus Christ and His saints at Jerusalem – in, as it turns out, a futile and fatal attempt.

Next lesson – Lesson # 68 -- Rev. 20:4-6 – Reigning & Judging With Christ

ⁱ J. Dwight Pentacost, in “Walvoort: A Tribute”, Donald Campbell, editor, Moody Press, 1982, p. 269

ⁱⁱ John Walvoort, in “Essays in Honor of J. Dwight Pentacost”, Stanley Toussaint & Charles Dyer, editors, Moody, 1986, p. 227

ⁱⁱⁱ William E. Cox, as quoted in Matt Waymeyer, Revelation 20 and the Millennial Debate, p. 17, Kress Publications 2004.

^{iv} IBID

^v Alva J. McClain, The Greatness of the Kingdom, BMH Books, 1959, reprint 1980, p. 481

^{vi} Richard L. Mayhue, New Covenant Theology and Futuristic Premillennialism, in The Master’s Seminary Journal, Volume 18, # 2, Fall 2007, p. 229

^{vii} IBID

^{viii} McClain, pp. 476-477

^{ix} IBID, p. 482

^x IBID, pp. 482-483