

BITTER HONEY: THE REVELATION

Rodger Dalman

CHAPTER 20: SATAN JUDGED

Verses 1-3

Revelation 19 had described God's judgment on Rome and Armageddon. Revelation 20 now finished God's wrath. This chapter dealt with Satan's destruction and hell. In the first verse, an angel came down from heaven with the key of the abyss and a great chain. This angel may have reflected the claim in Revelation 1:18 that Christ had the keys of death and Hades. The motif of keys was used in a number of Biblical passages including: Isaiah 22:21-22; 24:22; 42:7; Matt 16:19; Luke 11:52; John 20:23, and Acts 14:27. Depending on whether this angel is seen as being Christ, either Christ came down to earth to bind Satan or Christ sent an angel under His authority to do the same thing. If the angel is understood as being Christ, this verse could be compared to Exodus 9:11, Isaiah 64:1, and Judges 13:20. Christ (or the angel) laid hold of Satan and bound him for a thousand years. The great chain used to bind Satan could be compared to Lamentations 3:6-7, and the motif of being bound in Sheol could be compared to Job 40:13; Isaiah 24:22; II Peter 2:4, and Jude 6. The pit in which Satan was bound could be compared to Exodus 28:38; Song of Songs 8:6; Ezekiel 9:14, and Daniel 6:17. The binding of Satan could also be compared to Paul's claim in Colossians 2:15 that Christ had disarmed the rulers and authorities.

The Lord bound Satan for a millennium. The figure of 1,000 years may have signified the one time period of mixed nations when the old Roman Empire was in the grave and when Satan's power to create a world empire was limited by the spread of the Gospel throughout the world. The motif of 1,000 years may also be related to Deuteronomy 7:9; I Chronicles 16:15; Psalm 50:10; 90:4; 105:8; Ecclesiastes 6:6, and II Peter 3:8. This was the age of the exiled church scattered through the world. After this period, Satan would be released when Babylon fell, and Satan would be able once more to create a world empire opposed to God. Then the exiles of Israel and the church would be over, and the center of God's activity in the world would return once more to Palestine. Satan, his Antichrist, and his false prophet would reign everywhere except in Palestine where God's people would return to belief.

Verses 4-6

Satan was bound. Then John saw the martyrs and the twenty four elders from Revelation 6:9 and 19:1-10. These martyrs still represented believers slain during Israel's New Testament exile. These were killed by Satan and his antichrists as Satan tried to destroy the gentile church. These martyrs came to life and reigned with Christ for the period of the exiled church, the mixed nations. In these verses, John was not just about physical life. He was also talking about spiritual life. The gentile church came to life because gentiles had gained spiritual life during Israel's exile from her God. This spiritual life was the first resurrection. Christ said in John 11:25-26, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me shall live even if he dies. Everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die." Jesus Christ is the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in Him have a part in the first resurrection. They are priests to God and they reign with Christ just as Old Testament Israel was called to be priests to the world. This motif can be compared to Exodus 19:6, Isaiah 61:6, Revelation 1:6, and 5:9-10.

The rest of the dead did not come to life until after the 1,000 years. The rest of the dead were those spiritually dead who would be converted after the period of mixed nations. They included the Jews who were identified with the tribe of Dan in Revelation 7. They are also the two witnesses who rose from the dead in Revelation 11:11. These Jews were called "the rest" because they were not present among the believers in verse 4.

Verses 7-10

After the New Testament exile was completed, Satan was released from prison. He deceived the nations at the four corners of the earth. The motif of four corners can be seen in Genesis 28:14; the Hebrew of Nehemiah 9:22; Isaiah 11:12; Jeremiah 49:36; Ezekiel 17:2; 37:9, and Ephesians 3:18. By deceiving the nations, Satan gathered them to Armageddon. The nations came up on the broad plain of Armageddon, and they surrounded the beloved city and the camp of the saints. Jerusalem was called the beloved city in Jeremiah 11:15 and 12:7. Zechariah 14:2 prophesied that Jerusalem would be captured and ravished. However, God would deliver His people as they were about to be destroyed (cf. Exodus 14:12-13; II Chronicles 32:21). Then the Lord went forth to fight against the nations. Then Zechariah 14:12 predicted that Israel's enemies would be destroyed in an instant. Their flesh would rot as they stood on their feet. While that could be interpreted in a number of ways, it would be an accurate description of a nuclear attack. Then Ezekiel 39:6 promised that God would send fire on Magog and on those who inhabited the coast lands in safety. John described this destruction in Revelation 20:9-10. He said that fire came down from heaven and devoured Satan's armies. This destruction could be a nuclear exchange as Satan tried to prevent the coming of God's kingdom by destroying the whole human race. It could also simply be fire from heaven. God did exactly that a number of times in the Old Testament, and Jesus' disciples assumed that they could also call down fire from heaven in judgment. (perhaps Genesis 19:24; Exodus 9:24; 19:18; 24:17; Leviticus 9:24; 10:2; Numbers 11:1-3; I Kings 18:24-38; II Kings 1:10-14; Luke 12:49). Then Satan was thrown into the lake of fire along with the Antichrist and the false prophet. John described the destruction in Revelation 20: 9-10. John said that fire came down from heaven and devoured Satan's armies. Then Satan was thrown into the lake of fire along with the Antichrist and the false prophet. They would be tormented day and night forever. Isaiah 66:22-24 promised that believers would see them burning in hell where they would be a perpetual abhorrence to all mankind. These verses can be compared to Psalm 11:6; 18:12-14; II Kings 1:10; Isaiah 66:15-16, and Ezekiel 38:22.

Verses 11-15

Revelation 20:10 described the final judgment. Revelation 20:11-15 developed this theme in more detail. John saw a great white throne with Christ sitting on it. Earth and heaven fled away from Christ's presence, and no place was found for them. This throne was the same throne from which Christ had always ruled His kingdom. He reigned on His throne from the beginning of Genesis to the end of Revelation. When Christ ascended to heaven, He reclaimed His seat on God's throne at the right hand of the Father. When men see Christ coming on the clouds of heaven, He sits on this throne. Jesus warned the high priest of this truth. Jesus said, "After this, you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power and coming on heaven's clouds" (Matthew 26:64). Christ also spoke of His return in Matthew 25:31-46. Part of this section claimed, "When the Son of Man comes in His glory, all of His holy angels will be with Him. Then He will sit on His glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them from each other as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats." The rest of Matthew 25 described the final judgment. In Matthew 25:34, saints inherited the kingdom. In Matthew 25:41, unbelievers were sent to hell.

Then John saw all of the dead standing before the throne. The books were opened and men were judged according to their deeds. The motif of God's heavenly record of believers went back at least the Exodus 32:32. After the golden calf fiasco, Moses prayed that his own name be blotted out of God's book of life if that was the price that had to be paid for Israel's pardon. That was one of the clearest pictures of Christ's love in the Old Testament. In Revelation 20, the saints were spared because they were recorded in the Lamb's book of life. The sea gave up the dead that were in it. Death and Hades gave up the dead in them. These too were judged according to their deeds. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire along with anyone whose name was not recorded in the Lamb's book of life. Revelation 20:14 is hard to understand. How could death and Hades be thrown into a lake of fire? The Bible often drew imagery from the ancient Near East to teach believers something about after life experiences that by their nature

could not be understood. People lack the frame of reference to grasp the nature of the eternal. So God gives them pictures that give them at least some vision for the realities that they can not possibly understand. The motifs of Sheol and a Lake of Fire were closely related to Egyptian underworld imagery. How closely they approximated the true nature of the eternal is impossible to estimate. Sheol is not always just the grave, although sometimes it means no more than that. Sometimes it is described as a place of confinement. Sinners are taken from this place of confinement. They are judged by God, and they are sent to their eternal destiny. Isaiah 24:20-23 illustrated this aspect of Sheol. Isaiah said that the dead were gathered into something like a prison. After many days, they were punished. Peter talked about this prison in I Peter 3:19. In Job 40:12-13, God called it the hidden place. The prison in Isaiah and I Peter was Hades in Revelation 20:14. Whatever this place may be, it will become part of the Lake of Fire after Christ judged sinners.