

**Jesus –
proclaimer of
God’s gospel**

- Third and greatest enemy – dragon
- Thrown into the lake of fire and tormented

We recall that John is seeing a vision of Jesus as the proclaimer of God's gospel. Seven units come in 19:11–21:8. Seven times John will say 'I saw'^{□1}. Next there is a third enemy of God to be defeated – the greatest of all. 'I saw an angel coming down out of heaven^{□1} . . . And he laid hold of the dragon^{□2} . . . and threw him into the abyss . . . '^{□3}. But this throwing of the devil into the abyss is not the full destruction of Satan. That comes later in the story. 'The devil . . . was thrown into the lake of fire and sulphur, where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night for ages of ages'^{□4}. But by the time we have gone from 19:11 to 20:10, the three great enemies of God have been thrown into the lake of fire.

□1 19:11, 17, 19;
20:1, 4, 11;
21:10
□1 20:1
□2 20:2
□3 20:3
□4 20:10

**The conquering
Saviour -**

- Destroys the beast
- Destroys the false prophet
- Destroys Satan

As one looks over these twenty-six verses, one can see how Revelation 19:11–20:15 deals with the ways in which the three enemies of God – the beast, the false prophet, Satan – are to be destroyed.

The conquering Saviour destroys the beast by the shedding of blood^{□1}, by the word that proceeds from his mouth^{□2} and by a final judgement in which the beast is thrown into the lake of fire^{□3}.

□1 19:13
□2 19:15
□3 19:20

The conquering Saviour destroys the false prophet in a judgement in which he also is thrown into the lake of fire^{□1}.

□1 19:21

The conquering Saviour destroys Satan in stages. There is a preliminary binding^{□1}. Martyrs experience the 'first resurrection'^{□2}. Satan is bound and defeated, but then he seems to regain his power, and only in a burst of victory is he (like the beast and false prophet) made to experience a final judgement in which he is thrown into the lake of fire.

□1 20:1-3
□2 20:4-6

**Not told in
chronological order**

- Jesus began His triumphant ride to victory at the time of His ascension
- Enemies defeated by the preaching of the gospel and thrown into the lake of fire

Revelation 20 is of course immensely controversial. Let us simply plunge into the text and see what we find. All I need say at present is that the three scenes, in which beast, prophet and Satan are destroyed, all seem to have some 'backward-jumps'. The story is not told in straightforward chronological order. The Saviour who rides forth conquering and to conquer began his triumphant ride to victory (if we may mix symbol and reality) at the time of Jesus' ascension. There are indications that the defeat of these enemies comes by the preaching of the gospel. They are overcome by 'the blood of the Lamb and the word of . . . testimony'. The gospel-message boldly preached by a persecuted people is what brings victory. But the very final victory is the casting of the three enemies into the lake of fire. The visions start at various points but they all run up to the point where the enemies are thrown into the lake of fire.

Before we decide what we think of the various opinions about 'the millennium', let us look at the only chapter in the Bible that uses the word. Let us just start reading, scrutinizing the text to see what we find.

Revelation 20:1

- John is seeing his vision from heaven
- An angel
- Keys and a chain

Consider Revelation 20:1. *And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the keys of the abyss and a great chain in his hand.* John himself is in heaven. He was caught up into heaven in Revelation 4:1, and he is still there. There has been no reference to his involvement in anything earthly since that point. He is seeing earth from the viewpoint of heaven.

He sees an angel coming out of heaven. Where is the angel going to? He is presumably going to earth, since he is coming **out** of heaven.

He is holding keys and a chain. Someone is about to be locked up and restrained in chains. Since the keys are keys to the abyss we can guess that someone is about to be locked up in 'the abyss'.

• *The abyss – realm of the dead*

What is the abyss? It is the realm of the dead. A study of Revelation 1:18, 6:8 and 9:1–2 shows that death and Hades and the abyss are all similar concepts. Romans 10:7 makes clear the same point.

• *Imprisoned ready for punishment*

We need not rush into premature conclusions concerning the total interpretation of Revelation 20, but already anyone well read in the writings of John's day must think of times when spiritual beings are put into prison or in chains **ready** for the punishment that will come at the end of the world. The fact that such spiritual beings are put into prison is a sign that the last day has **not** come. In such texts the prison is a form of confinement **until** the time for final punishment comes. In such texts the imprisoning and the **final** judgement are different. Three of them are to be found in the New Testament: 1 Peter 3:19, 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6. Others outside the New Testament are First Enoch 10:4–16; 18:11–19:3; 54:1–6; Jubilees 5:6–14; Isaiah 24:21–22. In each of these cases the end of the world has **not** come but spiritual beings are chained and put under threat of punishment. It looks as if an angel is about to take some evil spiritual being or person and imprison him in some way ready for future punishment. But we read on to find out more!

• *The last day has not yet come*

The angel imprisons a spiritual being in the abyss

In **Revelation 20:2–3**, it turns out as we suspected! The angel takes hold of a spiritual being and imprisons him. The prison is 'the abyss'. ²*And he laid hold of the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan, and he bound him for a thousand years, ³and threw him into the abyss, and shut [it] and sealed [it] over him, so that he should not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were completed. After this he must be released for a short time.*

• *Dragon – fearsome*
• *Serpent – deceit*
• *Devil – slanderer*
• *Satan – adversary*

John emphasizes the character of the devil. He uses four terms: dragon, serpent, devil and Satan. 'Dragon' speaks of the devil's fearsome character; he loves to terrorize. 'Serpent' speaks of the devil's deceit. Like a snake he loves to hide. 'Devil' is a word that means 'slanderer'. 'Satan' means adversary. The four terms together tell us what this spiritual being is like. He loves to terrorize, to deceive, to slander and to oppose.

• *Satan is bound*

Satan is bound for a thousand years. He is confined to a place of restraint ready for punishment – the abyss. It is not the end of the world yet, because the nations are still around and they are **vulnerable** to the devil's deception – only he cannot do what he wants to do. He has been deceiving nations before (as the words 'any longer' show) and will do so again^{□1} but he cannot do it from his imprisoned position.

• *The nations are vulnerable to his deception*

□1 as 20:7-10 says

• *Everything is symbolic, not literal, including the thousand years*

Naturally we want to know when and what all this refers to. We can be sure that the 'thousand' is not literal. Almost every number in Revelation has been symbolic. We are not likely to start having literal years now! The chain is not literal (it takes more than a chain to hold Satan!). The key is not literal. Keys and chains are picture-language for spiritual realities that restrain Satan. So there is clearly a lot of symbolism in the passage and we can be fairly sure that, like the numbers throughout the book, the 'thousand years' are symbolical also.

• *Revelation 12 – Satan is cast down from heaven to earth*

As we look back over the book we find that Satan has been referred to before. In Revelation chapter 12 Satan was cast down from heaven to earth. Now he is cast from earth to the abyss. This surely means that Revelation 20 is **not** exactly identical to chapter 13. It is saying **more** than chapter 13. The devil's defeat is **greater** than in chapter 13. In chapter 13 Satan lost his power in **heaven** and became full of rage in his activities on **earth**. Now in chapter 20 Satan temporarily loses his power on **earth**. Since reality is divided into three (in heaven, on earth, under the earth) this all means that Satan has lost two out of three of the places over which he might try to have power. Yet he is still not cast into the 'lake of fire' (as will happen in Revelation 20:10).

• *Revelation 20 – he is cast from earth to the abyss; greater defeat*

• *Not yet in the lake of fire*



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