

Revelation 20:1

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[0 : 00] Now could we turn to the passage in Revelation chapter 20? And we'll attempt to look at the first ten verses of this chapter this evening.

Some passages in the book of Revelation, it's difficult really to split them up into smaller, more manageable portions. And this is definitely one of these.

There's a lot of detail and a lot of explanation to be done as we look at these ten verses. But really it's best to consider them as a whole because we can't really make sense of what is said unless we see it as part of this whole vision.

And these ten verses do relate to one whole vision concerning Satan. Now it's a great pity that this section in the book of Revelation has become such a controversial passage.

It really is the passage of scripture on which the various systems concerning the future that we have in various Christian churches are base.

[1 : 17] Systems such as premillennialism, postmillennialism and amillennialism, which sound all very complicated. But this passage plays a crucial role in the attitude that we have towards what the Bible says concerning the future.

Perhaps it has often played too great a role in that because, of course, it is not the only passage in the Bible that talks about the future and future events.

But it's a great pity that it has become so controversial and many times the cause of division among churches. Because this passage, and this may not be without relevance, this passage tells us about God's dealings with Satan.

And perhaps it is for that very fact that this passage has had a destructive influence. Not that it was intended to have that, but because it is dealing with such an important, vital subject to the Christian church that even this can be abused by the evil one himself.

It tells of God's dealings with Satan, that great enemy of the soul and the great enemy of the Christian church.

[2 : 42] As we've looked through the book of Revelation, we've seen that behind all the manifestations of evil in this world, there lurks this figure known as the dragon or that ancient serpent, the devil himself.

He is marshalling all these powers and influences, seeking to oppose the Lord and his anointed, seeking to oppose the Christ's church in this world, seeking to destroy his work and bring it to nothing.

Yet we've seen constantly how that is not allowed to happen. Right throughout the book of Revelation, we've seen that God has put very distinct limits upon the very worst evil that is exercised in this world.

And that really is the theme of this section that we come now to in the book of Revelation. God's dealings with Satan, how he limits him, and how he ultimately brings him to judgment and to destruction.

The fundamental question for the correct interpretation of this passage is this. Does this passage describe something that happens after Christ's return, or something that happens before Christ's return?

[4 : 10] Now that seems to be the crucial question for an understanding of the passage concerning what happens in this world and what happens in the future.

And in some ways, this is perhaps the easier part of this passage to deal with, although there are many people who will disagree with the evidence that I'm seeking to bring forward this evening.

I believe the key to this whole question is whether at the beginning of this chapter, chapter 20, we are actually starting a new section in the book of Revelation or not.

If we are not there starting a new section in the book, then it would seem that what is said here would follow on directly from what's said at the end of chapter 19, where we have a description given of the return of Christ.

We noticed that last week. We read of the one who is called Faithful and True, the Rider on the White Horse, the one called the Word of God, and so on. And he is coming, and he is coming in judgment upon this earth.

[5 : 25] And it seems to be speaking most clearly of the return of Christ, sometimes called the second coming of Jesus Christ. So if there is no break at the beginning of chapter 20, but if it is giving us the impression that we are following straight on in a sequence of events, then it would seem that what's described in chapter 20 would, in fact, be talking about a time after Christ returns.

And that is the way in which a pre-millennialist would understand it. In other words, he believes that Christ returns, then there is this period known as a thousand years, a period that he would believe takes place on the earth.

Now, as you've probably understood as we've gone through the book of Revelation, I do not adhere to that understanding of the book of Revelation, or indeed the whole of the Scriptures.

And one of the reasons I do not accept that is because I believe that at the beginning of chapter 20, we are having the beginning of a new section in the book.

We've seen that so far there have been six sections in this book. And we've seen that in each section there has been some description given by a vision or a series of visions of the whole history of this Christian age, from the first coming of Christ to Christ's coming in judgment.

[7 : 05] Each of those sections deals with different aspects, different emphasis of that great truth, of Christ ruling throughout the whole of this period.

And at the end of chapter 19, we discover that we are led right up to the climax, as we have been in every section so far, the climax of Christ coming in judgment.

And so it would seem that at the end of chapter 19, we have another of these sections completed. And there is particular evidence for believing this.

There is reference here to a war or a battle. And that reference is in verse 19 of chapter 19. Then I saw the beasts and the kings of the earth and their armies gather to make war against the rider on the horse and his army.

Now that is something that's been referred to in earlier passages in the book. First of all, we have the expression in chapter 16 and verse 14.

[8 : 24] They are the spirits of demons performing miraculous signs and they go out to the kings of the whole world to gather them for the battle on the great day of God Almighty.

Now here we have this reference at the end of one of these previous sections, section made up of chapters 15 and 16, referring to this great battle or the war, it may be translated.

And in verse 16, that is called Armageddon. Then we have this referred to very briefly in chapter 17, verse 14.

They will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and with him will be his called, chosen, and faithful followers.

And that then is described. It's announced there in that section, but then the actual description is given at the end of this section in chapter 19, as we've noticed, verse 19.

[9 : 28] So this is presented quite clearly as the climax. And now again, we notice that this war is yet again referred to in chapter 20, and referred to now with a different emphasis.

Before, it was viewed as being the destruction of the devil's helpers, like the beast and the false prophet, representing anti-Christian power or influence in this world, one kind or another.

But in chapter 20, there is a different emphasis, and that's why we're really into a new section, because no longer are we merely confronted with the devil's allies or helpers, but we're confronted with the evil one himself.

And we see here that he is behind this great war that is made against the church of Jesus Christ, and he too comes to destruction in that war.

So very clearly, at the end of chapter 19, we have a description given of the final destruction of the kingdom of evil, and then at the beginning of chapter 20, we move into a new section, viewing again the whole history of this period from a different viewpoint.

[10 : 49] In chapter 19, it's quite clear that this is no kind of intermediate judgment of God, but it is a final judgment. We see that in verse 15, for instance.

Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nation. This one coming to judge is the one who is going to bring judgment on the nations, and that is the description used consistently in the book of Revelation and elsewhere in Scripture for the whole world.

This is not something that was just for one group of people, but it was for the nations. And that is developed in verse 18, where the call goes out to the birds of the air, so that they may eat the flesh of kings, generals, and mighty men, of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all people, free, enslaved, small and gray.

There's this universal emphasis about it again that we've seen before in reference to the last things, reference to the coming of Jesus Christ and this final judgment. And also, of course, in verse 21, the rest of them were killed with a sword that came out of the mouth of the rider on the horse, and all the birds guard themselves on their flesh.

The rest of them is meaning those apart from the leaders, the beast and the false prophet. That is the whole of the rest of those who were with them, and the rest of those who were with them are the whole of the ungodly world.

[12:18] So, quite clearly, we come to a climax at the end of chapter 19, and the climax is the final judgment. And then, at the beginning of chapter 20, we come to a new section, dealing with a new theme, and that is with God's dealings with Satan himself.

So, the movement from the end of chapter 19 to the beginning of chapter 20 is very similar to the movement from the end of chapter 11 to the beginning of chapter 12. We remember there how, at the end of chapter 11, we're led up to a great climax describing the judgment of God.

Then, at the beginning of chapter 12, we immediately return to the coming of Jesus Christ.

Remember the vision concerning the woman giving birth to the child, the one who's going to rule the nations with the rod of iron.

And then, we're introduced there, to the evil one who seeks at the very beginning to destroy the Christ, and goes on throughout the whole of this period to do that. So, that is the way, I believe, that we ought to understand this section of Revelation consistently with the way that we've understood the rest of this book.

So then, if we're to give a name to this final section of the book, which encompasses not only chapter 20, but the last two chapters as well, we would have to give it the title, Victory Through Christ.

[13:48] This is descriptive of the finally, the final overwhelming victory of the church of Jesus Christ through Christ. It is Christ who accomplishes this great salvation, who brings final judgment upon Satan and upon all who are with him, but also brings eternal life and an eternal kingdom, a new heavens and a new earth to those who are believing in him.

So then, we must attempt to look briefly at the three sections in these ten verses that deal specifically with God's dealing with Satan.

First of all, there is the section, verses one to three, that we may call the binding of Satan. Now, remember that here again, we're having a vision described for us.

Something that was presented to John's mind in these very visual terms, like you've sort of seen a dream, that kind of thing. Things that obviously don't normally happen in the physical waking world, but something by which God was revealing truth to his mind.

And here he sees an angel coming down out of heaven, having a key to the abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. He sees the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years.

[15:15] He threw him into the abyss and locked and sealed it over him to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended. After that, he must be set free for a short time.

Now, it's so obvious that here, the same style that we've seen throughout Revelation is being continued. It cannot be understood physically or literally because you cannot physically, literally bind a spirit, which Satan is, with an actual physical chain.

So, the words that are being used here, chain, and the key of the abyss and so on, these are the pictures that were presented to John's mind to get him to understand truth concerning the way in which God is dealing with and will deal with Satan.

Well, the first thing we have to ask then is when does this binding take place? And here we begin to get more evidence from the point of view I've been trying to express that here we are dealing with the history of Satan and God's dealings with him throughout this whole Christian era from the first

coming of Christ to his return.

I believe it's backed up by other passages of Scripture that this is referring to the time of the first coming of Jesus Christ. By that expression, we mean his coming into this world, his dying upon the cross, his rising again from the dead.

[16:47] The whole complex of events of his first coming into this world. This, I believe, is when this binding of Satan takes place. Now, I must look carefully at the evidence for this because it's so important that we see that this is, in fact, a biblical position backed up by many passages of Scripture.

First of all, there's a passage in Matthew chapter 12, the passage that we actually read from. And in that, we see the Lord Jesus Christ using exactly this same word concerning Satan that's used in Revelation 20.

That is the word binding. In verse 29, Matthew 12. Or again, how can anyone enter a strong man's house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man?

Then he can rob his house. Now, Jesus is talking there specifically in the context of his opposition to Satan and his defeating of Satan. You see, they were accusing him of casting out demons by the power of the devil.

Jesus says, don't be so ridiculous. How can a kingdom like Satan's be divided against itself? It just wouldn't exist if that were the case. He's saying, he is casting out demons because he has bound the evil one.

[18:13] He has power over the evil one. He has restricted him. He has bound him so that he cannot oppose him so that he is able to destroy the devil's world.

And he destroyed it by casting out demons in this particular instance. Now, the same idea is developed much further by the Lord Jesus in John chapter 12, the other passage we read.

And there, it's a very interesting passage indeed because it is very much in the context of Christ's influence being not limited to the Jewish people but being extended to the Gentiles represented here by Greeks who came to see him.

And this started Jesus meditating on the great fact of the salvation he was to accomplish. And the important words in this context are from verse 31.

Now is the time for judgment on this world. Now the prince of this world will be driven out. Or really, now the prince of this world is driven out. But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.

[19:29] Now, here's the point. He said this to show the kind of death he was brought to. What he said then is about his death. When is Satan, the prince of this world, driven out?

At Christ's death. That is the time supremely when Satan is driven out. And this expression, driven out or cast out, is again the same expression, the same root is used as the one used in Revelation where he is thrown into the abyss, cast into the abyss.

So again, here is evidence that the first coming of the Lord Jesus Christ is disastrous for the devil. And from his point of view, disastrously limits his power in this world.

He is cast out. No longer does he have the power that he previously had and we'll consider that in a few moments. But also, we must see that this is based not just on our two passages of scripture but right throughout the New Testament.

Thirdly, we see it in Colossians chapter 2 and verse 15. This is referring to Christ and having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

[20:54] Now these powers and authorities are referring to the powers and authorities of evil. That is the whole kingdom of Satan. And the expression that's used here is the whole idea of a triumphal procession of a great Roman general who's defeated all his enemies and he's bringing all these prisoners in his great victory train, his triumphal procession through the city of Rome.

That's the picture that is being applied to the Lord Jesus. When does he defeat these enemies? When are they deprived of power?

They are deprived of power at the cross. That is where their triumphs go. And then again in Hebrews chapter 2 and verse 14.

There in this passage we have something of the same thing put in a different way. Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death, that is, the devil, and free those who all their lives were held in

slavery by their fear of death.

The point being that again it's the cross of Christ, by the death of Christ, that the devil is destroyed. His power is destroyed. He who holds the power of death, this is destroyed by the death of Jesus Christ.

[22 : 27] And also in the second epistle of Peter, and this is a very important reference because it is Peter in his earlier epistle who makes it quite clear that the devil goes about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour.

And often people say how can it possibly be said in scripture that the devil is deprived of power and he's limited and he's defeated if he goes about like a roaring lion?

Well, it's Peter himself who also makes this reference in 2 Peter 2 and verse 4. For if God did not spare angels when they sinned but sent them to hell putting them into gloomy dungeons to be held for judgment.

In other words, quite clearly saying that evil angels, those who have rebelled against God, are kept, are limited, are deprived of power and influenced to a great extent being kept in hell for judgment. So then, if we put some of these passages together, we see that it's quite clear that the whole New Testament position is that the binding, the restricting of Satan takes place with the first coming of Jesus Christ and by the victory of his cross.

[23 : 51] Now, we've got to be quite clear that, therefore, the binding that is described, the binding described by Jesus, and talking about the binding of this whole man, the binding described here is not a complete and final destruction, but it is a severe limitation placed upon the Satan so that the kingdom of Christ is established and goes on and trials in this world throughout the history of this world.

That is to be made clear because there are the other passages which are like the one I quoted in 1 Peter 5, verse 8, where we're told the devil goes about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may defile.

The devil, indeed, still has power, influence, still tempts, still opposes the man with patience and press upon him.

beyond which he cannot go. And that is the emphasis throughout the book of Revelation. Whenever there is evil mentioned, it is said that it was given. In other words, God was allowing this to take place.

But evil could not go beyond the bounds, beyond the limits that God had imposed. So then we've got to ask the question, what exactly are these limitations then?

[25 : 17] what exactly is this binding of Satan? What exactly is this casting out of Satan? Because we can see quite clearly that it is not the final or the absolute judgment of Satan that comes right at the end time when we read about that in the third section of these verses that we'll be looking at.

Well, the severe limitation that is placed upon the evil one that we've seen in this context is that he is prevented from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years had ended in verse 3.

So we're talking specifically the limitation that was placed upon him. It is not an absolute limitation but it is a very severe limitation. Now, what can that mean?

Well, if we place ourselves in the position of those first century Christians to whom John was writing they, of course, are much nearer to the time of Jesus' first coming.

They are much nearer to the time of the Old Testament. and from their perspective looking back in time they can see for centuries and centuries a time when God's purpose seemed to be limited just to one nation of people and all the nations round about all the nations of the world were in blindness and ignorance and darkness of God's truth.

[26 : 57] They were in great moral depravity they were in great ignorance and in great error. Why were they in such a condition?

Because of the power of the evil one in keeping them blinded. The prince of this world has blinded the minds of unbelievers and that is his role and that was his role specifically in Old Testament times.

and we put ourselves in the position of these percentual Christians and see from their point of view and their feeling could be expressed something like this is this going to continue forever?

This way in which God's purposes seem to be limited just to one group of people all the nations of the world in darkness or the message of the book Revelation like the whole message of the New Testament is more that God's gospel is coming to all nations of the world as promised in the Old

Testament and the power of the evil one to restrict and to deceive is no longer going to hold but the gospel is going to be perfect and within this first century the Christian church saw that fact as people of other nations for the very first time were coming in great numbers to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ now that shows us the great relevance of what Jesus was saying at that time read in John's chapter 12 remember it was when these Greeks came inquiring about wanting to see him that caused him to meditate on the fact of his death and what he was to accomplish and that Satan was going to be cast out the fact of these Greeks coming to him set off that train of thought it was as if he was reminded and here was a great sign from his heavenly father that his work was going to be a great blessing not just to the

Jewish people but to all the nations of the earth that his concern with the great evangelistic missionary task of the church to the nations and that is the specific way in which Satan is limited and that we have seen has been the way in which he has been limited throughout this Christian period there has been an unprecedented spread of the word of God to the nations of the world something that did not happen under the Old Testament dispensation but something that has happened increasingly since the gospel of Jesus Christ has been proclaimed then we have to ask the question for how long does this binding of Satan take place well clearly it's here referred to as a period of a thousand years and this is the expression from which we get the word the millennium upon which the various schools of thought concerning the future are based

[30 : 19] I would argue as I've argued concerning the other numbers in the book of Revelation that this is not a literal period of a thousand years and I think this is the first mistake that many people make in thinking about this question of the millennium there is no other number in the book of Revelation that we take as a literal number for instance we are told that there are seven spirits of God but comparing that to the other passages of scripture relating to the spirit of God we know that there is no other place where it is said that there are seven spirits of God there is one spirit of God the Holy Spirit but yet this is the way in the book of Revelation referring to the completeness the perfection of the spirit of God the sevenfold spirit of God it's sometimes translated and of course we've seen numerous examples of numbers being used in this symbolic way in the book of Revelation why should it be different here when we come to this period of a thousand years a thousand years standing for a long a great but complete period of time these numbers in the book of Revelation are very often built up from combinations of three and seven the numbers that were considered to sum up perfection in various ways of completeness three from the three persons of the trinity seven from seven days of the week the six days of creation the one day of rest and so on but if we add those two together three and seven we get ten and then if we cube ten we get one thousand ten times ten times ten and it's like a number for a great long but complete period and of course in the understanding that I've been trying to explain this is referring to the long and completed period of the kingdom of Jesus

Christ here in this world the preaching of the gospel and the good news of this kingdom to the nations of the world and make no mistake the kingdom of Christ is not something way way far in the future yet to come at some kind of utopia it is in fact here amongst us Jesus Christ said the kingdom of God is among you and we read a passage earlier this evening talking about the kingdom of God having come upon them when they saw that Jesus was casting out demons by the very finger of God this was evidence that the kingdom of God was upon them so then this period of a thousand years stands here as a symbol for this great time of the kingdom of God amongst men in this world here and now as this gospel is being proclaimed and as

Christ is ruling his church and extending his invitation to all men then secondly we've got to look at the section here verses 4 to 6 that deals with this period of a thousand years from a slightly different point of view Satan recedes into the background he has been he has been limited we've noticed that yes still he has power still he has influence destructive influence but yet it's severely limited and he recedes into the background as we look at verses 4 to 6 where we are given a description of the reign of the saints of God they we are told reign with Christ a thousand years the words at the end of verse 4 now this surely is the same period that is being described this great period what we may call the Christian age in this world first we have to ask where does this reign take place because many would seek to present it as taking place here on earth in the sense that in the future a kingdom is to be set up with Christ as an earthly king and with people saints of God living on this earth as it presently is in all its imperfection well it would seem

I believe that that is mistaken because here we have a description given of a heavenly scene there is no mention in verses 4 to 6 of something that is taking place on earth rather all the indications are of a heavenly scene we are told that there are thrones and nowhere in the book of revelation are there thrones on the earth thrones are always in heaven in the book of revelation and that would lead us to think that consistently with that these thrones that are being described are also in heaven those thrones described in verse 4 also we have the souls of those who have been beheaded again in verse 4 now again the habitation of the souls of believers is not upon earth but it is in heaven very clearly we are being described here disembodied souls that is souls of people who have been executed who have died in this world their souls of course are in heaven and then also we are told that they are reigning with Christ and particularly they are living with Christ now the place where Christ dwells where he lives as it is described throughout the book of revelation is indeed heaven that is where he reigns from that is where his throne is and so the whole picture summed up here is a heavenly one and not an earthly one so throughout this period when the gospel is having effect in this world on this earth while Satan is restricted so that he cannot destroy the Christian church and he cannot oppose the ongoing march of the gospel of Christ the saints the souls of those who have been killed died they have passed into glory and they are reigning with Christ in heaven that's the picture that's been presented to us here we may ask then what exactly are they doing we are told that they are judging they are living and they are reigning with Christ all these words used in verse 4 concerning them the whole idea of them judging those who were sitting on the thrones having authority to judge the whole picture there being of believers in Jesus

Christ homologating the judgments of Christ in other words seeing things completely from Christ's perfect just point of view these judgments that we've been reading about in the book of Revelation judgments upon evil and upon destruction in this world those saints of God are completely agreeing with everything that the Lord Jesus Christ is doing and so it is said of them that they are judging with him they are going along completely with everything that he is doing and deciding and also of course we must make it quite clear that those who are described here are believers in Jesus Christ specifically are mentioned those who have been executed because of their faith in Christ those who are beheaded but also and this new international version here doesn't make it very clear but also there's a general description of those who believe in Christ they had not worshipped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands that really should read and those who had not worshipped the beast in other words it extends the description beyond martyrs those who have died for their faith to all those who have been faithful to Jesus

[38 : 52] Christ and we are told that they lived and that again is the best better translation not they came to life they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years now there are some complexities in verses five and six that really we haven't time this evening to go into but I believe that the main teaching of this section is in that verse four teaching concerning the saints of God ruling with Christ in heaven and that the living and the resurrection that's referred to here is indeed this living of their souls this ongoing life of their souls in heaven now these words coming to the saints of God in New Testament times in the first century must have been words of tremendous comfort because John here was writing to people who knew their friends their brothers their sisters who had been martyred who had been killed these words reminding them that they were reigning with Christ they were now where no Nero or where no Domitian or any of these other

Caesars could harm them now they were reigning with Christ in heaven and living with him and Christ was caring for them and then finally we must just look at the final conflict as summed up here in verses 7 to 10 the final conflict this time viewed not from the viewpoint of Christ dealing with the lesser evils the subsidiaries not dealing with the devil's helpers and all the forces and powers that he has mustered against Christ and his church but dealing with Christ's opposition and Christ's final dealing with the devil himself the leader of all evil in this world now we discover that at the end of this Christian age it would seem from quite clearly from this passage that there is to come as we've noticed again in previous parts of the book of Revelation a time of great evil a time of great opposition against the

Christian church it's presented as a short time but yet it is presented as a very definite time of opposition and persecution against the Christian church again it's described as the preparation for a great battle and the church is described as a beleaguered city or a camp the camp of God's people the city he loves and Satan has been released no longer he's restricted so he's unable to deceive the nations but rather he goes out and is deceiving the nations and with this particularly in mind to

oppose the church and to seek to destroy it but as we notice his seeming success is very short lived because at the very height of what seems to be his great success in turning nations again against Christ Christ returns in all majesty of his person and none can withstand his face here it is described as fire coming down from heaven and devouring them and again as we notice so often the suddenness of this coming of

Christ and the absolute destruction of those who oppose him is stressed in this passage by the picture of fire coming down and here we read of the final destruction of all the devil's plans and hopes and we read of his final judgment and his eternal limitation his eternal imprisonment in hell the lake of burning sulfur where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown they will be tormented day and night forever that fears and prospect of hell that has so often been presented in the book of revelation that place prepared for the devil and his angels isn't that the amazing thing that that is the place prepared for the devil who has opposed Christ but yet those who have rebelled against Christ in this world that is their ultimate place also it's not a place prepared for human beings at all prepared for those who are rebels against

God but those who are Christ's they go to a place prepared for them an environment specially created exactly fitting for them to be with Christ forever in heaven so these words reminding us again of the great divorce between heaven and hell between saved and lost between the Lord Jesus Christ and all that he offers and the devil and the fearsome prospect that awaits him and all those who serve him and so the invitation tonight is to all here to come and to trust in Jesus Christ and to know him and to love him and to serve him and to view life from the perspective of his word and to see him as the great king of kings and lord of lords who at this moment is causing his gospel to be proclaimed to all the nations and who will one day finally return to restore righteousness to this universe and to put evil in its place let us pray when love he went and he he