

Revelation 20:1-3

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Satan, the accuser and deceiver, is thrown, shut, and sealed into the pit for a thousand years where his powers will be weakened and he will no longer be able to deceive for a time.

Chapter 20 of Revelation begins with the statement *Then I saw*. This continues the series of visions John observed beginning in Revelation 4:1, which begins with the phrase “After these things I looked.” “I looked” occurs eleven times in Revelation, and *then I saw* nine times.

Revelation 20 continues a series of events from the previous chapter. Revelation 20:1 is in a sequence of statements that began in Revelation 19:11. Prophetic statements often appear out of sequence, or with large time gaps between statements. So it is uncertain whether the events in Revelation 20:1-10 are a linear sequence of successive events. However, it seems to be presented as a chronological sequence, so that is how it will be treated here.

What John sees this time is *an angel coming down from heaven, holding the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand* (vs 1).

This is not the first time the *abyss* was opened, as that also happened in Revelation 9, when an angelic being was given the key to the *abyss*, and he let out an army of what might be demonic beings John described as “locusts” having power to sting like a scorpion:

“Then the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star from heaven which had fallen to the earth; and the key of the bottomless pit was given to him. He opened the bottomless pit, and smoke went up out of the pit, like the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened by the smoke of the pit.”
(Revelation (9:1-2))

The term “bottomless pit” in chapter 9 and *abyss* in chapter 20 are both translations of the same Greek word “abyssos” and refer to the same place. The *abyss* is referred to throughout scripture as a place for confining disobedient spirits while they wait for judgement, like a sort of dungeon for spirits (Jude 6; Luke 8:31).

The first time the *abyss* was opened in Revelation 9, there was a fallen “star” (likely an angel) who opened the pit and let out demonic forces. This time, it appears that one of the good *angels* has opened the pit again and put *Satan* as a *dragon* into the pit. The second angel *coming down from heaven* to access the *abyss* is presented somewhat like a zoo keeper who has his *great chain in his hand*, and intends to lasso the *dragon (Satan)*, and confine him to his cage, where he will lock him up with his *key* to the *abyss*.

Also, though it seems that the releasing of the spirits will be done by an evil angel and the binding of *Satan* by a good one, we can remember that Revelation emphasizes that God is always on His throne. Nothing happens in Revelation that He does not authorize. It could be that

the angel of Revelation 9 thinks he stole the key and is pulling off a great feat of defiance. But, as all things are presented in Revelation, regardless of the intents of the actors, God is in control of everything. As has already been noted, the events unleashed on earth are all previously authorized from heaven.

Further, as Paul states in Romans, “God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose” (Romans 8:28). So all the events of Revelation, even those that are horrific, will play a part in culminating the end of this age in such a way that justice is done, and all things are put to right.

The casting of *Satan* into the *abyss* is preceded by Satan’s demotion in Revelation 12 where Michael casts *Satan* out of heaven:

“And the great dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.”
(Revelation 12:9)

This episode in chapter 12 includes a celebration of sorts, noting that the “accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, he who accuses them before our God day and night” (Revelation 12:10).

The *chain* that the *angel* in Revelation 20 carries is to emphasize the powerlessness of *Satan* in the presence of God. Satan only acts within the permissive will of God. Scripture infers that Satan was removed from being ruler of the world and replaced by humanity, who is lower than the angels but crowned with the glory and honor of being assigned to rule over the earth (see commentary on [Psalm 8](#), [Hebrews 2:5-11](#)) .

When humans fell, apparently Satan was reinstated as the prince over the earth, a position he was dislodged from when Jesus overcame sin and death by dying on the cross and rising from the dead (John 12:31). Authority was restored to humans through Jesus, who, because of the “suffering of death [was] crowned with glory and honor,” and has been given “all authority” that is “in heaven and on earth” as a human being (Matthew 28:18; Hebrews 2:9). Satan currently has no power if he is resisted (James 4:7). Although his power has been broken, he still has influence in the affairs of humans through those he deceives.

Revelation chronicles Satan’s power being diminished (Revelation 12:9) then eliminated entirely (Revelation 20:1-3). His status was reduced when he warred and lost to Michael and his angels, resulting in him being banished from heaven. Now, Satan is thrown into the *abyss*, and will lose access not only to heaven, but to wandering upon the face of the earth. Now the *angel* is able to bind him with a *chain* and has *laid hold* of him to put him away in the spiritual dungeon that is the *abyss* where he will serve a “thousand year sentence.”

We also see how the list of *Satan’s* names is repeated in both instances: *the dragon, the serpent of old, who is called the devil and Satan* (vs 2). This is reminiscent of a legal sentence where a prisoner’s name and titles would be read while he is being sentenced to be thrown into prison. So

too, *Satan* is being imprisoned and his name and titles are being spoken over his new state of being constrained from deceiving the world, for a time.

The word *dragon* is also used in Isaiah and Revelation in the context of prophecies, and here in Revelation the *dragon* of the prophecies connects to *the serpent of old*, which is to say the *serpent* of Genesis 3:

“Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, ‘Indeed, has God said, ‘You shall not eat from any tree of the garden’?’ The woman said to the serpent, ‘From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, ‘You shall not eat from it or touch it, or you will die.’” The serpent said to the woman, ‘You surely will not die!’” (Genesis 3:1-4)

Satan, in the form of a *serpent*, has been deceiving mankind from the very beginning. Referencing *the serpent of old* when describing *the dragon* that is being thrown into the *abyss* helps the audience remember all the evil things *Satan* has done and why he deserves to be *sealed* in the pit.

The Old Testament identifies the enemy by a Hebrew word, “satan” that is transliterated rather than translated. It means “opponent.” Satan’s opposition includes accusing believers (Revelation 12:10). *Satan* is also God’s adversary. God appointed humans to reign over the earth in order to silence the accusations of Satan, God’s enemy (Psalm 8:2).

Devil translates the Greek “diabolos” which is almost exclusively translated as “the devil” in the New Testament, except when it refers to gossips, as in 1 Timothy:

“Women *must* likewise *be* dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things.” (1 Timothy 3:11)

Just as gossipers select information about someone and use it to twist their reputation, so also *Satan* uses selective information to bring down your character, opposing by accusing. But even as *Satan* tries to accuse us, Jesus is our advocate, like a defense attorney in the heavenly courtroom:

“My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for *those of* the whole world.” (1 John 2:1-2)

As background, the Apostle John writes of Jesus as our advocate with the Father in this passage from his first epistle in a time when many held to a philosophy of “gnosticism” in the church. Gnosticism held that actions taken in the body did not affect the condition of one’s spirit. This (conveniently) allowed people to hold that sin was of no consequence because it was something that you do in your body, and the body (being material) is inherently bad. Therefore, gnosticism held that sin is not a problem so long as you do appropriately “spiritual” things. Thus, in this

passage 1 John 2:1-2, John first reminds the believers he addresses that they should strive not to sin, as each of us are one person, although we have both body and spirit.

John sets a context for Jesus's advocacy on our behalf. In 1 John 2:1-2, John recognizes that despite our best efforts, we will all fall short and sin. So he gives believers encouragement that "if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." Jesus Christ is petitioning to the Father for our forgiveness on our behalf. Thankfully, while *Satan* is our accuser, the prosecutor, we have Jesus as our advocate, our defense attorney.

This accusation/defense process is apparently an ongoing endeavor in the heavenly realm. We see in the instance of Job that Satan accuses him of being merely transactional, rather than truly righteous (Job 1:9-11). In the New Testament, Satan demanded to sift Peter "like wheat," but Jesus advocated for him by praying for him (Luke 22:31-32).

It may be that all of these titles, *Satan*, *devil*, *dragon* and *serpent* are not Satan's original name. We see in Isaiah 14:12, Satan appears to be named "helel ben sehar" which translates as "light-bearer, son of the morning." The "morning star" is noted as a reward in Revelation 2:28 and may refer to a position of ruling. It would seem that Satan fell from a position of authority because he desired to reign as a tyrant rather than rule as a servant.

Back to Revelation 20, now, at long last, *Satan* the accuser is *bound* and thrown into the *abyss*, which is then *shut* and *sealed*. He is not going to be allowed to accuse and *deceive the nations any longer*. *Satan* is going to stay in the pit *until the thousand years were completed* (vs 3).

Satan is *sealed* in the *abyss* so that he will not *deceive the nations any longer*. He is not only an accuser, but also a deceiver. Jesus said of Satan that he is the father of lies (John 14:44). There are still *nations*. However, the kings of the earth and their armies were killed in Revelation 19:19-21.

Notwithstanding the possibility for a nonlinear narrative in the genre of apocalyptic literature, for consistency's sake it is likely that these *nations* which exist during Satan's *thousand year* imprisonment are a mix of believers and unbelievers who remain alive. Although a substantial percentage of the earth's population has died, a significant number remains (Revelation 6:8, 8:11, 9:15, 9:18).

The remaining population carrying over could include unbelievers who did not believe in Jesus the Messiah, but did not perish. Also alive could be any believers who were spared being martyred, but were faithful and endured persecution without taking the mark of the beast (Revelation 14:12, 19:20).

There is an interesting time gap that takes place at the end of the Great Tribulation (the last three and a half years of Daniel's seventieth week) ([see our commentary on Daniel 9:24-25](#)).

"From the time that the regular sacrifice is abolished and the abomination of desolation is set up, there will be 1,290 days. How blessed is he who keeps waiting and attains to the 1,335 days!" (Daniel 12:11-12)

Three and a half years is 1,260 days, using 360 days in a year, for a lunar calendar (which was used in the Old Testament). There will apparently be 1,260 days plus one month, for a total of 1,290 days after the “abomination of desolation” is set up. This setting up of the “abomination of desolation” marks the beginning of the period Jesus called the Great Tribulation (Matthew 24:15, 21). But then Daniel 12:12 makes a mysterious statement that “he who keeps waiting” another 45 days will gain some extra special blessing.

We are not told what is happening during this 45-day period, but it seems that toward the end of Satan’s time on earth, the pressure will become increasingly intense, and it will get harder and harder to hang on and trust that Jesus will return. But He will, and those who stick it out will gain an extra special blessing.

The Greek word for *completed* in the phrase *until the thousand years were completed* (vs 3) is “teleō,” which is used throughout the New Testament in a literal sense to refer to the accomplishing of a task or the fulfilling of the law and prophets. Therefore, it can be inferred that its use here is also literal, meaning that this is not a figurative *thousand years*. This would support a mental model of Jesus reigning in Jerusalem on the current earth for a *thousand years*, while Satan awaits in the *abyss*.

Then Satan will be released for a season, defeated again, then the old heaven and earth will be replaced with a new one (Revelation 20:7-10, 21:1-2). During this thousand-year reign on the current earth, many Old Testament prophecies will be fulfilled, such as the construction of the temple of Ezekiel (Ezekiel 40-45:8) and a time period when death will still occur, but be rare (Isaiah 65:20-22). In the new earth, death will be no more (Revelation 21:4).

Further evidence to support this mental model is the fact that there are other specific dates and time frames listed throughout Revelation, such as the 1,260 days in Revelation 12 that the woman will have to hide in the wilderness (Revelation 12:6). This would seem to correspond to the last half of Daniel’s seventieth week, the time Jesus called the “Great Tribulation” (Daniel 12:11; Matthew 24:15, 21).

The detail in which *Satan*’s binding is described, the three-part *thrown, shut, and sealed*, is actually further evidence towards a literal *thousand years* because if the time in the bottomless pit renders him powerless to *deceive the nations*, then it has to refer to a specific period of time. If being in the bottomless pit just weakened him it would not fit the context.

Additionally, the thousand years does not fit as a stand-in for a figurative period of time that equals eternity, or as far as you can imagine, because *the thousand years* has an ending: *after these things, he (Satan) must be released for a short time* (vs 3). During that time he will be allowed to deceive the nations once again, further indicating that these time periods are literal (Revelation 20:7). The *short time* that Satan is released from the abyss before he is thrown to his final destination in the lake of fire is contrasted with the *thousand years*.

Biblical Text

Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand.² And he laid hold of the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years;³ and he threw him into the abyss, and shut *it* and sealed *it* over him, so that he would not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were completed; after these things he must be released for a short time.