

CHAPTER 20

This chapter is thought by some to be the darkest part of all this prophecy: it is very probable that the things contained in it are not yet accomplished; and therefore it is the wiser way to content ourselves with general observations, rather than to be positive and particular in our explications of it. Here we have an account,

- I.** Of the binding of Satan for a thousand years (v. 1-3).
- II.** The reign of the saints with Christ for the same time (v. 4-6).
- III.** Of the loosing of Satan, and the conflict of the church with Gog and Magog (v. 7-10).
- IV.** Of the day of judgment (v. 11, etc.).

REVELATION 20:1-10

THE BINDING OF SATAN

We have here,

I. A prophecy of *the binding of Satan* for a certain term of time, in which he should have much less power and the church much more peace than before. The power of Satan was broken in part by the setting up of the gospel kingdom in the world; it was further reduced by the empire's becoming Christian; it was yet further broken by the downfall of the mystical Babylon; but still this serpent had many heads, and, when one is wounded, another has life remaining in it. Here we have a further limitation and diminution of his power. Observe,

1. To whom this work of binding Satan is committed — to *an angel from heaven*. It is very probable that this angel is no other than the Lord Jesus Christ; the description of him will hardly agree with any other. He is one who has power to *bind the strong man armed, to cast him out, and to spoil his goods*; and therefore must be stronger than he.

2. The means he makes use of in this work: he has a *chain* and a *key*, a *great chain* to bind Satan, and *the key of the prison* in which he was to be confined. Christ never wants proper powers and instruments to break the power of Satan, for he has the powers of heaven and the keys of hell.

3. The execution of this work, v. 2, 3.

(1.) *He laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the devil, and Satan.* Neither the strength of the dragon, nor the subtlety of the serpent, was sufficient to rescue him out of the hands of Christ; he caught hold, and kept his hold. And,

(2.) *He cast him into the bottomless pit, cast him down with force, and with a just vengeance, to his own place and prison, from which he had been permitted to break out, and disturb the churches, and deceive the nations; now he is brought back to that prison, and there laid in chains.*

(3.) *He is shut up, and a seal set upon him.* Christ shuts, and none can open; he shuts by his power, seals by his authority; and his lock and seal even the devils themselves cannot break open.

(4.) We have the term of this confinement of Satan — *a thousand years*, after which he was to *be loosed* again for *a little season*. The church should have a considerable time of peace and prosperity, but all her trials were not yet over.

II. An account of the reign of the saints for the same space of time in which Satan continued bound (v. 4-6), and here observe,

1. Who those were that received such honour — those who had suffered for Christ, and all who had faithfully adhered to him, not receiving the mark of the beast, nor worshipping his image; all who had kept themselves clear of pagan and papal idolatry.

2. The honour bestowed upon them.

(1.) They were raised from the dead, and restored to life. This may be taken either literally or figuratively; they were in a civil and political sense dead, and had a political resurrection; their liberties and privileges were revived and restored.

(2.) *Thrones, and power of judgment, were given to them;* they were possessed of great honour, and interest, and authority, I suppose rather of a spiritual than of a secular nature.

(3.) *They reigned with Christ a thousand years.* Those who suffer with Christ shall reign with Christ; they shall reign with him in his spiritual and heavenly kingdom, in a glorious conformity to him in wisdom, righteousness, and holiness, beyond what had been known before in the world. This is called *the first resurrection*, which none but those who have served Christ and suffered for him shall be favoured with. As for the wicked, they shall not be raised up and restored to their power again, till Satan be let loose; this may be called a resurrection, as the conversion of the Jews is said to be *life from the dead*.

3. The happiness of these servants of God is declared.

(1.) They are *blessed and holy*, v. 6. None can be blessed but those that are holy; and all that are holy shall be blessed. These were holy as a sort of first-fruits to God in this spiritual resurrection, and as such blessed by him.

(2.) They are secured from the power of the second death. We know something of what the first death is, and it is awful; but we know not what this second death is. It must be much more dreadful; it is the death of the soul, eternal separation from God. The Lord grant we may never know what it is by experience. Those who have had experience of a spiritual resurrection are saved from the power of the second death.

III. An account of the return of the church's troubles, and another mighty conflict, very sharp, but short and decisive. Observe,

1. The restraints laid for a long time on Satan are at length taken off. While this world lasts, Satan's power in it will not be wholly destroyed; it may be limited and lessened, but he will have something still to do for the disturbance of the people of God.

2. No sooner is Satan let loose than he falls to his old work, *deceiving the nations*, and so stirring them up to make a war with the saints and servants of God, which they would never do if he had not first deceived them. They are deceived both as to the cause they engage in (they believe it to be a good cause when it is indeed a very bad one), and as to the issue: they expect to be successful, but are sure to lose the day.

3. His last efforts seem to be the greatest. The power now permitted to him seems to be more unlimited than before. He had now liberty to beat up for his volunteers in all *the four quarters of the earth*, and he raised a mighty army, the number of which was *as the sand of the sea*, v. 8. 4. We have the names of the principal commanders in this army under the dragon — *Gog and Magog*. We need not be too inquisitive as to what particular powers are meant by these names, since the army was gathered from all parts of the world. These names are found in other parts of scripture. *Magog* we read of in ^{<111>}Genesis 10:2. He was one of the sons of Japheth, and peopled the country called *Syria*, from which his descendants spread into many other parts. Of *Gog and Magog* together we only read in ^{<352>}Ezekiel 38:2, a prophecy whence this in Revelation borrows many of its images.

5. We have the march and military disposition of this formidable army (v. 9.): *They went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city*, that is, the spiritual Jerusalem, in which the most precious interests of the people of God are lodged, and therefore to them a beloved city. The army of the saints is described as drawn forth out of the city, and lying under the walls of it, to defend it; they were encamped about Jerusalem: but the army of the enemy was so much superior to that of the church that they compassed them and their city about.

6. You have an account of the battle, and the issue of this war: *Fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured the enemy*. Thus the ruin of *Gog and Magog* is foretold (^{<352>}Ezekiel 38:22), *I will rain upon him and upon his bands an overflowing rain, and great hailstones, and fire and brimstone*. God would, in an extraordinary and more immediate manner, fight this last and decisive battle for his people, that the victory might be complete and the glory redound to himself.

7. The doom and punishment of the grand enemy, *the devil*: he is now cast into hell, with his two great officers, *the beast and the false prophet*, tyranny and idolatry, and that not for any term of time, but to be there *tormented night and day, for ever and ever*.

◀11▶ REVELATION 20:11-15

THE UNIVERSAL JUDGMENT

The utter destruction of the devil's kingdom very properly leads to an account of the day of judgment, which will determine every man's everlasting state; and we may be assured there will be a judgment when we see *the prince of this world is judged*, ▶11▶ John 16:11. This will be a great day, *the great day, when all shall appear before the judgment-seat of Christ*. The Lord help us firmly to believe this doctrine of the judgment to come. It is a doctrine that made Felix tremble. Here we have a description of it, where observe,

1. We behold *the throne*, and tribunal of judgment, *great and white*, very glorious and perfectly just and righteous. *The throne of iniquity, that establishes wickedness by a law*, has no fellowship with this righteous throne and tribunal.

2. The appearance of the Judge, and that is the Lord Jesus Christ, who then puts on such majesty and terror that *the earth and the heaven flee from his face, and there is no place found for them*; there is a dissolution of the whole frame of nature, ▶12▶ 2 Peter 3:10.

3. The persons to be judged (v. 12): *The dead, small and great*; that is, young and old, low and high, poor and rich. None are so mean but they have some talents to account for, and none so great as to avoid the jurisdiction of this court; not only those that are found alive at the coming of Christ, but all who have died before; the grave shall surrender the bodies of men, hell shall surrender the souls of the wicked, the sea shall surrender the many who seemed to have been lost in it.

4. The rule of judgment settled: *The books were opened*. What books? The books of God's omniscience, who is greater than our consciences, and knows all things (there is a book of remembrance with him both for good and bad); and the book of the sinner's conscience, which, though formerly secret, will now be opened. *And another book shall be opened* — the book of the scriptures, the statute-book of heaven, the rule of life. This book is opened as containing the law, the touchstone by which the hearts and lives of men are to be tried. This book determines matter of right; the other books give evidence of matters of fact. Some, by *the other book*, called *the*

book of life, understand the book of God's eternal counsels; but that does not seem to belong to the affair of judgment: in eternal election God does not act judicially, but with absolute sovereign freedom.

5. The cause to be tried; and that is, *the works of men*, what they have done and whether it be good or evil. *By their works men shall be justified or condemned*; for though God knows their state and their principles, and looks chiefly at these, yet, being to approve himself to angels and men as a righteous God, he will try their principles by their practices, and so will *be justified when he speaks and clear when he judges*.

6. The issue of the trial and judgment; and this will be according to the evidence of fact, and rule of judgment. All those who have *made a covenant with death*, and an *agreement with hell*, shall then be condemned with their infernal confederates, cast with them into the lake of fire, as not being entitled to eternal life, according to the rules of life laid down in the scripture; but those whose names are written in that book (that is, those that are justified and acquitted by the gospel) shall then be justified and acquitted by the Judge, and shall enter into eternal life, having nothing more to fear from death, or hell, or wicked men; for these are all destroyed together. Let it be our great concern to see on what terms we stand with our Bibles, whether they justify us or condemn us now; for the Judge of all will proceed by that rule. *Christ shall judge the secrets of all men according to the gospel*. Happy are those who have so ordered and stated their cause according to the gospel as to know beforehand that they shall be justified in the great day of the Lord!