

Session 24 The beasts and dragon are destroyed

Rev. 19:17-20:10

- **The final contest**, v17-21

Summons to a feast v17-18. The is issued by an angel standing in the full glare of the sun (visible for all to see) summons, loud for all to hear, see. This is in stark contrast to the invitation to the marriage supper of the Lamb, v9.

The carrion birds are commanded to come, anticipating the outcome of the battle, c.f. Ezekiel 29:1-5, 32:2-5,

(Egypt as a prophetic antecedent). **This fate was considered to demonstrate the totality of defeat and dishonour**,

1Sam. 18:43-44, 31:7-13, 2Sam. 21:8-14.

This judgement will involve all who align themselves with the beast, v18, 6:15, c.f. those who follow the Lamb, 11:18b.

- **This is the final act of judgement, already portrayed in the 6th seal, 6:12-17, the 7th trumpet, 11:15-18, and in the visions of chapter 14:9-20 and the 6th bowl, 16:12-16, (Armageddon). It has been briefly introduced in 17:12-14 and prefaced again in 19:11-16.** The corresponding OT prophecies are in Psalms 2, 110, Ezek. 38-39, Joel 3, and Zech. 14. There is a double fulfilment - see 20:7-9.
- **Although there is a description of the Lamb leading out His army there is no description of a battle. His word carries all the power needed for victory**, v21, c.f. Isaiah 11:4, 2Thess. 2:8, just as it was sufficient to create the Universe, Gen.1:1-3 etc., John1:1-3.
- **The two beasts are captured and cast into the lake of fire**
- **The followers of the beast are killed by the sword that proceeded from the mouth of the Lamb. Their bodies are consumed and they now await final judgement**, 20:11-15.

- **Satan is bound**, 20:1-3

"Then I saw ..." This is John's way of introducing a new vision. It does not necessarily mean that the content of the vision follows chronologically from the previous one, but here this seems to be the case, as he follows the two beasts into the lake of fire judgement, v10. **The previous section was clearly located in the end of the age, Jesus coming with His heavenly army**, c.f. Matt. 24:30-31, 2Thess. 1:7-10, Jude v14-15. We have reached that point in time repeatedly through Revelation, with increasing detail, so that the final sections form a kind of climax.

There is a parallel with chapter 9. There an angel descended from Heaven to release a demonic horde from the Abyss as a judgement on the earth dwellers. **Now another angel descends from Heaven** (i.e. sent on a mission directly from the throne of God) to bind satan and imprison him for a thousand years (most of the numbers in Revelation are symbolic so this one, 10x10x10, may be of a similar nature rather than an exact number of years).

He is given **four names that characterise him - the dragon, the devil, the old serpent, and satan**, fierce and terrible, subtle, deceptive, and accusing, 2:10, 24, 3:9, chapter 12, 13:4, and 16:13-14. **"Old serpent" takes us back to Gen. 3.**

The purpose of this strange temporary binding of satan is stated - "so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished".

Then he will be released and will go out to deceive the nations ... ", v7-8. We will come back to this later, but first we have to try to understand what is meant by this period of the binding of satan, usually described as **the Millennium**.

There are three separate interpretations:

1) A-millennial. According to this view, based on Scriptures such as John 12:27-32, Col. 2:13-15, and Rev. 12:7-12, satan was bound when Jesus died and rose again.

This was introduced by Augustine, bishop of Hippo, (AD 354–430). He taught that the organized Catholic (universal) Church is the messianic Kingdom, and that the Millennium began with the first coming of Christ. According to this view, the history of this present earth will end at Christ's second coming, when the future eternal state will begin. The origins of this teaching are linked to the replacement theology of some anti-Semitic Gentile church leaders, who rejected God's plan to restore the nation of Israel and reacted against the Jewish belief in an earthly Messianic kingdom.

Interpretation depends on approach to the Bible as a whole - is it essentially a story unfolding and progressing seamlessly through time, or a collection of stories interwoven with allegorical presentation of spiritual truths? I believe that the former view is correct. **Past events are often presented in vivid metaphors but this does not undermine their historical reality.** For instance Isaiah describes Assyria as an axe and nations as trees; kings are described in very exalted and even exaggerated language, e.g. Isaiah 14:4, 12-15, Ezek. 28:11-19, but they are, nevertheless, historical figures. **The prophecies about the first coming of Jesus were fulfilled in a literal way,** e.g. Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:23, Isaiah 53:4-9; 1 Peter 2:24.

Why change the method of interpretation when future events are concerned?

Prophecies about the future should be treated in the same way, interpreting metaphorical language in the light of how it is used in the cases of past events, rather than changing the method and adopting an allegorical/spiritual approach as Augustine did. Otherwise we superimpose on Scripture our conclusion that the church is the Kingdom of God on earth, and dismiss the revelation of the earthly Messianic kingdom as portrayed in the Bible.

2) Post-millennial. This is a natural, but optimistic, extension of the a-millennial view. The Gospel will triumph in this age and Jesus will then return, not only for His bride but for a world that has been transformed into the Kingdom of God.

This contradicts the teaching of the Bible, Matt. 24:12, 22-25 Luke 21:34-36, 2Tim. 3:1-7, etc., and the observed situation in the world. Some predict a huge end times global outpouring of the Spirit at the end of the age. The only suggestion of this is in Rom. 11:15 where the salvation of Israel, as a people, leads to "life from the dead" for the world.

3) Pre-millennial. The facts do not support the assertion that satan has been bound and prevented from deceiving the nations for the past two thousand years; quite the reverse:

- **The cross and resurrection did spell his defeat and guaranteed his final destruction,** but first God purposed to call out a people whose faithfulness would refute satan's lie, that everyone has his or her price.
- **Far from binding and restricting satan's activity on earth the victory of Jesus intensified it,** Rev. 12, 13:1-10. **Deception is his prime strategy in relation to the nations,** 12:9, 13:14, and as **a means of attacking believers as well,** 2:14, 20-21. He has been actively pursuing believers through temptation and persecution throughout the Gospel Age, 2:10, 13, 2Cor. 11:13-15, Eph. 5:26-27, 6:10-20, 1Pet. 5:8-9.
- **The abyss is described as a closed prison** c.f. 9:1-2. Satan will be deprived of the power to interfere and deceive, as he had done in the Garden. Human beings, during this period, will be freed from his malign influence and live under the undivided rule of the true King and experience the blessings of peace and prosperity - true shalom.
- **What happened on earth in Gen. 3 must be resolved on earth.** Adam was placed in an environment of supreme blessing, under the government of his Creator God but chose the illusion of independence offered by the snake, with all the negative consequences that we know so well. **Now, for a time, the world will be ruled by a perfectly obedient Man with all the authority of God,** Phil. 2:9-11, Rev. 1:5, 5:1-10. **The coming of the Son of Man will inaugurate the "golden age" for which people have yearned for all of human history, that elusive age of peace and justice and plenty. This is the age foreseen by the prophets,** Psalm 96:10-13, 98:1-9, 9:6-7, 11:1-10, Amos 9:11-15, Micah 4:1-4, Hab. 2:14. **It has been unattainable, despite all the advances in civilization, because of the corruption of the human heart,** Mark 7:20-23, Rom. 3:9-18, James 1:13-15, 4:1-4.
Jerusalem will be the capital city - the city of the great King, Psalm 48.

"And I saw..." v4. John has witnessed the destruction of the beasts and their immediate followers and now the binding and isolation of satan. **Now he sees thrones and those who have refused to follow those evil powers**, even to the point of martyrdom; they have been crying out for vindication, even vengeance, 6:9-11, and now they enjoy their reward - **the thrones are for them**, c.f. 5:10, as Jesus had promised his disciples, Luke 22:24-30, c.f. 2Tim. 2:11-13, Dan. 7:26-27.

This is described as the first resurrection, v4-6. Some have misunderstood this as referring to an elite sub group of Christians. It is clear from previous chapters that this is incorrect. All who receive the mark of the beast will experience the eternal judgement of God, 14:9-11, and are contrasted with the saints who refuse to do so, 14:12-13.

All saints are martyrs or potential martyrs. The cowardly and unbelieving are first in line for eternal punishment, 21:7-8. **There is only one resurrection of the saints**, 2Thess. 4:13-17, rising to meet Him and then accompanying Him to earth, Jude v14-15, Rev. 17:14, 19:14, 2Thess. 1:6-10.

They will never die again, v6, c.f. 1Cor. 15:50-57. The first resurrection is the better resurrection of Heb. 11:35. They **reign with the Messiah**, Matt. 25:20-23, and **function as priests**, representing Him to the nations, as Israel was supposed to do, Exodus 19:3-6, 1Pet. 2:9.

"The rest of the dead" are all the others, awaiting judgement, together with those who, after the 1000 years desert to the blandishments of the devil, revealing their true loyalty, v7-9

Satan's final revolt, v7-10

Why must he be released for a little while? v3. Mankind will have experienced again the situation in Gen. 2 - peace and prosperity under the rule of God. Then an alternative is on offer; continue in this way on a voluntary basis or revert to the deceptions of satan. Sadly, but confirming the justice of God in His judgements, they will opt again for the lying propaganda of the serpent, with the delusive offer of independent freedom. Despite all the blessings of the Messiah's kingdom the innate rebellion of the human heart remains and awaits fresh opportunity for expression.

This final battle ends the rebellion of satan and his followers forever. It is like a re-run of the battle prefigured in 16:12-14 and 17:12-14, and described in 19:19-21 when the beasts and their army were destroyed. It is pre-figured in Ezek. 38-39, and centres on the beloved city (Jerusalem), but here the description is brief.

There is no battle - fire comes down from God (the Father) from Heaven and devours them. The faithful saints remain true to their Messiah King and are rewarded with deliverance from the presence of God Himself.

Satan is cast into the lake of fire to join his "henchmen", v10. He has finally gone to be tormented forever and ever.