

2 Thessalonians 2 and Revelation 20 are not the Same Events

Ammillennialists say,

“Since Paul’s non-symbolic predictions about the end times in 2 Thessalonians 2 match the symbolic prophecies of John in Revelation 20 so well, it’s hard to see how Paul and John could both be referring to some other set of collective circumstances.”¹

A frequent mistake among ammillennialists is that of assuming texts of Scripture which refer to similar or like events are indeed addressing the same event/s.² While parallel texts of Scripture referring to the same event do exist, this does not mean all parallel texts always refer to the same event. We can say that in some instances, parallels in Scripture do equate to the same events but not always.

Parallel texts are a common occurrence between the Gospels. For instance, Matthew 8:28-34; Mark 5:1-20 and Luke 8:26-39 all refer to the same event in the ministry of Christ. However, there are differences between these accounts. Matthew records that two men were possessed (8:28) while Mark (5:1) and Luke (8:27) mention only one of the two. Mark writes that the demons requested not to be sent out of the country (5:10) and Luke says the demons requested they not be sent to the abyss (8:31), while Matthew mentions neither country nor abyss. Nevertheless, a close study of the passages yields the fact that even though there are differences between the three accounts there exists no contradictions and all refer to the same event.

However, the accounts of Christ’s cleansing of the temple (Mt. 21:12-16; Mk. 11:15-18; Lk. 19:45-47 and Jn. 2:13-22) do not all refer to the same instance even though there are many parallels. John describes a clearing of the temple that took place at the beginning of the ministry of Christ, while the rest describe an event near the end of Christ’s ministry. The event described by John is distinguished from the others by time.

Such is the case between 2 Thessalonians 2 and Revelation 20:1-3. Similarities exist but is the **restraint** of 2 Thessalonians 2:6-7 referring to the same circumstances and period of time as the incarceration (restraint) of Satan in Revelation 20:1-3 and 7? The ammillennialist sees the similarities between these and concludes that the two equate to the same event and time period. Therefore, he answers the question affirmatively. However, a close examination of the grammar and context of each reference will not allow the two events to be referring to the same circumstances.

¹ Dr. Hal Ostrander, <http://www.bpc.edu/religion/Amillennialism.htm>

² Ammillennialists see the parallels between Rev. 12:7-12 and Rev. 20:1-3 as describing the same event. They also see the parallels between the battles of Rev. 19:11-21 and 20:7-10 as descriptions of the same battle. However, a close study of each of the texts shows that the differences between each are of such a nature so as to prevent the events from being the same.

2 Thessalonians 2:6-7 clearly speak of a present restraint preventing the revealing of the antichrist. The restraint was present in Paul's day as he wrote the epistle and it continues to this day for the antichrist is yet to be revealed. Referring specifically to that restraint the text says,

⁶ *And you know what restrains him **now**, so that in his time he may be revealed.* ⁷ *For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who **now** restrains will do so until he is taken out of the way.*"NASB

These verses reveal that it is not the antichrist who is present but the restraint which prevents the antichrist from being revealed that is present. As the apostle wrote this epistle he was aware that that which restrained the antichrist was operative at the moment he wrote. To this the ammillennialist agrees since he believes we have been in the millennium from the time of the first advent of Christ and that the binding of Satan in Rev. 20 is the symbolic representation of the restraint of 2 Thessalonians 2 (as stated above). On the surface this seems to fit the two passages together as if they are communicating simultaneous events. Since the antichrist will receive his power and authority from Satan (2 Thess. 2:9), it stands to reason that if Satan is bound as described in Revelation 20, the antichrist, by necessity is also presently restrained.

However, it must be emphasized that the second chapter of Thessalonians speaks of only one necessary component for preventing the revealing of the antichrist—the presence of the restrainer not the lack of the one who empowers the antichrist. The text nowhere even implies that the devil need be restrained in order to prevent the revealing of the antichrist. Thus, the ammillennialist who sees the binding of Satan in Revelation 20 instrumental in preventing the revealing of the antichrist as mentioned in 2 Thessalonians is essentially reading Revelation 20 into 2 Thessalonians 2.

The consequence of reading Revelation 20 into 2 Thessalonians 2 ends up being catastrophic for multiple reasons. Consider the following:

1. The immediate context implies Satan is not bound

While Second Thessalonians 2 does not even imply the necessity for Satan to be bound in order to prevent the revealing the antichrist, it does imply that Satan is not presently bound. Note the first phrase in verse 7, "***For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work...***" Here we see that the mystery of lawlessness is presently at work while the one who restrains is also at work. The antichrist is called *the man of lawlessness* (v.3), meaning that he will be the very embodiment of lawlessness. Satan's power and schemes will come to fruition in human form in the antichrist (v. 9). The implication is that in ways still shrouded in mystery, Satan is **presently at work** through various means to bring the antichrist onto the scene once the restrainer is taken out of the way. In a similar sense John writes in 1 John 2:18 of the forerunners to the antichrist, "*Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have arisen; from*

this we know that it is the last hour." Likewise, it is implied within the immediate text of 2 Thessalonians that even though the one who restrains is presently restraining preventing the revealing of the antichrist, Satan **is not presently bound** but presently at work preparing the way for his man.

2. The general context implies Satan is not bound

The context of 2 Thessalonians further indicates that the apostle Paul did not see the devil bound as described in Revelation 20:1-3 and 7. In 2 Thessalonian 3:3 Paul told the believers that the Lord would protect them from the evil one. Examination of the following verses indicates that the phrase "the evil one" is likely a reference to Satan (Mt. 13:19, 38; Jn. 17:15; 1 Jn. 2:13-14; 3:12; 5:18-19). Were Satan bound as explained in Revelation 20 there would be no reason for this verse. It would have made much more sense if Satan were bound (as described in Rev. 20) for Paul to have instructed the saints to not fear for Satan is bound.

3. The apostle Paul knew first hand Satan is not presently bound

While the passages referred to above strongly imply that the apostle Paul did not believe Satan was bound during the time he wrote the epistle, approximately six months earlier when he wrote 1 Thessalonians it is explicitly clear that the apostle did not consider Satan bound. In 1 Thessalonians 2:18 Paul unambiguously conveyed the fact of Satan's present liberty when he told the Thessalonians that he more than once, attempted to come to the believers at Thessalonica but he was thwarted by Satan. According to Paul's own words Satan was not bound and therefore prevented Paul from visiting the believers at Thessalonica. As a note regarding this instance, amillennialism maintains that the binding of Satan refers to Satan's inability to prevent the Gospel from being taken to the nations. In the light of this attempt to explain their position it must be stated that it is a very bizarre teaching that maintains the idea, as amillennialism does, that Satan is bound so that he cannot prevent Christians from taking the gospel to the nations but he can prevent apostles from visiting believers!

Reading the binding of the devil (Revelation 20) into 2 Thessalonians 2 is essentially a contradiction to the implications of 2 Thessalonians 2:6-9; 3:3 and the explicit event of 1 Thessalonians 2:18 which reveal Satan was **not** bound at the time of the writing of 1 and 2 Thessalonians.

Amillennialism will object saying its position interprets Revelation 20 in the light of 2 Thessalonians 2. This is more problematic for:

In Revelation 20 Satan is completely bound, while there is no mention in 2 Thessalonians 2 that Satan is bound. 2 Thessalonians conveys that it is only the revealing of the antichrist that is restrained not Satan. As we saw above, the context of 2 Thessalonians allows for both the presence of the one who restrains and Satan's liberty. Such a condition is in perfect harmony with a multitude of other New Testament

passages declaring Satan's present liberty³ and the reality of the present day that the antichrist is not yet revealed. However, Revelation 20 contains no qualifying statements which will allow Satan to be both bound and free at the same time. As a matter of fact the text of Rev. 20 uses multiple phrases to express Satan's complete incarceration. He will be **bound, thrown into the abyss**, which will be **shut and sealed over him**. By no uncertain terms we are informed that a stop is put to the devil. He is not weakened, neither is he merely staked to a chain like a mad dog free to operate within the chain's reach. He is not under house arrest free to operate under a watchful eye. When Satan experiences the events of Revelation 20:1-3 he **will not** be roaming around on the inhabited earth seeking whom he may devour as he now does according to 1 Peter 5:8. He **will not** be thwarting believers as he did the apostle Paul. No, John saw the ruthless devil **seized, bound, and thrown into the abyss which will be shut and sealed over him** so that he should not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years are completed (rev. 20:3). The text is clear — the abyss becomes Satan's **prison** for a thousand years (v. 7). During which time the inhabited earth will not even know his presence. Consequently, he will not be both bound and free but will be locked away in the abyss for a thousand years. Therefore, the binding of Satan in Rev. 20 cannot be a component of the restrainer in 2 Thessalonians.

Also, 2 Thessalonians 2:7 makes it clear that that which restrains the revealing of the antichrist is a person. The restrainer is twice referred to as *he*. In order for the antichrist to be revealed the restrainer must be taken out of the way (2 Thess. 2:7). The text does not say the restrainer's presence *binds* the devil only that it *prevents* the revealing of the antichrist. In Revelation 20 the devil's restraint is a place—the abyss as opposed to being a person. Revelation 20:7 says nothing about anyone needing to be removed so that the devil may experience liberty. Satan need only be released from his place of incarceration.

Additionally, the one who now restrains is active **in the inhabited earth**, while the abyss is **not** a part of the **inhabited** earth.

Moreover, in the series of chronological events depicted in the context of Revelation 19-21, the imprisonment of the devil in Rev. 20:1-3 and his eventual release in 20:7 both occur after the end of the antichrist's reign. Note too, that at Satan's release in Revelation 20:7 there is no mention of the antichrist. This makes perfect sense in the context given the fact that in the chronology of events preceding Rev. 20, the antichrist was already cast into the lake of fire (19:20).

Such differences will not allow the events to be the same without twisting the clear meaning of the words and distorting the obvious chronology of events in Revelation chapters 19-21.

³ **Satan's present influence in the lives of believers:** Lk. 22:31-34; Acts 5:3; Rom. 16:20; 1 Cor. 5:5; 7:5; 2 Cor. 2:11; 11:14; Eph. 4:27; 6:11, 16; 1 Thess. 2:18; 1 Tim. 1:20; 3:7; James 4:7; 1 Pet. 5:8. **Satan's present rule over unbelievers:** 2 Cor. 4:4; 11:13; Eph. 2:2; 6:11-12; 2 Tim. 2:25-26; 1 Jn. 5:19.

Remember the two demon possessed men from Matthew 8:28-34 and how Mark (5:1-20) and Luke (8:26-39) mentioned but one man? The texts were not mutually exclusive because where you have two (Matthew's account) you always have one (Mark and Luke's account). Had Mark or Luke explicitly stated there was "**only** one man" then the accounts would have to be understood as different instances as there are no contradictions in the Word of God. Likewise, the emphatic and explicit language in Revelation 20 referring to the condition of Satan being bound will allow neither the implications of Satan's liberty in 2 Thessalonians 2 and 3, nor the explicit statement regarding Satan's present liberty in 1 Thessalonians 2:18. Therefore, it is equally erroneous to read 2 Thessalonians 2 into Revelation 20. Revelation 20:1-5 and 2 Thessalonians 2 could not possibly be referring to the same event or time period for the events of 2 Thessalonians and Revelation 20:1-3 are mutually exclusive. They do not match. Instead, they are better understood to relate to each other by describing a chronology of events as illustrated by the tables below.

The Chronology of Events Related to the Empowerment of the Antichrist and the False Prophet		
The restraining one now in place and Satan freely roaming about	The antichrist not revealed and Satan is at work in the inhabited world	2 Thessalonians 2:6-7; 3:3; 1 Thessalonians 2:18
The restraining one removed Satan empowers the antichrist and false prophet to deceive	The antichrist empowered by Satan	2 Thessalonians 2:9-10; Revelation 13:2d
	The false prophet empowered by Satan	Revelation 13:11-12; Revelation 19:20a-c
Satan incarcerated and thus prevented from deceiving	The antichrist and the false prophet will be seized and thrown alive into the lake of fire	Revelation 19:20d
	Satan is bound and incarcerated and thus prevented from deceiving	Revelation 20:1-3
Satan freed from prison and deceives the nations	At the end of the thousand year millennium Satan will be released from his prison and once again deceive the nations	Revelation 20:7-8
	The deceived nations will be destroyed with fire from heaven	Revelation 20:9
Satan cast into the lake of fire	Satan, who deceived the nations will be thrown into the lake of fire where the antichrist and the false prophet are also	Revelation 20:10

The binding of Satan in revelation 20 cannot be a component of the prevention of the revealing of the antichrist for:		
2 Thessalonians 2		Revelation 20
The restrainer is a person who prevents the revealing of the antichrist	The one who restrains and the abyss cannot be the same. One is a person the other is a place.	Satan will be incarcerated in a place referred to as the abyss.
The immediate context of 2 Thessalonians implies Satan is not bound (2:7 with 2:9)	In the lawlessness which is presently at work (v. 7) Satan is preparing the way for the lawless one	Using unequivocal terms referencing a future event Revelation 20 presents Satan as being completely bound.
The general context of 2 Thessalonians implies Satan is not bound as described in Rev. 20 but is free (See 2 Thess. 3:3)	Satan cannot be bound as described in Revelation 20 and at liberty as implied by the general context of 2 Thessalonians	
Written only six months earlier 1 Thessalonians 2:18 unambiguously declares Satan's present liberty	Satan cannot be bound as described in Revelation 20 and at liberty as indicated in 1 Thessalonians 2:18	
Summary: The events of 2 Thessalonians 2 and Revelation 20:1-3 are mutually exclusive and therefore cannot be referring to the same event or timeframe.		

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