

A Literal Devil Literally Bound

Revelation 20:1 opens with John seeing an angel coming down from heaven, holding the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand. Then in verse 2 the Bible informs us that the devil will be bound.

Although not stated explicitly the assumption is that the angel will bind the devil with the chain. This is a reasonable assumption in the light of the verses and the fact that there is nothing in the text indicating the devil will be bound with anything else. Therefore, it is reasonably sound to conclude that the angel will literally bind the devil with the great chain.

Objections to a literal understanding of this passage are sometimes based on the idea that because angels and devils are spirit beings they do not engage one another using objects such as metal chains.¹ Therefore, it is necessary, as asserted by some, that this passage be understood as being symbolic.

The inability of a metal chain to bind the devil is a matter of Biblical fact, for a chain as we know it, cannot even detain a man possessed by a devil (See Mark 5:4) let alone Satan himself. However, the fact that the devil cannot be bound with a chain of metal or any known material **does not** negate a literal understanding of this passage. The text of Revelation 20:1 does not say nor does it even imply that the chain in the hand of the angel will be a metal chain. There is no mention of the material from which the chain will be constructed. Furthermore, a study of Scripture reveals that, although angels and devils are indeed spirit beings, they are nonetheless literal created beings who engage a physical universe as well as each another. Note the following Biblical instances where angels and devils:

- **Interact with each other:**

“¹² Then he said to me, "Do not be afraid, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart on understanding this and on humbling yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to your words. ¹³ "But the prince of the kingdom of Persia was withstanding me for twenty-one days; then behold, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I had been left there with the kings of Persia.” (Dan 10:12-13 NASB)

“But Michael the archangel, when he disputed with the devil and argued about the body of Moses, did not dare pronounce against him a railing judgment, but said, "The Lord rebuke you.”” (Jude 9 NASB)

¹ On his website <http://www.bpc.edu/religion/Amillennialism.htm>, Dr. Hal Ostrander states, “The “binding of Satan” (Revelation 20:2) isn’t literal in the sense of metal chains binding an evil spirit being.” This is an interesting statement given the fact that amillennialists do not hold to a literal binding of Satan. His use of the word *metal* seems to infer that those who hold to a literal binding of Satan believe a metal chain will be used.

- **Interact with men:**

²⁴ *So He drove the man out; and at the east of the garden of Eden He stationed the cherubim, and the flaming sword which turned every direction, to guard the way to the tree of life. (Gen 3:24 NASB)*

²³ *Then God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the men of Shechem; and the men of Shechem dealt treacherously with Abimelech, ²⁴ in order that the violence done to the seventy sons of Jerubbaal might come, and their blood might be laid on Abimelech their brother, who killed them, and on the men of Shechem, who strengthened his hands to kill his brothers. (Judges 9:23-24 NASB)*

¹⁴ *Now the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord terrorized him. (1 Sam 16:14 NASB; Compare vs. 16, 23; 18:10; 19:9)*

²² *"And the Lord said to him, 'How?' And he said, 'I will go out and be a deceiving spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.' Then He said, 'You are to entice him and also prevail. Go and do so.' ²³ "Now therefore, behold, the Lord has put a deceiving spirit in the mouth of all these your prophets; and the Lord has proclaimed disaster against you." (1 Kings 22:22-23 NASB)*

- **Hold certain positions of power in world affairs:**

¹¹ *Put on the full armor of God, that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. ¹² For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. (Eph 6:11-12 NASB; Compare Dn. 10:12, Judges 9:23, and 1 Kings 22:22-23)*

- **Even control atmospheric conditions in the world:**

See Job 1:12 with 16 and 18-19

Furthermore, since demons themselves are created beings, it stands to reason that through the use of other created things suited to their realm they are capable of being subdued and bound:

- **Places contain them**

"and they were entreating Him not to command them to depart into the abyss." (Luke 8:31 NASB)

"For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of darkness, reserved for judgment..." (2 Pet 2:4 NASB)

- **Bonds restrain them**

“And angels who did not keep their own domain, but abandoned their proper abode, He has kept in eternal bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day.” (Jude 6 NASB)

- **At Christ’s word even natural things such as the bodies of pigs can restrain devils that are spiritual beings.**

When two demon possessed men met Christ (Mt. 8:28) the demons possessing them entreated Christ not to send them out of the country (Mk. 5:10) into the abyss (Lk. 8:31). Instead, they pleaded with Jesus that if He was going to cast them out, that He send them into a herd of pigs and Jesus did (Mt. 8:31-32). The demons entered the pigs and it appears that they were bound to the bodies of the pigs until at least the pigs drowned in the sea.

Because the Bible gives us these instances documenting the engagement of angels and demons with a physical universe and with each other, there is no reason to conclude that Revelation 20:1 must mean something other than what it literally says. There is nothing in the text to indicate anything other than a literal encounter between an angel and the devil, wherein a chain made to bind the devil is put to use. The material of which the chain is constructed is not given, only it is said to be *great*, obviously capable of holding a devil.

It is interesting to note that were the words of Revelation 20 directed toward any person besides the devil who is indeed a spirit being there would be for the most part, no questioning as to their literal meaning. The words would be allowed to mean what they say, that someone was bound and thrown into a place where he was incarcerated for a specific duration of time. However, because the devil is a spirit being it is immediately assumed that all the words must have a different meaning, that is to say, a spiritual or symbolic meaning. On the other hand, in light of Biblical truth as conveyed by the multiple Scriptural references above, the devil, although a spirit, is nonetheless a created being. Therefore, he is subject to other created things fitted to his realm. Thus, there is no justifiable ground for assuming that Revelation 20:1-3 when addressing the binding and incarcerating of the devil means anything other than exactly what it says.

Pastor David Martin
Liberty Christian Church
lccut.org