

JUDGMENT ON THE HOUSE OF GOD

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JUDGMENT ON THE HOUSE OF GOD

This book presents a prophetic warning of God's judgment on the church. *"For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God" 1 Peter 4:17*

For centuries the church has been subjected to an overwhelming assault from the power of Antichrist. *"And it was granted to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them."* Revelation 13:7 As a result of this attack, the church has been contaminated with apostasy, and left powerless to witness to an ailing world.

The church must face the Lord's judgment and be purged and refined. This is so that it might effectively receive the "latter rain" of revival and restoration.

God has revealed His purposes to "His servants the prophets" Amos 3:7, and has instructed them to warn His children. The burden of their message at this time is to *"Come out of her, My people, (i.e. to come out of the apostasy in the church) lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues."* Revelation 18:4

John Holland
Bob Thomson

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THE TWO WITNESSES

KEY BIBLE READINGS

Rev 11:1-13 "Then I was given a reed like a measuring rod. And the angel stood, saying, 'Rise and measure the temple of God, the altar, and those who worship there. But leave out the court which is outside the temple, and do not measure it, for it has been given to the Gentiles. And they will tread the holy city underfoot for forty-two months. And I will give power to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy one thousand two hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth.' These are the two lampstands standing before the God of the earth. And if anyone wants to harm them, fire proceeds from their mouth and devours their enemies. And if anyone wants to harm them, he must be killed in this manner. These have power to shut heaven, so that no rain falls in the days of their prophecy; and they have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to strike the earth with all plagues, as often as they desire. Now when they finish their testimony, the beast that ascends out of the bottomless pit will make war against them, overcome them, and kill them. And their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified. Then those from the peoples, tribes, tongues, and nations will see their dead bodies three-and-a-half days, and not allow their dead bodies to be put into graves. And those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them, make merry, and send gifts to one another, because these two prophets tormented those who dwell on the earth. Now after the three and a half days the breath of life from God entered them, and they stood on their feet, and great fear fell on those who saw them. And they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, 'Come up here.' And they ascended to heaven in a cloud, and their enemies saw them. In the same hour there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell. In the earthquake seven thousand men were killed, and the rest were afraid and gave glory to the God of heaven."

THE BOOK OF REVELATION

To understand the Key Bible Reading it is necessary to appreciate the nature of the Book of Revelation. It is book deliberately obscured so that those who are yielded to the world and to the powers of darkness are unable to unravel its mysteries. Nevertheless it is a book which is meant to be understood by true believers so that they might be prepared for what is to come. The apostle John writes that the book is "**The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His servants - things which must shortly take place.**" Revelation 1:1

John declares that Jesus "**sent and signified it** (i.e. the Revelation) **by His angel to His servant John.**" Revelation 1:1 The word 'signified' is translated from the original Greek word 'semaino', which means to indicate or express by the use of signs or symbols.

Throughout the book of Revelation the reader is confronted by a procession of apparently bizarre images. In chapter 12 we read of a dragon standing before a woman in labor, ready "**to devour her child as soon as it was born.**" This is followed in chapter 13, by "**a beast rising up out of the sea**" and "**another beast coming up out of the earth.**" In an even more dramatic vision in chapter 17, we read of a harlot riding a scarlet beast.

This figurative or symbolic language is used to disguise the real meaning of Christ's Revelation from the idly curious or those with malevolent intent. However the key to unfolding the real meaning of this book for the believer is to trace the source of the symbols. That source is the Old Testament, and all the clues to understanding are to be found within it by the diligent searcher.

The Book of Revelation consists of a series of visions which are placed side by side and not necessarily in chronological sequence. These visions reveal the progress of Christ's invincible purpose in establishing His Kingdom through His church. The prophetic revelation contained within each vision can only be appreciated when we discover the meanings of the various symbols used. In addition, it is only as we abandon a complete reliance on our natural intellectual capacity, and open our hearts to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, that we are able to see each revelation in its proper place in time.

With this understanding of the nature of the book of Revelation, it is possible to approach the subject of the "two witnesses" in the key Bible Reading. Because the language is symbolic, we should not expect the actual or physical appearance of two men breathing fire. Nor should we expect to observe their dead bodies being openly mocked in the streets of some great world metropolis. Instead, in order to discover their real identities (and therefore their significance), we are required to trace back to the source of those symbols contained in the vision.

THE IDENTITY OF THE TWO WITNESSES

The major clue to the identity of the two witnesses is contained in the symbolic reference to Moses and Elijah. The two witnesses are said to have **"power to shut heaven, so that no rain falls in the days of their prophecy; and they have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to strike the earth with all plagues, as often as they desire."** Revelation 11:6.

The first phrase of this verse is a reference to the prophet Elijah, who declared God's judgment of drought to King Ahab of Israel. **"As the Lord God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, except at my word."** 1 Kings 17:1.

The latter phrase is a reference to Moses dealing with the pharaoh of Egypt so that he would let the children of Israel go. Chapters 7,8,9 and 10 of the book of Exodus detail nine plagues, beginning with the turning of the waters of the Nile to blood, through frogs, lice, flies, pestilence, boils, hail, locusts, and finally darkness.

The relevance of the two witnesses being related to Moses and Elijah is brought out in the last chapter of the last book in the Old Testament. **"Remember the Law of Moses, My servant, which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel, with the statutes and judgments. Behold I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord."** Malachi 4:4-5. The **"great and dreadful day of the Lord"** mentioned here is the day of judgment to take place at the second coming of Christ.

Moses was the servant of God appointed to deliver the 'law' or the 'word' to the children of Israel, and is therefore a symbol of the word of God. Elijah was the first major prophet and was fearless and obedient in his prophecy. Note that the two witnesses are not literal reincarnations of Moses and Elijah. Instead they are represented or symbolised by Moses and Elijah. The two witnesses are the WORD OF GOD, and the SPIRIT OF PROPHECY.

When Jesus was transfigured on the mountain, it was Moses and Elijah that appeared with Him. Later, when coming down the mountain with three of His disciples, Jesus prophesied that in the last days the spirit of Elijah would return to restore all things. **"And His disciples asked Him, saying 'Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?' then Jesus answered and said to them, 'Elijah is coming first and will restore all things. But I say to you that Elijah has come already, and they did not know him but did to him whatever they wished. Likewise the Son of Man is also about to suffer at their hands.' Then the disciples understood that he spoke to them of John the Baptist."** Matthew 17:10-13.

Notice that Jesus used two tenses here. First he said, "**Elijah truly is coming first and will restore all things**" which is a statement concerning events to take place some time in the future. Then He said, "**But I say to you that Elijah has come already**" which is clearly a statement made in the past tense. The disciples understood that when Jesus said that "**Elijah has come already**", He was talking about John the Baptist, who had already come to "**prepare the way of the Lord.**" (Isaiah 40:3). In fact, at the time Jesus made this statement, John had already been executed by Herod Antipas.

Jesus' words are therefore a statement that Elijah's spirit of prophecy was on John the Baptist. They are also a promise that the same spirit of prophecy would be manifested at some time in the future "**and will restore all things**". Just as the spirit of prophecy was in John the Baptist preparing the way for the Lord's first coming, so also will the spirit of prophecy prepare the way for the Lord's second coming.

This principle is clarified by study of an incident at the end of the prophet Elijah's life. "**Elijah said to Elisha, 'Ask! What may I do for you before I am taken away from you?' And Elisha said, 'Please let a double portion of you spirit be upon me.'**" 2 Kings 2:9. After Elijah was taken up into heaven on a chariot of fire, Elisha took his mantle and used it to part the waters of the Jordan. "**Now when the sons of the prophets who were from Jericho saw him, they said, 'the spirit of Elijah rests on Elisha'**" 2 Kings 2:15.

A similar event occurred in the life of Moses. He had complained to God that he was "**not able to bear all these people alone, because the burden is too heavy for me.**" Number 11:14. In response to his prayer, God told Moses to gather seventy elders to act as his assistants. "**I will take of the spirit that is upon you and will put the same upon them; and they shall bear the burden of the people with you.**" Numbers 11:17. In this way the elders were equipped to instruct and judge the children of Israel, using the statutes and commandments of God just as Moses did.

It is clear then that in awaiting the two witnesses, we are not to expect another Moses or another Elijah to arise as world acclaimed figures. Instead what is prophesied here is that the two witnesses will anoint God's chosen servants. The two witnesses, the spirit of prophecy which rested on Elijah and the spirit of the living word of God which rested on Moses, will rest on God's chosen servants. This anointing will equip those servants to walk as His instruments of restoration, wielding the prophetic word of God.

THE MINISTRY OF THE TWO WITNESSES

The ministry of the two witnesses is indicated early in the key bible Reading. They are likened to "**the two olive trees and two lampstands standing before the God of the earth.**" Revelation 11:4. This imagery is taken from the vision of Zechariah in the Old Testament.

"**I am looking, and there is a lampstand of solid gold with a bowl on top of it, and on the stand seven lamps with seven pipes to the seven lamps. The two olive trees are by it, one at the right of the bowl and the other at its left.**" Zechariah 4:2-3. The angel told Zechariah "**These are the two anointed ones, who stand beside the Lord of the whole earth.**" Zechariah 4:14.

The imagery from Zechariah relates to the restoration of the Jewish temple, which had been destroyed by King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. The olive trees impart oil (which is a consistent symbol of the Holy Spirit), to the golden lampstand (which is a picture of the temple). The angel of the Lord explained to Zerubbabel that this vision showed that the temple would be restored "**Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit', says the Lord of hosts.**" Zechariah 4:6.

The source of the oil which brought restoration was the two olive trees. These two trees are another picture of the word of God and the spirit of prophecy. In this case the prophetic word expounded by Haggai and Zechariah, prepared the way for the restoration of the temple by Zerubbabel and Joshua.

This picture is also relevant to the restoration of the Christian church. Jesus used the candlestick as a clear symbol of the church when He told the apostle John that **"the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches."** Revelation 1:20 (Authorized King James Version). In the New Testament context then, Zechariah's vision is a picture of the two witnesses filling the Christian church with the Holy Spirit.

This picture indicates that the two witnesses come to life to minister directly to the church. The Spirit of prophecy and the power of the word of God are poured into the church as a preparation for the triumphant return of Christ. The ministry of the two witnesses is a ministry to **"restore all things"** to the body of Christ.

THE PREPARATION OF THE TWO WITNESSES

The preparation of the two witnesses is outlined in the tenth chapter of the book of Revelation, which immediately precedes the Key Bible reading. Here the apostle John is confronted by an angel clothed in the glory of God and holding **"a little book open in his hand"**. Rev 10:2.

John is directed to take the book and eat it. **"Then I took the little book out of the angel's hand and ate it, and it was as sweet as honey in my mouth. But when I had eaten it, my stomach became bitter. And he said to me, " You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, tongues, and kings."** Revelation 10:10-11.

This imagery relates to the commission of Ezekiel the prophet in the Old Testament. During the Babylonian captivity a priest called Ezekiel was commanded by God to deliver His word to the children of Israel. He was given **"a scroll of a book"** on which was written **"lamentations and mourning and woe"** and instructed to **"eat what I give you"**. Ezekiel 2:9,10,8.

Ezekiel was told to **"'eat what you find; eat this scroll and go, speak to the house of Israel' So I ate it, and it was in my mouth like honey in sweetness...Moreover he said to me: 'Son of man, receive in your heart all My words that I speak to you, and hear with your ears.'" Ezekiel 3:1,3,10.**

"And you, son of man... do not be afraid of their words or dismayed by their looks, though they are a rebellious house. You shall speak My words to them whether they hear of whether they refuse, for they are rebellious. But you, son of man, hear what I say to you. Do not be rebellious like that rebellious house; open your mouth and eat what I give you." Ezekiel 2:6-8.

The apostle John's prophecy in the book of Revelation indicates that a similar reaction of rebelliousness awaits the two witnessed at the end of the age. John was warned that the little book would be sweet in his mouth but bitter in his stomach. The prophetic revelation of God's purposes is sweet in the receiving because the prophet is admitted into personal communion with God. It is bitter in the end however, because the prophet's commission is to pronounce that revelation of judgment on a rebellious and apostate church.

The preparation of the two witnesses is necessary because the Lord is doing a new thing in the last days. **"Surely the Lord God does nothing, unless He reveals His secret to His servants**

the prophets." Amos 3:7. This renewal of the prophet's commission assures the church that she will not lack divine guidance at the time of God's judgment.

The apostle John writes of the mighty angel who holds the little book, swearing "**that there should be delay no longer, but in the days of the sounding of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound, the mystery of God would be finished, as he declared to His servants the prophets.**" Revelation 10:6-7. This verse declares that the revelation of the hidden purposes of God will be completed or fulfilled at the end time through His anointed prophets.

Although God's purposes have been revealed down through the ages, it is now necessary to prophesy again. This is because God is revealing His purposes and judgment more fully as the time draws near. The servants of the Lord at this time are instructed to eat the little book. They are being instructed to eat and absorb the new revelations that they are being given so that it becomes part of them. They are called upon to be well grounded in the truth (i.e. the word of God) so that they are properly prepared to prophesy.

THE PERSECUTION OF THE TWO WITNESSES

In the last days the power of the word of God that invested Moses, and the spirit of prophecy that invested Elijah, will be invested in God's chosen servants. However it is clear that their ministry is violently opposed. "**Now when they finish their testimony, the beast that ascends out of the bottomless pit will make war against them, overcome them, and kill them.**" Revelation 11:7.

It is not difficult to accept that this prophecy of the death of the two witnesses has been fulfilled. This century has seen an unprecedented attack on the authority of the bible. In the vanguard of this attack have been church leaders and theologians. This 'higher criticism' has diluted the acceptance of the divine authority of the bible, and has left many of the mainstream denominations with major doubts about its contents. Fundamental issues like the virgin birth, the miracles, and the resurrection of Christ, are no longer considered unassailable truths in many churches.

Similarly the resurgence of the Holy spirit in this century has been resisted and opposed by many denominations. The gifts of the Holy spirit have been denounced as a once only phenomenon peculiar to the apostolic church. Many church goers have preferred the dry comfort of traditional doctrines and liturgies to the fresh revelations of Jesus Christ through His Spirit.

As a result of this the present climate of immorality and humanism mocks the church. "**And their dead bodies will lie in the streets of the great city which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified....And those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them, make merry, and send gifts to one another, because these two prophets tormented those who dwell on the earth.**" Revelation 11:8, 10. The world is much more comfortable with a church which is unsure of her spiritual foundations, and which denies her inheritance in Christ.

Initially we are told that the two witnesses "**will prophesy one thousand two hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth.**" Revelation 11:3. 1260 days, or 42 months, or 3½ years, or "**time and times and half a time**" are symbolic measures of the same period of time - a time of persecution and suffering. The sackcloth is a sign of mourning, and this description confirms that the two witnesses would preach repentance in a climate of disbelief and spiritual darkness.

After finishing their testimony through the long centuries since the demise of the early church, we are told that the two witnesses are overcome and killed. Their dead bodies lie exposed in the world for three and a half days, which is a further period of persecution, but this time cut

short. Finally however, we are told that **"after the three and a half days the breath of life from God entered them, and they stood on their feet, and great fear fell on those who saw them."** Revelation 11:11.

In spite of all the opposition, God's purposes cannot be prevented. In a miraculous resurrection the Spirit of God enters the two witnesses, and they stand on their feet. They begin to prophesy, and declare the revelation of the hidden purposes of God at this time.

REVELATION OF GOD'S PURPOSES

The word of God consistently promises further revelations at the close of the age. The prophet Daniel was told of a time of trouble and judgment. But then he was told to **"shut up the word, and seal the book until the time of the end; many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase."** Daniel 12:4. This suggests that some of the revelation of the end times have been withheld. It also suggests that at that time new knowledge will be revealed.

This 'sealing' of knowledge until the end time is repeated in John's prophecy in the book of Revelation. **"Now when the seven thunders uttered their voices, I was about to write; but I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, 'Seal up the things which the seven thunders uttered, and do not write them.'" Revelation 10:4.** John is then told that at the time of the sounding of the seventh and final trumpet all would be revealed. **"But in the days of the sounding of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound, the mystery of God would be finished, as He declared to His servants the prophets."** Revelation 10:7

This is the time that the two witnesses are standing on their feet. God is about to judge an unruly and unfaithful church. The ministry of the two witnesses is directed to the many devoted children of God who are imprisoned within the legalistic and barren walls of the apostate church. These believers have been unwittingly drawn into apostasy by the subtle deception of Antichrist.

Included in the revelation of the church corrupted by apostasy, there is a warning of God's impending judgment, and a call to repentance. With this revelation comes a decision for us all. **"Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision."** Joel 3:14. We are told to **"Come out of her, My people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues."** Revelation 18:4. The choice is clear. Either we repent and come out from the power of apostasy plaguing the church, or we face God's judgment.

IN SUMMARY

The two witnesses are the Lord God's chosen vessels raised up to declare His revelations at the end of the age. God is anointing certain of His servants with the spirit of prophecy which rested on Elijah, and the spirit of the living word of God which rested on Moses.

The ministry of the two witnesses is to all who profess to be Christians, as a preparation for the triumphant return of Christ to his Body. The two witnesses have been prepared with instructions to eat (or absorb) new revelations they have been given, so that those revelations become part of them.

The two witnesses have faced persecution in the past from a rebellious and apostate church, but now the Lord is standing them on their feet again. Their ministry, like that of John the Baptist, is a call to repentance, preparing the way for the Lord's return.

Chapter 2

ONE THOUSAND YEARS

KEY BIBLE READING

Rev 20:1-10 "Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished. But after these things he must be released for a little while. And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. Then I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years. Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number is as the sand of the sea. They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them. The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever."

A PERFECT AND COMPLETE TIME

The word 'millennium' is used by theologians to describe the thousand year period referred to in the Key Bible Reading. In studying the millennium it is not our intention to analyze the various theories that abound in this area and then declare our choice. Rather it is our intention to take a fresh look at the relevant scriptures.

The most significant feature of the Key Bible Reading is its consistent reference to this thousand year period. It is both a period during which Satan is bound away from deceiving the nations and a period when the saints are reigning with Christ. However it is not necessarily a literal measure of time.

In the earlier chapter on the two witnesses the principle of symbolic interpretation was established. Likewise in this chapter the key to unraveling the true meaning of these verses lies in abandoning a strictly literal or physical position. Symbolically one thousand years is a perfectly complete time.

This is illustrated in the apostle Peter's reference to 'a thousand years'. "**But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.**" 2 Peter 3:8-9

According to Peter, the actual length of the period of time was not the priority, but rather the purpose allotted to it. The "**thousand years**" was a full and complete time for that particular purpose to be fulfilled. This understanding is confirmed by the apostle Paul, who wrote that God's final judgment would be delayed "**until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.**" Romans 11:25.

We can now focus our attention on the specific purpose for the "**thousand years**" mentioned in the Key Bible Reading. Firstly it is apparent that Satan is bound from deceiving the nations during that time. Secondly there is the emergence of a group of people who have given up their own lives for the sake of Christ and the gospel. These people are said to be "**priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years.**" Their purpose as "**kings and priests**" (Revelation 5:10) is to establish Christ's kingdom on earth, and to bring lost souls into that kingdom.

The "**thousand years**" is the full and complete time required for all these things to take place. It is the full length of time designated by God to give mankind every opportunity to repent and receive salvation. It began with Christ's great atoning work on the cross, which bound Satan. It ends when Satan is released at the close of the church age, as part of God's judgment on "**the house of God**" (1Peter 4:17), and on the world.

SATAN IS BOUND BY CHRIST

Before establishing how Satan is bound during the age of salvation, it is important to establish who bound him. It is not difficult to identify the "**angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in His hand.**" Revelation 20:1. This angel is our Lord Jesus Christ. Only Christ has the key to the bottomless pit. "**I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive for evermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and death.**" Revelation 1:18.

Jesus came down from God specifically to bind and bring to nought the works of Satan. "**For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil.**" 1 John 3:8. Early in His ministry Jesus declared His purpose in binding Satan. "**Or else how can one enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house.**" Matthew 12:29.

Only Jesus had the spiritual chain with which to bind Satan. The act which forged that chain was the crucifixion at Calvary. Before the cross of Christ, Satan was able to stand before God and rightfully accuse mankind of sin and rebellion. After the cross Satan was bound, not so much by the cross, as the saints' knowledge of their righteousness by the cross.

The spiritual chain binding Satan is the saints' knowledge and declaration that the cross cancels out all claims made against them. No matter how accurate Satan's accusations are, there is now one infallible answer to them. 'I know I am a sinner, but Jesus Christ has paid my debt in full, in one mighty atoning work on the cross.' Satan has no answer to this. He is defeated by the knowledge of the cross of Jesus. He is bound and rendered powerless.

To ensure Satan's imprisonment Jesus "**set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished.**" Revelation 20:3. This seal is a seal of authority similar to those used in the ancient world. It was common for men in positions of power to place their personal seals on important documents, as a way of transferring their authority to the contents of those documents.

The seal Jesus set on Satan is the power and authority vested in His own name. "**Therefore God has also highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth.**" Philippians 2:9-10.

The use of the name of Jesus was to have a profound effect on the kingdom of Satan. Even before the cross and His resurrection, Jesus gave seventy of His disciples the authority to use His

name to heal the sick. **"Then the seventy returned with joy, saying 'Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name.'"** Luke 10:17. Looking ahead to the effect the use of His name would have on Satan's kingdom, Jesus replied, **"I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven."** Luke 10:18.

Jesus entrusted the authority to use His name to Peter first of all. **"And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."** Mathew 16:19. The **"keys of the kingdom of heaven"** are to bind the power of Satan and loose those who are in bondage to him.

Later, when Jesus was speaking to the disciples, He gave them, and subsequently the whole church, the keys of authority. **"Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven...For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them."** Matthew 18:18,20. The church has been authorised to declare the seal and so bind the operation of Satan.

BOUND FROM DECEIVING THE NATIONS

The word 'bound' has as its basis the thought of being constrained. This is illustrated by examining its use in other biblical passages. For example Jesus said, **"So ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has bound - think of it - for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath?"** Luke 13:16. Another example is provided by the apostle Paul, who said, **"I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem."** Acts 20:22.

Rather than being physically incarcerated, Satan has, by the cross of Christ, had spiritual limits put on him. The saints, or the church, are empowered to declare those limits by the use of Jesus' name. The extent to which Satan is bound therefore depends on the extent to which the church and its members testify to the power of the cross.

The agent of binding is the Holy Spirit. Jesus said, **"I cast out devils by the Spirit of God."** Matthew 12:28. Satan is actually bound now by the Holy Spirit. **"For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He (the Holy Spirit) who now restrains will do so until He is taken out of the way."** 2 Thessalonians 2:7. The Holy Spirit operates in binding Satan as believers testify to the truth of the cross.

The Holy Spirit testifies to the word. **"For there are three who bear witness in heaven; the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one."** 1John 5:7. Before the Holy Spirit can testify to the word, we must speak the word, and walk in the light of the word.

Before the crucifixion of Christ, Satan is called **"that serpent of old, called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world."** Revelation 12:9. Then Christ binds Satan **"and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished."** Revelation 20:3 The key concept here is Satan as the author of deception.

During the thousand years Satan is bound away from **"deceiving the nations."** He is not bound away and rendered inoperative. There is no 'kingdom reign' of bliss, free from all strife. Instead what is bound away is Satan's unlimited power to deceive. The chain that binds away this power of deception is the truth of the cross revealed to mankind.

A major difficulty in accepting that this age is **"the thousand years"** lies in our failure to appreciate that **"Satan is bound."** It is a consistent ploy of Satan to deceive people into thinking that their spiritual inheritance in Jesus is either in the past or in the future. For example it is suggested that the gifts of the Spirit were only for the early church, or that our physical healing is

to take place at some time in the future. It is therefore considered by many that Satan will be bound and that the saints will reign with Christ, but that this will take place at some time in the future.

The fact is that Satan is bound NOW, and the saints who wield the authority of the name of Jesus reign NOW. This claim may seem unrealistic when all the strife in the world and the disunity of the church are considered. However to test the claim that Satan is bound, it is useful to examine the spiritual facts in the light of history.

The spiritual reality is that before the cross Satan was the undisputed "**ruler of this world.**" John 14:30. Every nation, other than a small remnant of God's people in Israel, worshipped the devil in one form or other. Despite all the evidenced of God about them, the ancient world bowed down to the created rather than the Creator.

In the beginning God gave dominion or rulership of the earth and everything in it to mankind through Adam. "**Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over everything that creeps on the earth.'**" Genesis 1:26. However, when Adam rebelled against God's law in the garden of Eden, he fell into Satan's hands, and mankind's dominion over the earth fell with him.

Jesus acknowledged that Satan ruled the world when He was being tempted in the wilderness. Satan made what seems an extravagant claim that all worldly authority had been delivered into his hands, and that he could dispose of it as he willed. Jesus rebutted the temptation, but he did not deny the claim. "**Then the devil, taking Him up on a high mountain, showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said to Him, 'All this authority I will give you, and their glory; for this has been delivered to me and I give it to whoever I wish. Therefore, if you will worship before me, all will be yours.' And Jesus answered, and said to him, 'Get behind Me Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve.'**" Luke 4:5-8.

It is clear from these verses that since the fall of man in Adam, the whole world had been ruled by Satan. It was not until after Christ's mighty redeeming work on the cross that this situation was overcome. With Jesus' triumphant ascent from hell to His Father's throne a dramatic event took place in heaven.

"And war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer. So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him. Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, 'Now salvation and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down.'" Revelation 12:7-10.

The outcome of this war in heaven was that the accuser was cast down, defeated by the victorious cross of Christ. All of Satan's claims against man were now cancelled out by that one work of atonement at Calvary. Beforehand Satan had been able to consistently accuse mankind of sin and rebellion before the throne of God. Because God is a God of justice and righteousness, He had to admit Satan's claim as ruler of this world. But now that the full price of man's sin had been paid by Christ, Satan no longer had a legal position as "**the accuser of our brethren.**" God's demand for righteousness had been fulfilled and Satan was cast out of heaven, defeated by the cross of Jesus.

Prior to the cross, the whole world, apart from a small Jewish remnant, worshipped the devil through pagan gods or demon spirits. Because of the cross, Satan has no longer had the undisputed right to hold mankind in bondage to lies and deception. The truth of the gospel has opposed and overcome this kingdom of darkness to a great extent. Today the whole of the earth has been evangelised, and the worship of God is no longer limited to a few souls in the Middle East.

SATAN IS FINALLY RELEASED

The beginning of the one thousand year period is identified as the cross of Christ, when Satan was bound by the truth. Similarly the Key Bible Reading identifies the end of the thousand years. **"Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number is as the sand of the sea."** Revelation 20:7-8.

It has already been established that the thing that binds Satan for one thousand years is the truth of the gospel. In contrast, the withdrawing or obscuring of that truth is the things that looses him. A time of renewed deception is therefore prophesied at the end of the age.

This time of confusion and lies is a time of unrestrained attack on the truth. In the chapter on the 'two witnesses,' it has already been observed that both the spirit of prophecy and the word of God would be casualties. **"Now when (the two witnesses) finish their testimony, the beast that ascends out of the bottomless pit will make war against them, overcome them, and kill them."** Revelation 11:7.

The bible consistently forecasts a time of gross spiritual darkness prior to the end of the age and final judgment. **"The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord."** Joel 2:31. **"Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken."** Matthew 24:29.

The sun, the moon, and the stars are symbols of the glory of God revealed through the word and His prophets. It is not so much a case of the truth being withdrawn, as the truth being obscured and overwhelmed by thick clouds of deception. **"And he opened the bottomless pit, and smoke arose out of the pit like the smoke of a great furnace. And the sun and the air were darkened because of the smoke of the pit."** Revelation 9:2.

Satan is using this time of darkness to gather together his armies of opposition to the saints. By this same process the church is also being brought into the valley of decision. **"Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision."** Joel 3:14. As the difference between light and darkness becomes more appallingly apparent, we are being asked to choose between them.

Two processes are taking place simultaneously so that these issues are revealed. The light of revival on the one hand is burning bright in the true church as the power of Christ is being manifested. God promised, **"I will pour out My Spirit in those days."** Joel 2:29. Once again the saints are being filled with the power that quickened the early church.

On the other hand Satan's kingdom of darkness is being let loose so that his evil might be magnified. The light is getting lighter and the dark is getting darker. The false or apostate church is becoming more blatantly apostate as it fails to confront evil or shepherd the flock. The light of truth and the darkness of apostasy are openly contrasted before the believer. There is no escaping the decision.

THE OVERCOMERS

The vision contained in the Key Bible Reading presents two distinct companies of people. The first group is made up of **"those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God"** and who **"lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years."** Revelation 20:4. **The other group contains "the rest of the dead (who) did not live again until the thousand years were finished."** Revelation 20:5.

The first company are clearly believers who have been martyred for their witness to Christ. It is important to recall at this stage that the Book of Revelation relies on scriptural symbols to both obscure and reveal its message. The picture is therefore one of spiritual martyrs rather than those who are physically put to death.

The central concept is one of people losing their lives for Christ. Jesus said to His disciples, **"If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it."** Luke 9:32-24.

In order to have a new life in Christ, the believer must give up his old life to death. The soul life or self life of ego and self opinion has to be beheaded. The big 'I' has to be consigned to the cross so that the believer can declare with the apostle Paul, **"I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me."** Galatians 2:20.

The first company are living in the power of Christ rather than in their own strength. They know with certainty that God **"made us alive together with Christ...and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus."** Ephesians 2:5-6. The result of having died to self is that **"they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years."** Revelation 20:4.

These are the overcomers. They are a procession of saints down through the centuries who have learned to overcome the powers of darkness and reign with Christ. Their means of overcoming are quite specific. **"Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, 'Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night has been cast down. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death."** Revelation 12:10-11.

And they overcame him (1) **"by the blood of the Lamb."** The overcomers know the power of the cross of Jesus in canceling out all of Satan's claims against them. (2) **"(A)nd by the word of their testimony."** The overcomers use the word of God in the power of Jesus' name. (3) **"(A)nd they did not love their lives to the death."** The overcomers give up their lives for the sake of Christ and the gospel.

The raising of this first company to a position where they **"sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus"** is called **"the first resurrection."** Revelation 20:5. **"Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years."** Revelation 20:6. The overcomers have adopted the spiritual position that **"we have been united together in the likeness of His (Christ's) death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection."** Romans 6:5. Their first death was the death of their self life. The second death, which is that of their physical bodies, will have no power over them.

The second company of people are those who have not given up their lives for Christ's sake, and therefore have no part in the first resurrection. They **"did not live again until the thousand**

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