

Revelation

Part Fifty-Two
A Solitary Deliverer
(Revelation 20:7-10)

With Study Questions

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Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison ⁸ 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. ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ 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 (Revelation 20:7-10).

Introduction

We call the Bible the *Word of God*, though it was written through human agency (2 Timothy 3:16; Romans 1:1). Paul wrote Romans. Jude wrote Jude. The writers of Scripture were not machines, typewriters with God pounding the keys. They wrote organically. They wrote through their own personalities, styles, addressing personal relationships. It is a greater enigma than most realize.

The same can be said for evangelism. God chose His elect from the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4). Yet the means by which the elect would be brought in is through human agency-through the preaching of the word (Romans 10:17).

The same can be said for the redemption and transformation of the world. God has promised that all the ends of the earth shall turn to the Lord (Psalm 22:27). All the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea (Habakkuk 2:14). It is conveyed in the beautiful Christmas passage. A passage which is not unclear regarding the source of this transformation:

For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will

be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.⁷ Of the increase of *His* government and peace *There will be no end, Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, To order it and establish it with judgment and justice From that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this (Isaiah 9:6, 7).*

Yet this Christ-powered government, this kingdom that shall have no end, this nation which advances via the “**zeal of the Lord of hosts**” also involves human agency.

Christians are called “**ambassadors**” (2 Corinthians 5:20) when it comes to the interaction between the kingdom of God and the kingdoms of men. The means by which these glorious advances take place is through a “**kingdom of priests**” (Isaiah 61:6; Exodus 19:6; 1 Peter 2:9; Revelation 1:6; 5:10; 20:6).

So involved are we to be in the redemption and transformation of the world, that we might very well be tempted to think more highly of ourselves than we should (Romans 12:3) rather than soberly and sensibly, recognizing that any good thing found in us (including faith itself) is a gift from God (Hebrews 12:2).

We see, from time to time in Scripture, God protecting us from such folly. When Gideon was called to engage the massive Midianite army (of 135,000), God reduced his troops to three hundred. Why?

And the Lord said to Gideon, “The people who *are* with you *are* too many for Me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel claim glory for itself against Me, saying, ‘My own hand has saved me (Judges 7:2).’

All this that we might appreciate the ministerial exercise before us in this, what many consider, mystifying section of Scripture. Bold critics, often with a surface level grasp of theology, scoff at why in the world Revelation 20:7 even exists.

Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison (Revelation 20:7).

Satan Released

Satan doesn't escape. He's "**released**" (*lythesetai*-set free)! Why is Satan released one might ask. Why does he exist in the first place would also be a fair question.

This question presses us to think more deeply than most Christians wish to be pressed. In saying this, I am not seeking to set the world free, as if they don't have a more massive problem. For the problem of good and evil is not even a question the world (by world, I speak of those who seek to live in this world as if there is no God) is capable of asking. For the world, though having a sense of good and evil, can give no authoritative definition of which is which and why. But let us leave that for now.

It is exegetically (what we can extract from specific Scriptures) important at this point to note that this passage does not specifically tell us why Satan is released, other than to go about his usual business of deception. And here on a massive scale. But let it a goal here to grasp why God might do such a thing.

...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 20:8).

Gog and Magog

This great apostasy (turning away from God) is said to include "**Gog and Magog.**" This can be understood as the prince and his people. The rabbinical writings understand Gog and Magog to be the enemies of the Messiah¹.

Biblically this is taken from Ezekiel 38 and 39, referring to the savage and unbelieving nation from the north of Jerusalem. But here it appears to include an international force built to oppose the church. If we take a moment to survey Ezekiel 38 and 39 we might get an inkling (if not clear instruction) on why this battle takes place.

¹ In the Rabbinical writings Gog and Magog appear as the enemies of the Messiah; cf. the Jerusalem Targum on Num. 11:29 "Eldad et Medad (cf. Herm. vis. 2:3, Fabric. *cod. pseud. V. T.* 1. p. 801 ff.)¹

You will come up against my people Israel, like a cloud covering the land. In the latter days I will bring you against my land, that the nations may know me, when through you, O Gog, I vindicate my holiness before their eyes (Ezekiel 38:16).

So I will show my greatness and my holiness and make myself known in the eyes of many nations. Then they will know that I am the Lord (Ezekiel 38:23).

And my holy name I will make known in the midst of my people Israel, and I will not let my holy name be profaned anymore. And the nations shall know that I am the Lord, the Holy One in Israel. ⁸ Behold, it is coming and it will be brought about, declares the Lord God. That is the day of which I have spoken (Ezekiel 39:7, 8).

And this final passage almost sounds anticipatory of the New Covenant.

They shall forget their shame and all the treachery they have practiced against me, when they dwell securely in their land with none to make them afraid, ²⁷ when I have brought them back from the peoples and gathered them from their enemies' lands, and through them have vindicated my holiness in the sight of many nations. ²⁸ Then they shall know that I am the Lord their God, because I sent them into exile among the nations and then assembled them into their own land. I will leave none of them remaining among the nations anymore. ²⁹ And I will not hide my face anymore from them, when I pour out my Spirit upon the house of Israel, declares the Lord God (Ezekiel 39:26-29).

Everyone wants to be God. And none of us are good at it. And God will use extreme measures from time to time to remind us that He is God and that we aren't.

In a world where God, in His zeal, has done wonderful things through human, we are given one last reminder that apart from grace, love,

mercy and power of God, we have no chance. This is a good place for us to live. There is a territory that simply does not belong to the creature.

Many of us have experienced to emptiness and even embarrassment of seeking to be more than we are. I want to sound neither proud nor present a false humility when I say I was a good athlete. I was good enough to be on the field and court with great athletes. But I was not one of the great athletes. I had roommates and close friends who were Olympians. I was not one of them (at least in that capacity). And when they would gather in that capacity (say, at an event of Olympians) I would create an awkward environment if I sought to include myself. I just didn't belong there. How much less do any of us belong in the capacity of deity, of Godhood! When the triune God is in session, He is not looking for company.

And the difficulties and failures and vulnerabilities which encompass us are designed to remind us of that very thing. The Westminster Confession (5, 5, Of Providence) says it well.

The most wise, righteous, and gracious God doth oftentimes leave, for a season, his own children to manifold temptations, and the corruption of their own hearts, to chastise them for their former sins, or to discover unto them the hidden strength of corruption and deceitfulness of their hearts, that they may be humbled; and, to raise them to a more close and constant dependence for their support upon himself, and to make them more watchful against all future occasions of sin, and for sundry other just and holy ends.

It is quite possible that in this cosmic transformation of history through the advancement of the Gospel, mankind might begin to think to himself, the *Zeal of Man Has Performed This?* And yet we are given one more galactic example of human weakness apart from His divine hand. John paints a picture of a losing battle, an insurmountable force.

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 ¹⁰ 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 (Revelation 20:9, 10).

A Solitary Deliverer

And here all secondary means, all human agency, is removed that there will be no confusion. The fire comes straight from God and devours all that is evil in this world. This final revolt, as we shall see in the next section, will be followed by the final judgment.

It might be added here, over and against premillennialism, that this would hardly make sense for a glorified Christ and resurrected saints to be threatened by the death and destruction of Gog and Magog. It would also require a second humiliation of Christ which is highly problematic. And against amillennialism, when tends to a negative trajectory of history², a worldwide apostasy makes little sense in a world that is already apostate.

But so far from merely being an odd, confusing or polemical doctrine/portion of Scripture, this passage should be immensely ministerial. I will conclude by indicating a few ways.

First, it should ever prompt our hearts to stay close to Christ. Faithfulness is a spout of peace and strength. To live this life as if we can fruitfully be independent from Christ is a formula for all sorts of frustration and destruction.

There are certain plants/branches that, as they grow out from the vine, seek to attach themselves to the soil. But in doing so, the soil drains them and impedes the natural flow of strength that vine provides. The good farmer will, from time to time, yank those branches from the dirt, that they might be refreshed by the vine.

Although this passage speaks of a macrocosmic, universal apostasy at the end of history, we experience individual and microcosmic temptations in the course of our normal lives.

Second, it should be a reminder that there is no true prosperity in life, culture or nation if God is not the Lord. **“Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord” (Psalm 33:12)** does have its antithesis. A people rejecting the

² Postmillennialism gives a very optimistic view of what will happen on the earth. Amillennialism teaches just the opposite. Hendriksen in his *Commentary on Matthew and More than Conquerors* teaches that “The majority will ever be on the side of the evil one.” Kuyper claims the church will ever be as a little flock. W. J. Greer teaches that the world will not be converted. Jay Adams argues that the realized millennialism is not a golden period.

grace and wisdom of the Holy Triune God will be governed by fallen man. And this is a much-repeated failure in every conceivable way.

Finally, and perhaps more than all other ways, this is a blessing to know that when our eyes are truly opened to the nature of our condition, it is God and God alone who is our Deliverer.

I have, many times in this series, compared the transformation of the world to the transformation, or sanctification of our own lives. As Paul wrote, the **“whole creation groans and...we ourselves groan” (Romans 8:22, 23)**.

During the course of our generally healthy lives, we can begin to conclude that our co-partners with God. That God, as the bumper-sticker states, is my co-pilot. Or as the famous poster, Footprints, poetically but erroneously states, that sometimes there are two sets of footprints in the sands of my life and sometimes there is one set. And the one set is not when we're deserted by God but when He carries us.

The end of history will reveal that it was always the grace and power of God that delivers. And at the end of our individual lives, when the spotlight clears out all the shadows and it becomes manifestly obvious that we have nothing to offer, by either thought, word or deed, that this great battle, resulting in this eternal victory is won by Christ and by Christ alone.

Questions for Study

1. Explain how God uses human agency. What might we be tempted to think in light of God using us (pages 2, 3)?
2. What are some ways God teaches us not to be prideful (page 3)?
3. What is Gog and Magog and why is there this conflict (pages 4, 5)?
4. How does the Westminster Confession address God allowing us to be tempted (page 6)?
5. Can you think of some ministerial reasons attached to this passage (pages 7, 8)?