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*A Brief History of the
Bottomless Pit*

If the Biblical Enoch is indeed the author of the book bearing his name, one might well expect the book's contents to be consistent with the books of the Bible. Not only do we find the *Book of Enoch* to be consistent with the Bible, but as it turns out, familiarity with the contents of the book aids in understanding certain difficult passages of the Bible. Does this intriguing fact point to a familiarity with the *Book of Enoch* on the part of the writers of the Bible? Or, does it demonstrate the writer of the *Book of Enoch* and the writers of the Bible both received divine revelation?

There are quite a number of subjects in the Old and New Testaments concerning which the Biblical writers seem to assume a certain level of prior knowledge on the part of their readers. It is the lack of this prior knowledge in our own day which creates problems for us in understanding these texts. There are a surprising number of these 'problem passages' of Scripture which knowledge of the contents of the *Book of Enoch* effectively erases. Here are a few examples:

- The nature of the sin of the "sons of God" in Genesis 6 ⁶¹⁹
- The curious origin of the Old Testament giants ⁶²⁰
- The origin of demons not expressly explained in the Bible ⁶²¹
- The pervasive use by Christ of the term *Son of Man* ⁶²²
- The nature of the angels' sin mentioned in 2 Peter 2 and Jude
- The reason the angels are imprisoned in 2 Peter and Jude
- The sending of the scapegoat to "Azazel" in Leviticus 16 ⁶²³
- The identity of the seven angels in Ezekiel and Revelation
- Jude's classifying of Enoch as one of the prophets

If one is not familiar with the contents of the *Book of Enoch* each of the above-mentioned subjects poses questions which cannot be definitively answered from the 66 books of the Bible. If one is willing to refer to the *Book of Enoch* on these questions, however, none of these examples poses serious problems. Modern readers do well to bear in mind, at the time of Christ, the subject matter of the *Book of Enoch* was well-known and could have provided a well-spring of conceptual background for readers and hearers of the Scriptures in first-century Israel.

⁶¹⁹ Discussed at length in chapter 5 of this book.

⁶²⁰ Discussed at length in chapters 5 and 6 of this book.

⁶²¹ Explained in Enoch 15:8-16:1

⁶²² Discussed in chapter 2 of this book.

⁶²³ Explained in chapter 9 of this book.

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To this above-referenced list we can now add another curiosity from the New Testament:

- The *Book of Revelation's* unique mention of a "bottomless pit" is another example of how knowledge of the content of the *Book of Enoch* helps our understanding.

Out of nowhere, it seems, the *Book of Revelation* speaks of a curious region in the bowels of the earth called the "bottomless pit." The *Book of Revelation* refers to this bottomless pit six times, and in most English translations, the term "bottomless pit" does not appear in the other books of the Bible outside of the *Book of Revelation*.⁶²⁴ In that light, it is all the more curious that when John wrote Revelation, he spent no time explaining the idea to his readers. John seems to assume prior knowledge of a place called the bottomless pit on the part of his readers.

The first mention of such a bottomless region inside the earth is found in Enoch.

Bind Azazel hand and foot, and cast him into the darkness: and make *an opening in the desert*, which is in Dudael,⁶²⁵ and cast him therein. (Enoch 10:4)

Bind them fast for seventy generations *in the valleys of the earth*. (Enoch 10:12)

The sinning angels are bound and then cast into "an opening in the desert" also referred to as the "valleys of the earth." Though these passages do not speak of the *bottomless* nature of the pit into which the angels are cast they provide the basis for a developing concept. Later we read,

I saw a place which had no firmament of the heaven above, and no firmly founded earth beneath it: there was no water upon it, and no birds, but it was a waste and horrible place. (Enoch 18:12)

Enoch sees a horrible place with no firmly founded earth beneath it. The angel informs Enoch, "*This place is the end of heaven and earth: this has become a prison for the stars and the host of heaven.*" (Enoch 18:4) Elsewhere in the *Book of Enoch*, this locale in the heart of the earth is called the "Abyss."

On one occasion in Luke's gospel, the demons which Christ confronts seem to have prior knowledge of such an abyss.

Jesus then asked him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Legion," for many demons had entered him. And *they begged*

⁶²⁴ The New Living Translation uses the term "Bottomless Pit" in Luke 8:31

⁶²⁵ The specific location of Dudael is lost to history.

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him not to command them to depart into the Abyss. (Luke 8:30-31)

What Enoch referred to as an abyss without firmly founded earth beneath, John calls the bottomless pit. It is interesting to note, the Greek word used by John, which most translations of the *Book of Revelation* render as the bottomless pit, is 'Abussos', or *abyss*.

In Enoch we discover this abyss is a temporary prison in the bowels of the earth in which some evil spirits and fallen angels are bound. As it turns out, this happens to be an apt description of how we see the bottomless pit functioning in the *Book of Revelation*. In the *Book of Revelation*, the bottomless pit is alternately shown being used to confine⁶²⁶ or else release⁶²⁷ evil beings upon the earth.

On closer examination, there are other references to the abyss besides those in Enoch and Revelation. Taking all these and other references together, we are ready to build a kind of timeline, or a brief history of the bottomless pit...

From the Beginning

The first mention of the Biblical Bottomless pit, the abyss, may actually be Genesis chapter 1.

In most of our English Bibles, the rendering of the Hebrew text of Genesis 1:2, reads like this, "*and darkness was over the face of the deep.*" This is how modern translators of the Hebrew render it. However, Jewish scholars in ancient times have left us clues as to how the word was understood originally. Hundreds of years before the first Christians, while translating the Bible into Greek,⁶²⁸ Jewish translators of Genesis translated the above passage like this, "*and darkness was over the abyss*" (NETS). What was destined to become an earthbound place of spiritual punishment was apparently being prepared right from the beginning.

"Chains of Gloomy Darkness"

The sinning angels in the *Book of Enoch* were placed in the abyss and its opening was subsequently covered over, thus obscuring its location.

Bind Azazel hand and foot, and cast him into the darkness: and make an opening in the desert, which is in Dudael, and cast him therein. And *place upon him rough and jagged rocks, and cover*

⁶²⁶ Revelation 20:1-3

⁶²⁷ Revelation 9:1-10, 11:7, and 17:8

⁶²⁸ The Septuagint is a translation of the Old Testament into Greek. It was made by Jews for Jews before the Christian era. Among the reasons the Septuagint is useful for Bible study today is because it can reveal how Jews in ancient times interpreted certain passages of Scripture.

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him with darkness, and let him abide there forever, and cover his face that he may not see light. (Enoch 10:4-5)

In the New Testament, Peter and Jude seem to be elaborating upon this same subject.

God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to *chains of gloomy darkness* to be kept until the judgment. (2 Peter 2:4)

The angels who did not stay within their own position of authority, but left their proper dwelling, he has kept in *eternal chains under gloomy darkness* until the judgment of the great day. (Jude 1:6)

The Abyss in Prophecy

The surface of our earth is pock-marked with crevices and abysses, some of which are man-made, and others which are naturally occurring. These can be seen as examples of the earth's ability to sustain and sometimes conceal deep holes, and these can help give us an idea what the opening to the Biblical abyss, or bottomless pit, may be like.

Something which can be observed from the behavior of sinkholes is that for millennia the earth can sustain huge holes in its mantle which are not visible from its surface. Without notice, suddenly, these can open up and wreak havoc. The abyss in Scripture is to have such a future in the sequence of prophetic events. Consider Revelation chapter 9:

The fifth angel blew his trumpet, and I saw a star fallen from heaven to earth, and he was given the key to the shaft of the bottomless pit. He opened the shaft of the bottomless pit, and from the shaft rose smoke like the smoke of a great furnace, and the sun and the air were darkened with the smoke from the shaft. Then from the smoke came locusts on the earth, and they were given power like the power of scorpions of the earth. They were told not to harm the grass of the earth or any green plant or any tree, but only those people who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads. They were allowed to torment them for five months, but not to kill them, and their torment was like the torment of a scorpion when it stings someone. And in those days people will seek death and will not find it. They will long to die, but death will flee from them.

In appearance the locusts were like horses prepared for battle: on their heads were what looked like crowns of gold; their faces were like human faces, their hair like women's hair, and their teeth like lions' teeth; they had breastplates like breastplates of iron, and the noise of their wings was like the noise of many chariots with horses rushing into battle. They have tails and stings like scorpions, and their power to hurt people for five

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months is in their tails. They have as king over them the angel of the bottomless pit. His name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Greek he is called Apollyon. (Revelation 9:1-11)

In the passage above, the bottomless pit is shown as a temporary holding place for unclean spirits and other kinds of spiritual evil. According to John, at some future time hordes of those evil creatures will be released to wreak havoc on earth under the guidance and direction of an evil angel.

At the Second-coming of Christ, the bottomless pit is to be employed yet again for the purpose of a temporary prison for evil.

On that day the LORD will punish the host of heaven, in heaven, and the kings of the earth, on the earth. They will be gathered together as prisoners in a pit; they will be shut up in a prison, and after many days they will be punished. (Isaiah 24:21-22)

In Isaiah it is the world rulers and additional sinning angels who will be imprisoned at the time of Christ's return. John gives us more detail and discusses the coming imprisonment of Satan himself.

I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he might not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be released for a little while. (Revelation 20:1-3)

When the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison and will come out to deceive the nations that are at the four corners of the earth. (Revelation 20:7-8)

After the return of Christ, the bottomless pit will become the temporary holding cell of Satan himself. After 1,000 years of Christ's earthly rule, Satan will again be allowed to rise from the abyss and deceive mankind, according to Revelation 20. Then comes the last judgment. Satan and all those whose names are not found in the *Lamb's Book of Life* will be cast into the lake of fire which is neither temporary nor is it a place from which anyone can return.

Accepting what we have discussed to this point, the history of the bottomless pit can be viewed in the following seven stages, or epochs:

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The Seven Epochs of the Bottomless Pit

1. Created empty according to the *Book of Genesis* (Genesis 1:2).
2. Becomes a prison for sinning angels (Enoch 10:4).
3. Is also used as a prison for certain demons (Luke 8:30-31).
4. Will be opened in the last days to release demons, evil angels, and the Antichrist (Rev. 9:1-11, 11:7, and 17:8).
5. Will become a prison for Satan himself (Revelation 20:1-3).
6. Will be opened to release Satan for a time (Revelation 20:7-8).
7. All who are in it will be thrown into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:7-15).

Now that the time of final judgment has come, all those who remain in the Bottomless Pit are thrown into the lake of fire. The purpose for which the bottomless pit existed will no longer be needed. Having run its course its history is now finished. Just so ends the history of the bottomless pit. Enoch's message of judgment, which he had once delivered to the Watcher-angels so long ago, is now fulfilled, for the final condemnation of the Watchers who sinned has arrived.