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1000 Years

By Bryan Hodge

“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... and bound him for a thousand years... so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished” (Revelation 20:1-3).

Satan is bound in some way. However, we should understand that one may be bound and still have some power or influence. Example: Paul was bound (Colossians 4:3), yet was still able to proclaim the Gospel (Acts 28:31; Philippians 1:12-14), and convert a soul (Philemon 10). Example: A dog may be bound with a chain. However, if one ventures inside the length of that chain, then he might find that the dog still has power. Example: A woman is bound to her husband (Romans 7:2; 1 Corinthians 7:39), and a man to his wife (1 Corinthians 7:27). This does not mean that they are restricted in every way, but they are restricted in some sense. They are not free to marry another.

In what respect was Satan bound? In everything? No. The reference is that he would be restricted from deceiving the nations into a wide-spread persecution of Christians (Revelation 20:3 cf. 20:7-10).

The thousand years are not to be taken as a literal length of time. No one that I know takes the great chain or keys as literal. Foy Wallace, Jr. commented, “There are twenty figures of speech in the nineteenth and twentieth chapters alone. In a series of symbols such as these, it is not reasonable to make a literal application of the thousand years and a figurative application of all the rest of the symbols, without a contextual or historical reason for doing so” (The Book of Revelation, p. 403).

The term “thousand” simply denotes many years, or a long period of time (cf. Deuteronomy 7:9; Psalm 50:10; Psalm 90:4). My understanding is – the church was going to come out of persecution and experience a long unprecedented period of relative peace (cf. Revelation 19:19, 20).

“And I saw thrones, 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... and they lived and reigned for a thousand years” (Revelation 20:4).

Notice what this does not say. It does not mention Christ’s second coming. It does not mention human bodies reigning with Jesus on this earth. It does not say anything about Jesus living on earth. Instead, this pictures the petition of the martyrs being granted (cf. Revelation 6:9-10). It pictures the cause of Christ triumphing.

“But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished” (Revelation 20:5).

This is not referring to the resurrection from the grave (John 5:28-29). Such will occur for both the righteous and unrighteous in the same “hour,” not a thousand years apart, or a thousand and seven years apart.

This is referring to the fact that the cause of the unrighteous does not live again until the thousand years are finished. This fits the context (cf. Revelation 20:7).

“Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations... the devil... was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone” (Revelation 20:7-10).

This may refer to difficult and wicked times returning before the end. James Burton Coffman commented, “Very near the end, faith shall practically vanish from the earth. When the son or man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?” (Luke 18:8)” (Commentary on Revelation, p. 415).

However, Satan will be defeated in the end. We should always remember this.

“Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power? (Revelation 20:6).

Two deaths are implied. The second death refers to eternal separation from God (cf. Revelation 20:12-14). The first death, no doubt, refers to physical death.

Two resurrections are implied. The first does not refer to the resurrection from the grave (Revelation 20:4 cf. 20:5b-6). It refers to the ones who overcome (Revelation 2:11 cf. 20:6), and were honored. Foy Wallace Jr. remarked, “Just as Israel’s deliverance from the bondage of Babylon was referred to in Ezekiel 37 as a resurrection out of their grave; and the broken dominion of the lords was a resurrection from oppression, of Isaiah 26; so overcoming these persecutions, triumphing over death and martyrdom, in the victorious cause of Christ, was called a resurrection in Revelation 20.” (The Book of Revelation, p. 415-f). The second resurrection no doubt refers to the resurrection from the grave.