

“The Thousand Years”

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(Adapted from a lesson presented at the 2017 Kentucky Indiana Christian Fellowship.)

The text for this lesson is Revelation 20:1-7. The expression “the thousand years” appears six times in these seven verses and we are going to be looking at these in some detail. There are **five important truths** concerning the thousand years that I want to call to your attention.

I. The thousand years is the period of time for Satan to be bound (20:1-3, 7). **(A)** It begins with the devil's confinement (and ends with his release). As the chapter opens, we see that an angel from heaven is taking action against the devil. Let's look at these **(1) five actions of the angel**.

(a) First, we see that the angel seizes or lays hold of the devil (20:2). There should be no doubt as to who is being bound here. We are given four titles or names of this one. It is “the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan.” The Lord is explicit in this identification so this should be indisputable.

Who, then, is this angel? There are those who make the case that this is the Lord Jesus. This may be correct, but our text does not *require* such a conclusion in order to be understood. This angel is not even identified as “strong” or “mighty” as we see elsewhere in the book of Revelation (5:2; 10:1; 18:21). Here, this is *just* an angel, unidentified – if it is fitting to use such an expression as “just an angel” in light of what the Bible reveals about the nature of angels! In any case, there are two things we know about this angel. (1) He comes from heaven and (2) he is equipped with sufficient authority and strength to do what God has sent him to do.

The main point I want to emphasize here is that this process of binding Satan, beginning in this very first action, does not depend on or involve human agents! It is not the preaching of the Gospel or the believing of the Gospel nor the faithfulness of Christians or the unfaithfulness of Christians that determines here whether the devil is bound or not bound. All action here comes from God. The key, the chain, and the angel all come from heaven. This is all God's doing; He is taking charge here. He is the one responsible for binding the devil and putting him in the abyss, the prison house, and keeping him there for a thousand years. Men are not involved with this and I emphasize that because such is often an interpretation that is given concerning *how* the devil is bound. Men do not have anything to do with this.

(b) Second, the angel binds the devil (for a thousand years) (20:2). This is the purpose for the chain (20:1). Now, immediately, someone may ask, “Well, what kind of chain is this? How can a chain bind someone like the devil, a spirit being?” or raise some similar objection. All we know about this chain is what the Scriptures tell us. It is a “great” chain (*mega*, Greek) and the angel brings it from heaven. Therefore, it is a chain which is sufficient for the task at hand! *That* is all we really need to know.

John calls it a chain. It looks something like a chain. I don't know what it's made of and I don't know exactly how it works, but I am fully confident that it is not a problem for God to make some kind of chain that can bind the devil. Do we really need to question that? Surely God is able to do that. This chain serves the same purpose for the devil as an iron chain would serve for a man. We can understand that. We may not know exactly what kind of chain it is, but we can know the literal meaning which is that the angel will use it to bind Satan and restrict him.

In Jude 6, we are told that God has kept disobedient angels “in everlasting bonds (“chains” in some translations) under darkness unto the judgment of the great day.” The “bonds” (or “chains”) of Jude 6 and the “chain” of Revelation 20:1 are translated from two different Greek words, but the chain that God uses for the devil could be a restraint which is similar to those He is now using on the disobedient angels of Jude 6.

God has provided the means sufficient for binding the devil and in some way his freedom, his movement, and his power are greatly restricted as a result of this chain!

(c) **Third**, the angel casts the devil into the abyss (“bottomless pit” in some translations) (20:3). The devil is held in the abyss (for one thousand years) until he is released for a short time. The abyss should not be mistaken for the lake of fire; those are two different things. The lake of fire will come later for the devil (20:10).

The abyss is mentioned earlier in the book of Revelation (9:11; 11:7; *et al.*). This is some type of prison and undesirable place for the demons. The demons of Luke, chapter 8, begged Jesus repeatedly not to order them to go into the abyss and so Jesus permitted them to enter the swine nearby. The abyss has an entrance with a key (and a lock) (9:1-2). It will now become a prison for the devil.

(d) **Fourth**, the angel locks or shuts up the devil (20:3). This is the purpose for the key possessed by the angel (20:1). Again, like the chain, the key (and the lock) would not be identical in makeup to those that men use, but we can understand the literal *idea* that these words convey. The devil is going to be confined in a way fit for him just as a human prisoner is who is locked away in a penitentiary. This key, which implies a lock, is going to be sufficient for the purpose of locking the devil behind the closed door of the abyss. The devil's freedom, activity, and power is even further restricted now with this imprisonment.

(e) **Fifth**, the angel seals it over (20:3). Some older translations say that the angel put a seal on *him*, that is, the devil. Such a thing would seem to be possible. In Revelation 7:1-8, we read that certain servants of God are sealed, in part, for their protection (9:4). In Ephesians 1:13, Paul reminds us that God has sealed Christians with the Holy Spirit. A seal is something that shows the authority of the one who did the sealing and it is also that which only one with authority can rightly remove or break. Perhaps God could put a seal on the devil and this would indicate the devil's inability to resume his activity until the seal is removed. This thought would certainly fit the context.

However, the better translation seems to be that the angel seals the *abyss* or the entrance to the abyss. The abyss is both shut (locked) AND sealed. This is illustrated in part when the tomb of Jesus was sealed (Matthew 27:66). Here we have the same Greek word (*sphragizo*) and the same idea is present. The stone covers the entrance to the tomb and then, further, it is sealed. The angel closes the door on the abyss, he locks it, and he seals it. The outcome of this is that there will be no going or coming for the devil for one thousand years! He is bound personally. He is put in prison; the door is shut and locked and sealed. God has the key and that's the end of that matter for one thousand years.

Now, let us consider the outcome or **(2) result of these five actions of the angel**. (a) **First**, we see that the devil is both bound AND imprisoned. This situation is partly illustrated by an event in the life of Peter (Acts 12:6). If you will recall, he was bound (in his case with *two* chains); he was between two guards and he was also in prison (with additional guards at the door). He was, at least, *doubly* bound. (That was not a problem, of course, for God to get him out.) The arrangement for the devil is similar.

The devil is personally bound and also locked away in prison. In his case there will be no escape; the chain and the lock will not fail; the door is sealed by God. As such, he is removed from heaven's and earth's activities. He is made to be inactive; he cannot have access to men and men do not have access to him. The door is shut, locked, and sealed.

It should now be evident that the devil is NOT bound in the same way that a dog is bound when it is chained to a stake. This common illustration proposes that God has bound (chained) the devil to a limited area of activity and, like the dog, he is bound to all those who do not venture into his territory. The dog-chained-to-a-stake illustration may have some application regarding Christians dealing with temptation, but it has nothing to do whatsoever with what we see described here in these verses about the binding of Satan. It does not illustrate what it claims to illustrate. In these verses we see that the devil is completely removed from men's affairs when he is bound.

(b) Second, while the devil is bound for one thousand years he will not deceive the nations (20:3). He can no longer blind their minds (2 Corinthians 4:4). He can no longer appear as “an angel of light” (2 Corinthians 11:14). This “deceiver of the whole world” (Revelation 12:9) can no longer ply his trade because he is in jail. He is locked up, shut up, and there is no access to him and no way for him to get out! It is with this binding of Satan that the thousand years begins.

(B) The thousand years end with the devil's release. In verse 3, we read that the devil “must” be released for a “short time” (or a “little season”). We are not told *why* he must be released. Based on what transpires when he *is* released, it seems reasonable to conclude that it is to test those who are born during this thousand-year period. Nevertheless, he is to be released to satisfy some purpose of God, whatever that might be.

(1) The result of the devil's release is seen in verses 7 and 8. He immediately returns to deceiving the nations and continues his war with God. Most of you are familiar with the “pause” button which can be found on nearly all of our modern electronic gadgets. You know how it works; you can put your video or your music on hold and return to it later. When you come back, you touch the correct button and your device picks up exactly where you left off. Regarding the events of our text, it's as if the “pause” button is hit for the devil when he is put in the abyss for one thousand years and then hit again to proceed when he is released. He picks up exactly where he left off. He is *unchained* and *unchanged* even after one thousand years.

(2) Further, the unregenerate hearts of countless people are exposed at this time. Many, “as the sand of the sea,” rebel and join with the devil in his ongoing battle against God. Jeremiah 17:9 says, “The heart is deceitful above all things and *beyond cure*.” These hearts that have not been changed by Jesus Christ are ready to accept what the devil has to say and join with him. This is in spite of the perfect rule and the perfect justice they have known for a thousand years; this, in spite of a world freed from its curse and one freed from the control of Satan. Everything is just wonderful for one thousand years and what do many make of it? Not even a perfect environment is enough to cause them to trust God above all other things. As soon as their wicked hearts are able, they will join with the devil proving yet again that Jesus is our only hope and Savior. If men do not allow Jesus to change their heart, there is no other recourse for them.

(C) At this point a question might naturally arise, “Is the devil currently bound or is this still future?” **(1)** Certainly there are *limitations* on the devil's activity at the present time. For example, **(a)** Christians are instructed to “resist the devil and he will flee from you.” (James 4:7) **(b)** We know that we have the armor of God including the shield of faith which we can use against the devil to quench his fiery arrows or darts (Ephesians 6:10-17). **(c)** Paul reminds us that “we are not ignorant of his devices” (2 Corinthians 2:11). That knowledge is to help us cope with the devil and protect ourselves from falling into temptation and so on. **(d)** And John reassures us with these words: “He who has been born of God keeps himself, and the wicked one does not touch him” (1 John 5:18). **(e)** Without a doubt, the devil can go no further than God will allow or tolerate (see Job 1:12; 2:6, for example).

(2) We know the devil's final defeat is assured by **(a)** the promise of God (Genesis 3:15) and **(b)** the work of Jesus. “The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work.” (1 John 3:8) and through His death “He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil” (Hebrews 2:14).

(3) However, the question remains, “Is the devil bound *now* as described in Revelation 20:1-3?” I look at the world about me and I am amazed and astonished at how wicked things have become. We think surely no one could think the devil is bound. Yet, the fellow who thinks the devil *is* bound looks at these same things that I look at, he sees the same wickedness, and he says, “Just think how bad it would be if the devil was *not* bound!”

(4) So, we can't answer this question just by looking at world events and our environment. The only way is to go to the Scriptures and I am going to tell you right up front that the Scriptures reveal that the devil is NOT bound at this present time. Please consider the following passages:

(a) Peter tells us that the devil is our enemy and he “*prowls around like a roaring lion* looking for someone to devour” (1 Peter 5:8). Does that sound like one who is bound inside a prison house with the door locked and sealed? It is the very opposite of that. Does Peter’s description of the devil’s behavior even agree with the dog-chained-to-a-stake illustration?

(b) Paul instructed Timothy about those who need to be taught the truth so “that they will come to their senses and escape from *the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will*” (2 Timothy 2:26). The devil is still laying his traps and taking men captive to his will. This is not the action of one who has been cut off from contact with men.

(c) According to Ephesians 2:2, “the prince of the power of the air [*i.e., the devil*] ... *now works* in the sons of disobedience.” These are those of the world, not Christians. The devil is at work *now* in this age.

(d) In 2 Corinthians 4:4, Paul says, “The *god of this age*” – he is talking about the devil and we know that from the description which follows – “has *blinded the minds of unbelievers*, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.” First, we see that the devil is called “the god of this age;” he is exercising authority and power *at this present time*. He has some measure of control over unbelievers (nations). Second, we learn what he is doing. He is blinding their minds to the Gospel; he is *deceiving* them! He is quite active and *not* bound.

(e) And John writes, “the whole world is *under the control* of the evil one” (1 John 5:19). It is the world that includes all those who are not children of God (see context). The devil is actively controlling these people or nations. This is hardly the behavior of one who is bound in the way John describes in Revelation 20:1-3.

(5) Now let's review that binding of Satan one last time. For what purpose was he was bound? John gives a very specific reason: “so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished.” So, if he is bound, he is not deceiving the nations; if he is deceiving the nations, he is not bound. He cannot both be bound, unable to deceive the nations, AND, at the same time, be deceiving the nations. It should be evident from the foregoing Bible verses (2 Corinthians 4:4; 1 John 5:19; *et al.*) that the devil is *actively engaged in deceiving the nations*. It should also be evident that his current behavior is not that of one who is bound and placed in prison behind a locked and sealed door. So, we may rightly conclude that the devil is *not bound at this present time* and that this is still a future event.

II. The thousand years is the period of time for the reign of Christ (20:4, 6). Please notice that this reign coincides with the binding of Satan. These are coextensive events; at the same time that the devil is bound, Christ is reigning. Once the pretender has been removed from the throne, the true King assumes His rightful place on that throne.

(A) We are told very little about the reign of Christ in these verses, but it is described in great detail elsewhere in the Bible. To suggest that the millennial (thousand years) reign of Christ is found only here in the Scriptures is to overlook a large portion of the Word of God. The main detail we get from these verses is the *duration* of that reign – one thousand years.

(1) Peter, in his sermon in Acts 3, speaking concerning the “restoration of all things” (the reign of Christ, the millennial age), declares that these things God “promised long ago through his holy prophets” (3:21). Indeed, when we go to the pages of the Old Testament, we can find prophet after prophet giving us many details concerning that millennial reign. Additional insights are to be found in our New Testament books as well.

(2) Of course, it is well beyond the scope of this present lesson to pursue these details further. However, before moving on I will refer you to a passage from Jeremiah. “The days are coming,

declares the Lord, when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land” (25:5-6).

(B) Now, as we continue, we read about those who reign *with* Christ. It is *His* reign, but who are these who reign with Him? (1) Let us look first at our text.

(a) In verse 4a, we are told “they” sat on thrones (“those,” NIV). But who are “they?” The antecedent is found in the preceding chapter (19:19) where we learn that it is “His [Christ’s] army” that is in view. So, what more can we learn about “His army”? That leads us further back (19:14) where we learn that His army is dressed “in fine linen, white and clean, and follow Him on white horses.” If we take just one more step back (19:7-8), we will get the identity of these who are described in verse 14 and the “they” in 20:4a where we started. It is the Bride of Christ, the Church; it is the Church that will reign with Him.

(b) In verse 4b, John calls attention to a special group who will reign with Christ. These are those who suffered greatly for their faith and were martyred during the Great Tribulation. Here we learn that these Tribulation saints will also share in the reign of Christ.

(c) Then John tells us in verse 6 that everyone who has a part in the first resurrection will reign with Him for a thousand years.

(2) That Christians will reign with Christ is taught in other Bible passages as well. For example, consider Paul’s reminder to Timothy: “If we endure, we shall also reign with Him” (2 Timothy 2:12). We are looking forward to that. In the letter to Laodicea, Jesus promises, “To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My father on His throne” (Revelation 3:21).

(C) At this point someone may ask, “Is Christ reigning now?” or “Are we reigning now?” (1) It is true and we affirm that Christ Jesus has been “highly exalted” and given “the name above every name” (Philippians 2:9) and He has been given “all authority” (Matthew 28:18). He is seated at “the right hand of God” (Colossians 3:1; Ephesians 1:20) on the Father’s throne (Revelation 3:21) “far above all rule and authority and power and dominion” (Ephesians 1:21) with “angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him” (1 Peter 3:22).

(2) However, for the time being, He is not *fully exercising* all that authority. He is a king in waiting.

(a) A pretender (Satan) is still on the throne (2 Corinthians 4:4) and is still in active rebellion. We have addressed this point earlier. (b) The nations are not yet obedient to the authority of Christ (1 John 5:19). (c) One day He *will* reign (Revelation 11:15) and will do so on His own throne (Revelation 3:21), but, in the context of the question, we can answer that He is *not* now reigning.

(3) And, of course, if Christ is not reigning now, then *we* are not reigning now. *Now* is the time of our enduring (2 Timothy 2:12). *Now* is the time of our overcoming (Revelation 3:21). The apostle Paul mocked and rebuked Christians at Corinth because they were acting as if they were already reigning (1 Corinthians 4:8). To paraphrase, he says, “I wish it were so! If it were so, I would be reigning with you, but it is not so.” The Corinthians were not truly reigning then (though they were acting as if they were) and we cannot be reigning now because Christ is not reigning now.

III. The thousand years is the period of time separating two resurrections (20:5). (A) In verse 5, John introduces the term “**the first resurrection.**” (1) He is referring to those who have just been mentioned in the latter part of verse 4. It is “they” who “lived” or “came to life” who are a part of this first resurrection.

(a) When John writes this term, “the first resurrection,” he uses the usual Greek word (*anastasis*) for “resurrection,” but concerning those who “lived” or “came to life,” he uses another word (*zao*). Some have put forth the idea that this is not a *physical* resurrection of bodies, but rather some type of *spiritual* resurrection.

(b) However, by looking at the context, it should be apparent that a bodily resurrection is in view. We see in verse 5a, that “the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were

finished.” I think it is almost universally accepted (among conservatives) that *this* is a bodily resurrection. The same word (*zao*) is used for *both* resurrected groups.

(c) This same word is used in other Bible passages where it is clearly used to mean a physical, bodily resurrection. In Revelation 1:18, Jesus says, “I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive (*zao*) forevermore.” Also, in 2:8, Jesus identifies Himself as “the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life (*zao*).” Again, this same word is used regarding those who “came to life” (20:4c); it is a physical, bodily resurrection; they are a part of the first resurrection.

(2) Now we come to the question, “Who *are* these who are a part of the first resurrection?” In verse 6 we read, “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.” (a) From this it should be clear these are *saved* individuals. (i) They are “blessed” and “holy” (*saints!*). (ii) They are not subject to the second death (*i.e.*, the lake of fire, 20:14). (iii) They are priests of God and reign with Christ.

(b) There is *more* that we know about these. This part has already been addressed earlier in this lesson, but I want to add another detail at this point. (i) If you will recall, this group was identified as the Bride of Christ, the Church. These are resurrected when Jesus returns FOR His church (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17) *before* the Great Tribulation. (ii) Then, as was pointed out previously, there are some here who were martyred *during* the Great Tribulation (20:4b). They are also resurrected, but at some point *after* the “dead in Christ” that Paul writes about in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17. However, please understand that *both* groups are a part of the first resurrection.

(3) On this last point someone may challenge, “How can that be called the first resurrection? There are *two* resurrections here!” In response, let me point out that it is essential to understand that the “first resurrection” is not a one-time event, but rather it is a *category* within the larger group of *all* who will be resurrected (which includes the unrighteous). Only select individuals are included in this “first resurrection” group; only the righteous, the saved, will have a part. It is the name for the group of all the resurrected saved ones even though they are not all resurrected at the same time.

Please listen to what Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15:22-23, “...in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own *order*: Christ the first fruits, afterward those who are Christ’s at His coming.” Here we learn that all of the righteous are not resurrected at the same time, but in orders or ranks. In Revelation 20:4-5 we are given a little more insight about that. Nevertheless, all the righteous are a part of the first resurrection (group).

(B) There is another resurrection that we read about in our text (20:5). It is described simply as “**the rest of the dead.**” They come to life after the thousand years are finished. We learn more about this group later in this same chapter (20:12-13). (1) Twice in these two verses, once in each verse, we are told that these resurrected ones are judged *according* to their works. That is an important detail; don’t overlook it. This helps us understand who these are. (2) When they are judged by God *according* to their works that means their salvation, their eternal life, depends on the works they have done. That is, they have to have enough good works to secure their salvation. Who can survive such a judgment? *No one* can survive that judgment! (3) Since these are judged *according* to their works, they cannot possibly be saved. Their works will fail them; it is impossible for them to earn their salvation by their good deeds. These are those who are unsaved and lost! Their names will not be found in the Book of Life and they are cast into the lake of fire (20:15).

(C) So, in verse 5, we read about *two* distinct resurrections. One is “the first resurrection” which is a resurrection of the righteous; the other is “the rest of the dead” which is a resurrection of the unrighteous. (1) This, as we would expect, fits with other passages that come earlier in God’s Word.

(a) For example, in John 5:29, Jesus tells us about a “resurrection of life” and a “resurrection of condemnation.”

(b) In his defense before Felix, Paul acknowledges his belief in a resurrection of the “just and the unjust” (“the righteous and the wicked,” NIV) (Acts 24:15).

(c) In Philippians 3:11, Paul expresses his desire to “attain to the resurrection from the dead.”

(i) Since everyone (righteous *and* unrighteous) is going to be raised eventually, what is Paul talking about here? What does he want to attain? If everyone will be raised in a general resurrection, his desire seems pointless. (ii) To understand we must look more closely at the text. A more literal translation will reveal Paul’s desire. He says he wants to attain “the out-resurrection out from the dead.” In other words, Paul wants to be a part of the group which is resurrected out from among those who are dead, that is, some of the dead remain. All will not be resurrected at the same time. It should now be evident that Paul wants to have a part in the “first resurrection,” the one in which “the rest of the dead” remain.

(2) As we have seen, the *fact* of two resurrections is taught here and elsewhere in the Scriptures. The terms may vary but the teaching is the same. One additional thing we have learned here (20:5) is the *length of time* separating these two resurrections. There is a time span of one thousand years between the resurrection of life and the resurrection of judgment. Paul had a desire to be a part of a resurrection that occurs a thousand years *before* the rest of the dead are raised.

IV. The thousand years is... a thousand years! By that, I mean a *literal* thousand years. I draw that conclusion from the context where we find the term. (A) There is nothing here in the six uses of this expression “thousand years” to suggest that it is *not* to be taken in a literal sense. Of course, there are many who object to this conclusion and assure us that although they are not quite sure what it means, they are absolutely certain that it does *not* mean a *literal* thousand years.

(1) Some are quick to point out that Revelation belongs to a genre of literature known as “apocalyptic.” It is a literature of symbols, vivid imagery, and double meanings; it paints grand, sweeping pictures of the conflict between good and evil and the ultimate triumph of good. Someone must “break the code” to understand the author’s real message. It cannot possibly be taken literally, but must be interpreted from an allegorical or figurative approach.

(a) Yes, we agree that there are symbols and that there is vivid imagery in the book of Revelation. There are grand scenes of the climax of history and of God’s victory over all who have opposed Him. But in agreeing to that (whether or not it is accurate to so classify this book as “apocalyptic literature”), we are not also agreeing that one is thereby granted a license to engage in some sort of “freestyle” interpretation where words can mean whatever the interpreter wants them to mean. The explanation of the symbol must fit the symbol and fit the context of the passage and fit the overall context of the Scriptures.

(b) How does such a figurative, allegorical approach to interpreting Revelation differ from what the liberal theologian does with the first two chapters of Genesis? He tells us that those chapters contain a beautiful Hebrew song (poetic literature) ascribing the glories of nature to God. Adam and Eve are only representative figures for mankind; the heavens and earth did not come to be in a *literal* six-day time period; and so on. In fact, according to him, very little in those two chapters should be *interpreted literally*! Does that *approach* sound familiar?

(c) Nevertheless, when we read through our text (20:1-7), where are those symbols that are supposed to make this so difficult to understand? What is so complicated that we can’t understand it without understanding the “code”? There is no reason not to take the overall message in these verses at face value and take a “thousand years” to mean just that.

(2) Next up, someone tells us that when John writes a “thousand” years he is simply using it as a figure of speech to mean a large, indefinite number. For an example of this we are directed to Psalm 50:10 where Asaph, speaking for the Lord, says, “For every animal of the forest is mine and the cattle on a *thousand* hills.” Of course, God is not limited to owning the cattle *only* on a *literal* thousand hills and so this must be understood to be a figure of speech meaning, in this case, *all* the hills without

regard to the exact number. Likewise, the argument goes, the thousand years of Revelation 20 should not be understood as a literal number but simply as a long, undetermined and indefinite period of time.

(a) First, I want to point out that if I've heard the foregoing explanation once... I've heard it a *thousand* times! Yes, of course, we are capable of understanding that the word "thousand" can be used as a figure of speech. Yes, in some cases it *can* be used to mean an innumerable amount or an uncountable number.

(b) In Psalm 50:10, the context *supports* such an interpretation. The verse begins, "For *every* animal of the forest is mine." Look at verse 11, "I know *every* bird of the mountains, and the creatures of the field are mine." Verse 12, "For the *world is mine*, and *all* that is in it." In this context, then, there is reason for understanding that the *thousand* hills is a figure of speech meaning an innumerable amount of cattle on an uncountable number of hills.

(c) However, in Revelation 20 *there is no such context!* If "thousand years" in this context does not mean a literal "thousand years," then in what other way could John have written these words to be sure we understood it to be a literal "thousand years?" There really is no justification in this context for passing this term off as a figure of speech and ignoring the literal meaning.

(3) Then, someone else wants to invoke Peter's statement from 2 Peter 3:8, "With the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." This is applied to Revelation 20 to suggest that the "thousand" years is not really a hard and fast number. It's just a period of time and, according to Peter's formula, it could be just about any length of days or years. After all, the conclusion is made, time is meaningless to God.

(a) First, let's be clear, Peter's statement is not a formula for interpreting prophetic numbers. It is not like a decoder ring you get out of a cereal box to read the secret message. This text is not even directly connected to our passage in Revelation 20.

(b) Second, Peter is making a contrast between *God's* perspective on time and *man's* perspective on time. And he draws this contrast to warn the scoffers and reassure the faithful that God always keeps His word! Peter is *not* teaching that God is *indifferent* to time or that we cannot take Him at His word when He reveals things to us involving time elements. However, that which is a long time (a thousand years) to us is but a short time (a day) to Him. The Psalmist says, "For a thousand years in Your sight are like yesterday when it is past, and like a watch in the night" (Psalm 90:4).

Men may conclude that so much time has passed since God made a promise that He has forgotten it or He has failed to keep it, but, no, it's only been a short time from God's point of view and He will do what He has promised. This is why Peter adds in this same passage, "The Lord is not slow in keeping His promise, *as some understand slowness*." (If we are to make an application of Peter's statement to Revelation 20, let it be this: God will do what He has promised! We have every reason to expect to reign with Christ for a literal one thousand years even though the promise is some two thousand years old. After all, that's just like two days from God's perspective.)

(B) Now that we have considered some objections, what is in the text and context of Revelation 20:1-7 that would call for interpreting the thousand years as a literal thousand years?

(1) The first rule of interpretation of any passage is always that words are to be understood in their literal sense unless there is a compelling reason in the context that forbids such. Except for the preconceived ideas that men may bring to these verses, there is nothing here to suggest anything other than taking this term in a literal sense.

(2) Ten times in chapters 19, 20, and 21, John says, "and I saw," or "then I saw." Sometimes he also says, "I heard." These chapters are an accurate, firsthand account of what John witnessed. It is a written record of a chronological sequence of events that includes many details. Without a doubt we can know that John was careful to record every event (in order, as well) and every detail that was revealed to him. When God wanted to be definite about something, John was definite; when God was indefinite, John was indefinite. God was *indefinite* regarding the time period that the devil would be

released; it's called a "short time" (or a "little season") (20:3). We don't know how long that will be. If God wanted to be *indefinite* about the thousand years, He knows how to be indefinite; He could have said "a long time" or something like that. Instead, He was definite; John writes "one thousand years" (six times). So, we should not interpret it in any other way.

(3) Also, please observe that this thousand years is presented as a very specific time period in the sequence of events that John records. It has a distinct beginning point and it has a distinct ending point. The binding of Satan marks the beginning and the release of Satan marks the ending. The first resurrection is completed before the thousand years begins and the rest of the dead are not raised until the thousand years have ended.

(4) And, again, we pose this question, "If God wanted to tell us that He meant a literal thousand years, what other words should He use to make that clear to us?" It seems to me it is clear as it is.

V. The thousand years follows the second coming of Christ. To make this point, we will need to look at part of the larger context. (A) Please turn to Revelation 19:11-21. In verse 11, John sees a rider on a white horse. (1) We should have no doubt as to the identity of the rider. Of course, this is Jesus Christ. This is evident from His (a) names (19:11, 13, 16) and His (b) actions (19:11, 15). (2) He comes from heaven (19:1, 11) to earth (19:19) and in short order defeats those who have arrayed themselves against Him (19:19-21). (3) This is the coming of Jesus in glory! (See 2 Thessalonians 1:7-8; 2:8; Matthew 24:30; 25:31).

There are some who teach that Revelation 19:11-21 is not an account of the second coming of Jesus, but is a depiction of Jesus as the great victor in the conflict of right and wrong; His armies are the Church Triumphant who are sharing in God's judgment upon ancient Rome; this describes the fall of the Roman Empire and other such similar interpretations. We do not have time to respond to this inadequate line of interpretation point by point, but please note that those early saints (at the time this book was written) were on the earth enduring and overcoming (2 Timothy 2:12; Revelation 3:21). How puzzled those early, persecuted Christians would have been had someone interpreted to them the idea that they were actually triumphing over the Roman Empire and were sharing in God's judgment of the same! Where are the saints when the events in this passage begin (19:14)? They are in heaven with the Lord having now been rewarded (19:8; 22:12); they are no longer being persecuted on the earth. This *is* a picture of the Church Triumphant, but not one made so by some tenuous connection to the fall of the Roman Empire, but one made so by the return of its Savior, Jesus Christ.

(B) There is an unfortunate chapter break at the end of chapter 19. This sometimes causes the reader to disconnect the events of chapter 19 from those of chapter 20. However, since the chapter and verse divisions are manmade we can just ignore them for the time being and continue studying. The next verse (20:1) begins with "and" in the Greek thereby connecting what we have just read with the matters that we have already studied earlier in this lesson.

(C) So now we can establish a sequence of events. First, from 19:11-21, there is the return of Jesus in glory and then, second, that return is followed by, among other things, the thousand years (20:1-7). Or we could also say that Jesus comes *before* the thousand years. Since "pre" is a prefix that means "before" and since "millennium" or "millennial" means "thousand," we could also say that the Second Coming of Jesus is premillennial.

In **conclusion**, (1) I would like to remind you that I began this lesson by telling you that there were five important truths about the thousand years that I wanted to call to your attention. I call them "important" because I believe that they are (a) important to God. It is important to God that *we* know these things. God tells His friends what He is going to do (see Genesis 18:16-21). He's revealed this to us that we might know His plans. If He wants us to know this, it must be important to Him. They are important to God because they show that He will someday vindicate His Name and His Word. He has been lied about, mocked, and scorned for thousands of years; these truths show He is going to set the record straight at some point.

(b) These truths are important to our understanding of the Scriptures. They are a part of God's Word and a part of some of the major themes of the Bible. By studying these things our understanding of other parts of the Bible will grow, as well.

(c) And these things *should be* important to us. Some Christians seem to be indifferent about them; some will even admit, "I'm not interested in those topics. I don't care what God is going to do, that is all His business." Let me remind you that God's plans involve *us* as well as His other purposes. We *should* have an interest in all things God is doing; these truths should not be feared or ignored, but should be loved and kept and we'll be blessed by them.

(2) And lastly, let me emphasize again, these things are still future. The devil is *not* bound at present. Christ is *not* yet fully reigning and we are *not* yet reigning with Him in the millennial age. Christ has *not* yet returned. The dead in Christ have *not* yet been raised. To borrow a thought from Brother Robert Shank, we have a King in waiting and we are waiting for the King!

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