

The Book of Revelation (Two of Three Questions)

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In this article we will continue to answer the second of three questions raised from our recent presentations on the Book of Revelation with the great Central Church of Christ in McMinnville, Tennessee.

Why would Satan come back up from earth, and why would he come simply to burn an uninhabited world?

Presumably, this question comes to us from Revelation 20:7-10 which reads, “And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, And shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea. And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them. And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever.”

If we may draw the camera back just a little to take a wider look at the context, it may prove helpful in understanding what we have here. The Battle of Armageddon at the end of Chapter 19 saw the perennial enemies of Christianity in the first through the third centuries soundly defeated (vv. 20-21). We consistently have identified the beast and the false prophet as the Roman Emperor known religiously as *pontifex maximus* or Supreme Pontiff and his High Priest or *pontifex* who was “one of the 16 members of the Pontifical College presiding over the state religion” (*The Concord Desk Encyclopedia*, vol. III, p. 977). The Devil or Satan is bound in Chapter 20:1-3 with the provision that after the figurative 1,000 years he will be “loosed a little season.” (In the opening verse the writer told us he would communicate his message with “signs,” Revelation 1:1, and that is what he is doing here). We also affirm the 1,000 years to be figurative because everything else in the context is figurative, for example, the bottomless pit, the chain, and the key must be figurative because no way could a spirit being like the Devil be chained with a literal chain and be physically confined in a pit and locked away.

After the resurrection of the cause of the martyred saints whose cries went up to heaven in Chapter 6:9-11 have been answered here in Revelation 20:4-6, then “Satan is loosed out of his prison” (v. 7). The special restraining Satan endured for that figurative 1,000 years (how long in actual or literal years is likely the first through the third centuries down to the Edict of Toleration issued by Emperor Constantine in A.D. 312) comes to an end in verse 7.

The world remains inhabited, as it has all along. Satan now “loosed out of his prison” goes about his deceptive work always fighting against God and enlisting his troops into his destructive battle. The special restraining spoken of in Revelation 20:1-3 is no longer necessary to ensure the promise of the book in its key verse of Revelation 11:15, “And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever.” Always

remember the Devil is restrained by the Word of God (see: Matthew 4:4, 7, 10; Psalm 119:11; and James 4:7).

How long in actual years or centuries is covered in Revelation 20:7-10 where the Devil is deceiving the nations we do not know. It approaches 2,000 years at the time of this writing. Revelation is a book of prophecy, and that is what we have as John prophesies the ultimate destruction of the Devil in verse 10. Verses eleven and following depict the second coming of Christ and harmonize beautifully with other references of it in the New Testament (see: Mark 13:31-32; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10; 2:6-10; and 2 Peter 3:10-12).

In the presentation of the Book of Revelation as John is bringing the message to a close, a very important distinction to realize is that at the Battle of Armageddon in Chapter 19 verse 20 the beast and false prophet are “cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone” and in Chapter 20 verse 10 now “the Devil that deceived them” is forever cast in with them!