

Dr. Sam Storms
Enjoying God Ministries

*Amillennialism
and
The Millennial Kingdom of Revelation 20 (1)*

When I make known my millennial convictions, it's not uncommon to hear someone say: "But Sam, how can you say you embrace a 'millennial' option when you don't even believe in a millennium?" As you'll soon come to see, I most assuredly do believe in the reality of a literal millennial kingdom. The reason for this misunderstanding is the label most commonly used to describe the view I'm prepared to defend: *Amillennialism*.

You've no doubt heard someone described as being "apolitical" or perhaps "amoral" and you know what is meant. Similarly, to say that I am "amillennial" (where the alpha privative "a" seemingly negates the word "millennial") exposes me and others to the charge that we deny the existence of what is clearly taught in Revelation 20. As you will soon see, the "millennium" that I believe John describes in the Apocalypse is concurrent with the church age in which we live and consists of the co-regency with Christ of those believers who have died and entered into the glory of the intermediate state. More on that shortly.

A Definition of Amillennialism

Amillennialism has suffered greatly in the past because of its apparent negative character. In other words, definitions of Amillennialism have focused more upon what the view *denies* (namely, a literal 1,000-year, **earthly** reign of Christ between his second coming and the eternal state) than on what it *affirms*. In order best to counter this negativism, the definition of Amillennialism presented here will concentrate on its fundamental *affirmations* concerning eschatological truth.

As noted above, and contrary to what the name (Amillennialism) implies, Amillennialists *do* believe in a millennium. The millennium, however, is *now*: the present age of the church between the first and second comings of Christ in its entirety *is* the millennium. Therefore, while the Amillennialist does *deny* the Premillennial belief in a personal, literal reign of Christ upon the earth for 1,000 years *following* his second coming, he *affirms* that there is a millennium and that Christ rules. However, this messianic reign is not precisely 1,000 years in length and it is wholly spiritual (non-earthly, non-visible, non-physical, but no less literal) in nature. “This millennial reign is not something to be looked for in the future;” writes Hoekema, “it is going on now, and will be until Christ returns. Hence the term *realized millennialism* is an apt description of the view here defended – if it is remembered that the millennium in question is not an earthly but a heavenly reign.”¹

Amillennialists have differed on the precise character of this spiritual rule of Christ. Some, such as myself, contend that the millennium is restricted to the blessings of the *intermediate state*; i.e., the millennium as described in Revelation 20:4-6 refers to the *present reign of the souls of deceased believers with Christ in heaven*. Others would go a step further and restrict the experience of the millennial blessings to the “martyrs” now in heaven with Christ (i.e., those who were slain while on the earth by reason of their testimony for Christ and the gospel). Other Amillennialists interpret the millennium as encompassing all the inward spiritual triumphs experienced by the church on earth (i.e., Christ ruling in the believer’s heart). By far the more common form of Amillennialism is the first alternative.

As a direct corollary to the above, Amillennialists maintain that there will, therefore, be no millennium in the sense of a semi-golden era of earthly prosperity for the kingdom *before* Christ returns. There will be no visible earthly expression of Christ’s reign over the world as a whole; the church will not *Christianize* the nations, nor will it gain a dominant or widespread influence throughout the world. Thus it is here, and for all practical purposes *only* here, that Amillennialism differs from Postmillennialism.

¹ Anthony Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 235.

According to the Amillennialist, there will be a parallel and contemporaneous development of good and evil in the world which will continue until the second coming of Christ. Thus, “despite the fact that Christ has won a decisive victory over sin and evil, the kingdom of evil will continue to exist alongside of the kingdom of God until the end of the world.”²

At the end of the age there will emerge an intensified form of tribulation and apostasy. Whether or not there will likewise appear a *personal* antichrist is a point of dispute among Amillennialists. It should be pointed out that the Amillennialist does not identify this period of tribulation with Daniel’s 70th Week, as does the Dispensational Premillennialist, nor does he define its purpose as having anything to do with the restoration of national theocratic Israel. Some Amillennialists, however, *do* believe in a mass salvation of ethnic Israel at the end of the age. Christ’s return at the close of this period will synchronize with the general resurrection and general judgment of all men, believers and unbelievers alike, to be followed *immediately* by the eternal state (i.e., the new heavens and the new earth). In other words, here is the major point of difference between the Amillennialist and Premillennialist: the former denies whereas the latter affirms an earthly, visible rule of Christ for 1,000 years *between* his second coming and the final resurrection, judgment, and introduction of the eternal state.

Other Distinctives of Amillennialism

Among many Amillennialists of the past, most OT prophecies which seem to teach an earthly kingdom were understood *not* as pointing to future, literal realities, but were to be interpreted figuratively. In other words, they were viewed as descriptive of *spiritual* blessings now being fulfilled in the church. Recently, however, Anthony Hoekema has popularized (although he did not invent) a view which takes a more serious, or should I say *more literal and earthly*, perspective concerning these prophecies. Concerning such OT texts, Hoekema writes:

² Ibid., 174.

“Dispensationalists commonly say that we amillennialists spiritualize prophecies of this kind by understanding them as being fulfilled either in the church of this present age or in heaven in the age to come. I believe, however, that prophecies of this sort refer neither primarily to the church of this age nor to heaven, but to *the new earth*. The concept of the new earth is therefore of great importance for the proper approach to Old Testament prophecy. All too often, unfortunately, amillennial exegetes fail to keep biblical teaching on the new earth in mind when interpreting Old Testament prophecy. It is an impoverishment of the meaning of these passages to make them apply only to the church or to heaven. But it is also an impoverishment to make them refer to a thousand-year period preceding the final state. They must be understood as inspired descriptions of the glorious new earth God is preparing for his people.”³

The Interpretation of the Book of Revelation

Most Amillennialists interpret the book of Revelation according to what is called *progressive parallelism*. According to one view of the book, “Revelation consists of seven sections which run parallel to each other, each of which depicts the church and the world from the time of Christ’s first coming to the time of his second.”⁴ This has also been called the *Recapitulation* view, meaning that the structure of Revelation does not relate consecutive events but frequently covers the same ground from different perspectives.⁵

Therefore, according to this view Revelation 20:1 is *not* to be thought of as following in chronological order chapter 19 (which describes the second coming of Christ). Rather, it takes us back once again to the *beginning* of the NT era and

³ Ibid., 205-06.

⁴ Robert, Clouse, ed., *The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1977), 156-57.

⁵ The most popular scheme envisions the seven sections as: (1) chps. 1-3; (2) chps. 4-7; (3) chps. 8-11; (4) chps. 12-14; (5) chps. 15-16; (6) chps. 17-19; (7) chps. 20-22.

recapitulates the entire present age. By doing this the Amillennialist is able to interpret *the binding of Satan* in Revelation 20:1-3 as having occurred during our Lord's earthly ministry, and *the 1,000 year reign* (i.e., the millennium) of Revelation 20:4-6 as describing in symbolic language the entire inter-advent age in which we now live. Therefore, the thousand-year period is no literal piece of history; it is a symbolic number coextensive with the history of the church on earth between the resurrection of Christ and his return. For more on this, we now turn to an exposition of this important passage.

Revelation 20

Unfortunately, the discussion of this text has been muddled by statements such as: "The Premillennial interpretation of Revelation 20 is superior because it is **literal**, whereas the Amillennial interpretation **spiritualizes**, and therefore dishonors, God's Word." Suffice it to say, in the words of Arthur Lewis, that

"the essential and concrete aspects of the text may not be 'spiritualized' out of existence. The martyred and enthroned saints are real, the angel who binds Satan is real, Satan himself is very real, and the wicked nations in revolt against the King are real nations and part of history. The question is not, therefore, which view is the more literal, but which correctly understands the place and purpose of the thousand years."⁶

The point is simply that the millennium for which I will argue is just as real and literal as the millennium for which the Premillennialist contends. The first interpretive task before us is the account in vv. 1-3 of Satan's imprisonment in the abyss⁷ (or, "bottomless pit," ESV) for a period of 1,000 years.

⁶ Arthur Lewis, *The Dark Side of the Millennium: The Problem of Evil in Rev. 20:1-10* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), 50.

⁷ The word translated "abyss" occurs nine times in the NT, eight of which refer to the abode of demons (the exception being Romans 10:7 where it refers to the abode of the dead in general. According to Robert Mounce, the abyss was thought of "as a vast subterranean cavern which served as a place of confinement

Revelation 20:1-3 and the Binding of Satan

Premillennialists believe this vision constitutes one of the strongest confirmations of their prophetic scenario. They point to two significant features.

First, they insist that the relationship between the events of Rev. 19:11-21 and those of 20:1-3 is one of *chronological and historical sequence*. Consequently, the binding of Satan for a millennium is historically subsequent to (i.e., after) the second coming of Christ. Second, they insist that the New Testament evidence concerning the extent of Satan's activity in this present age is incompatible with the description of the restrictions imposed upon him by the angel in Rev. 20:1-3.⁸ *Since Satan is most certainly not bound now, so they tell us, the events of vv. 1-3 must be future.*

I will respond to each of these two arguments in turn.

The Premillennialist insists that beginning with Rev. 19:11 and extending through 21:1 we have a series of visions that are historically and chronologically sequential. The Premillennialist appeals to two arguments. First, much is made of the phrase "and I saw"

for disobedient spirits awaiting judgment" (*The Book of Revelation* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977], 352). In Rev. 9:11 Satan is referred to as "the angel of the bottomless pit (or abyss)," most likely because he is *in* the abyss, the place from which he dispatches his demonic hordes (9:1-3) and commissions the beast (11:7; 17:8). Although this point should not be pressed, it may be that Satan is "in" or "of" the abyss precisely because he was consigned and sealed therein at the inception of this present age, only to be released at its close. In other words, it may be that Satan is described as being "of the abyss" in 9:11 because that is the place of his current incarceration. If so, this would support the identification of the 1,000 years of 20:1-3 with the present age preceding the second coming of Christ.

⁸ This "angel" is anonymous, as is the case with 65 of the 67 occurrences of the word in Revelation. However, Sydney Page suggests that the "angel" of Rev. 20:1 might be Michael. He bases his argument on the possible parallel between the "restrainer" of 2 Thess. 2 and the angelic restraint of Satan in Rev. 20:1-3. "It is tempting to speculate," notes Page, "that the restrainer mentioned by Paul might be the angel Michael, since he appears as the one who defends God's people from those who oppose him in Dan. 10:13,21; 12:1, and Paul's teaching in 2 Thessalonians 2 is rooted in the Danielic prophecies. If this identification is accepted it would constitute another link with Revelation 20, for the binding of Satan is pictured as the work of an angel there. Moreover, although the angel who binds Satan is unnamed, there is reason to think that the seer had Michael in view. Revelation 12 describes a heavenly battle between the armies of Michael and Satan that results in Satan and his forces being cast out of heaven. What happens to the devil according to Revelation 12 exhibits enough similarity to what is pictured in Rev. 20:1-3 to prompt the suggestion that a single experience is in view in both" ("Revelation 20 and Pauline Eschatology," in *JETS* 23 [March 1980], 34-35). Whereas Page's identification of the angel in Rev. 20:1-3 with Michael, if correct, would not prove that Satan was bound at the inception of this age, it would certainly lend support to that thesis.

(*kai eidon*), which occurs in 19:11,17,19; 20:1,4,11; 21:1. This, they argue, indicates that what John saw in chapter 20 follows chronologically and historically upon what he saw in chapter 19. Consequently, the binding of Satan and the millennial kingdom are yet future, subsequent to the second coming of Christ.

However, the phrase translated “and I saw” appears countless times in Revelation and need only indicate *the sequence in which John received the visions*. It does not necessarily indicate any historical relation among the many visions themselves. The phrase “and when” (*kai hotan*) in 20:7, being decidedly temporal in force, simply indicates that the events of 20:7-10 follow historically upon the events of 20:4-6 and 20:1-3, a fact which no one denies.

If we were to take the events of 20:1-3 as historically subsequent to the events of 19:11-21, a serious problem arises in that 20:1-3 would describe an action designed to prevent the satanic deception of the very nations who had already been *deceived* (16:13-16) and consequently *destroyed* in 19:19-21. In other words, it makes little sense to speak of protecting the nations from deception by Satan in 20:1-3 *after* they have just been both deceived by Satan (16:13-16; cf. 19:19-20) and destroyed by Christ at his return (19:11-21; cf. 16:15a, 19).

Note also the parallel between Rev. 19:17-21 and 20:7-10. It seems that John is providing parallel accounts of the same conflagration (Armageddon) rather than presenting two entirely different battles separated by 1,000 years of human history. This deserves some attention.

There is evidence from Ezekiel 39:17-20 that the battle of Armageddon in Revelation 19 and the battle of Gog-Magog in Revelation 20 are one and the same. The Ezekiel passage describes an invitation to the birds of heaven to assemble for the purpose of consuming the flesh of those who played a role in the Gog-Magog revolt. But interestingly, this Old Testament passage is cited in Rev. 19:17-18 and applied to “the great supper of God” which consummates *Armageddon*. It would appear, therefore, that Armageddon and Gog-Magog are the same event, not two entirely different battles separated by a 1,000 year interregnum. Fowler White correctly concludes that

"if we are expected to interpret the revolts in Revelation 19 and 20 as *different episodes* in history, we would hardly expect John to describe them in language and imagery derived from the *same episode* in Ezekiel's prophecy. On the contrary, John's recapitulated use of Ezekiel 38-39 in both 19:17-21 and 20:7-10 establishes a *prima facie* case for us to understand 20:7-10 as a recapitulation of 19:17-21. If 20:7-10 is indeed a recapitulation of 19:17-21, then 20:7-10 narrates the demise of the dragon (Satan) at the second coming, while 19:17-21 narrates the demise of the beast and the false prophet at the second coming. Any other interpretation of how to relate these two judgment scenes, both of which are modelled on Ezekiel 38-39, will have to bear the burden of proof."⁹

In both Rev. 16:14 and 19:19 the campaign against Christ and his people is designated as "the" war. The definite article in both texts draws our attention to the distinctive identity of this war as the eschatological battle which brings the present age to its end. It seems only reasonable to conclude that the use of the definite article in 20:8 is anaphoric. *The* war of 20:8 is *the* war of 19:19 and 16:14. This point is confirmed when one observes the absence of the definite article in Rev. 9:7,9; 11:7; 12:7,17; and 13:7.

Furthermore, the Premillennial view of historical succession between chapters 19 and 20 also runs counter to the declaration of Hebrews 12:26-28. According to Premillennialism, there will be *two* wars, *two* cosmic dissolutions, one before the millennium (16:17-21; 19:11-21; cf. Matthew 24:29) and one after it (20:9-11). But in Hebrews 12 we read: "At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, 'Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens.' This phrase, 'Yet once more,' indicates the removal of things that are shaken – that is, things that have been made – in order that the things that cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God

⁹ Fowler White. Bibliographical data forthcoming . . .

acceptable worship, with reverence and awe” (vv. 26-28). Clearly, the author is describing the cosmic consequences of the appearance of the Divine Judge, first at Sinai, and then finally at the end of the age. He could hardly have been more explicit when he said, “Yet once (*hapax*) more I will shake not only the earth, but also the heavens” (v. 26). But according to Premillennialism he should have said, “Yet *twice* more . . .,” i.e., once before the millennium and a second time after it. A more viable interpretation is the one which interprets the account of destruction in 20:9-11 as an abbreviated recapitulation of the destruction in 6:12-17, 16:17-21 and 19:11-21.

Another argument employed by the Premillennialist is the fact that according to Rev. 20:10 Satan is cast into the lake of fire where the Beast and False Prophet *already are*. Therefore, the latter two characters must have been cast into the lake of fire *before* the millennium (19:20).

This argument is based on a mistranslation of 20:10. The text literally reads: “and the devil, the one who deceives them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where also the beast and false prophet, and they shall be tormented day and night forever and ever.” The NASB supplies the verb *eisi* (“are”; the ESV renders it “were”), wrongly so in my opinion. The verb to be supplied should probably be *eblethesan* (“were cast”) from 19:20. Thus the text would read: “and the devil . . . was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where also [*hopou kai*; cf. 11:8 for a similar usage] the beast and false prophet **were cast** (*eblethesan*).”

So when were the beast and false prophet cast in? The answer would appear to be, at the conclusion of *the* war, when the devil himself was cast in. The three *jointly* instigated the Armageddon/Gog-Magog revolt and are therefore *jointly* cast into the lake of fire to be *jointly* tormented forever and ever. The text does not say that the beast and false prophet were “already” in the lake of fire when Satan was cast in. Even if it did, this need only imply that after the war the beast and false prophet were first judged and cast into the lake of fire, a judgment and fate then immediately applied to Satan.

The suggestion that the judgment of the beast and false prophet precedes by 1,000 years that of the devil ignores the parallel between *the* war of chapter 19 and *the* war of

chapter 20. There are not two wars with two judgments, but one war and judgment described from two distinct but complementary vantage points. First, in chapter 19, John relates the destruction of the beast and false prophet, and second, in chapter 20, that of Satan.

All that we may legitimately conclude is that the *vision* given to John of the beast and false prophet being cast into the lake of fire precedes the *vision* given to him of Satan being cast in. In order to prove the historical antecedence of the former to the latter, far more is needed than what the text itself supplies. It is just as likely, if not more so, that what we have here is simply the *literary* antecedence of one vision to another, not the historical sequence of their respective contents.¹⁰

The second of the two arguments from Rev. 20:1-3 employed by Premillennialists pertains to the nature and extent of Satan's binding. Premillennialists insist that Satan's

¹⁰ One additional factor in determining the literary structure of Revelation, specifically the relation between chapters 19 and 20, is the motif of "angelic ascent and descent." There are four occasions in Revelation where an angel is said either to "ascend" or "descend" (Rev. 7:2; 10:1; 18:1; and 20:1). In 7:2; 10:1; and 18:1, the angelic ascent/descent initiates a vision that temporarily suspends whatever historical or chronological progress had heretofore obtained, and introduces an interlude that is *recapitulatory* in nature. That is to say, the visional interlude inaugurated by this distinctive angelic activity has its *beginning* at a point in history antecedent to the event(s) depicted in the opening of the preceding vision and its *ending* at a point in history contemporaneous with the concluding event of the preceding vision. If this pattern holds true in 20:1 it would indicate that the relation between chapters 19 and 20 is not one of historical progress (as the premillennialist contends) but of *literary recapitulation*. The angelic descent of 20:1 signals a visionary interlude, the historical beginning of which antedates the inaugural events depicted in 19:11-21. This pattern, of course, cannot of itself prove recapitulation, but it does provide support for that view of the structure of Revelation when taken in conjunction with other factors. For a defense of recapitulation or progressive parallelism in the book of Revelation as a whole, see William Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors: An Interpretation of the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977), 22-64; Benjamin B. Warfield, "The Millennium and the Apocalypse," *Princeton Theological Review* 2 (Oct 1904):599-617; Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 223-27, and the more recent commentaries by G. K. Beale and Dennis Johnson. Although not typically conservative in her conclusions, helpful insights are provided by Adela Y. Collins in her two books, *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation* (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1976), 5-13, and *The Apocalypse* (Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1979), xii-xiv. Meredith Kline, in his unpublished class notes, "A Study in the Structure of the Revelation of John," likewise argues for recapitulation, but offers a slightly different interpretation than Hendriksen. According to Kline, the book contains five synchronous sections or cycles of visions, sandwiched, as it were, between an Introduction/Conclusion and a portrait of the Church in the World / in Glory. Each cycle takes us back to the beginning of the Christian era and concludes with the end of the age, God's judgment, and Christ's return (1:1-8 = Introduction; 1:9-3:22 = The Church Imperfect in the World; 4:1-8:1 = The Seven Seals; 8:2-11:19 = The Seven Trumpets; 12:1-14:20 = The Deeper Conflict; 15:1-16:21 = The Seven Bowls; 17:1-21:8 = The Final Judgments; 21:9-22:5 = The Church Perfect in Glory; and 22:6-21 = Conclusion.

imprisonment in 20:1-3 is not compatible with the dimensions of his present activity as portrayed in the New Testament epistles (as, for example, in 1 Cor. 5:5; 2 Cor. 4:3-4; Eph. 6:10-20; 1 Thess. 2:18; Js. 4:7; 1 Pt. 5:8-9; 1 Jn. 4:4; 5:19). G. R. Beasley-Murray, for example, argues that the angel in 20:1 “reduces Satan to impotence.” The “incarceration of the Devil,” says Beasley-Murray, “is trebly circumscribed. He is bound up, locked in, and sealed over. The writer could hardly have expressed more emphatically the inability of Satan to harm the race of man.”¹¹

The question must be asked: “In regard to what is Satan bound? Is the binding of Satan designed to immobilize him from any and all activities?” The Premillennialist thinks so. Beasley-Murray tells us that Satan’s binding entails his inability “to harm the race of man.” But that is not what John says. The Premillennial interpretation errs in that it has attempted to universalize what John explicitly restricts.

Two statements in Rev. 20 tell us the purpose of Satan’s imprisonment. First, in v. 3, John says that Satan was bound “*so that he should not deceive the nations any longer.*” Then secondly, in v. 8, John tells us that upon his release from the abyss Satan will come out “to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together for the war.” Note well what John does and does not say. He does *not* say that Satan was bound so that he should no longer persecute Christians, or so that he should no longer prowl about “like a roaring lion” (1 Pt. 5:8) devouring believing men and women. He does *not* say that Satan was bound so that he should no longer concoct schemes to disrupt church unity (2 Cor. 2:11), or so that he should no longer disguise himself as an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14). He does *not* say that Satan was bound so that he should no longer hurl his flaming missiles at Christians (Eph. 6:16), or so that he should be kept from thwarting the plans of the apostle Paul (1 Thess. 2:18).

Rather, John says that Satan was bound so that he should no longer deceive the *nations* (v. 3), the purpose behind which is to mobilize them in an international rebellion against the city of God (v. 8). And the language John employs in 20:1-3 makes it clear that there is no possible way for Satan to do so during the thousand years. The restriction

¹¹ G. R. Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation*, NCBC (London: Marshall, Morgan, and Scott, 1974), 285.

on this particular aspect of his sinister ministry is absolute and invincible. *The intent of the devil is to incite a premature eschatological conflict, to provoke Armageddon before its, that is to say, before God's time. But the exalted Christ, through the agency of an angelic being, has temporarily stripped Satan of his ability to orchestrate the nations of the earth for the final battle* (regardless of the form that battle might assume).

The final offensive against the Lamb and his elect shall come only when the restriction placed on *this* element of Satan's work is lifted. For the duration of the present Christian era Satan's hand is stayed. Upon release from his imprisonment he will dispatch his demonic hordes "which go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them together for the war of the great day of God, the Almighty" (Rev. 16:14).

Although Satan may and will do much in this present age (as the epistles clearly indicate), there is one thing of which John assures us: *Satan will never be permitted to incite and organize the unbelieving nations of the world in a final, catastrophic assault against the church, until such time as God in his providence so determines.* That event, which the Lord will immediately terminate with the fiery breath of his mouth (2 Thess. 2:8; Rev. 20:9), will come only at the end of this age.

John does not say Satan's activity is altogether eliminated, but that it has been effectively curtailed in one particular domain. The binding is absolute and, at least for the duration of a "millennium," unbreakable. That is to say, it is a binding which is intensive, so far as it goes, but is nowhere said to be extensive in relation to all that Satan does. It is designed solely for one purpose, to prohibit and inhibit a satanic plot to deceive the nations into a war which, in view of the prophetic plan and power of God, is both premature and futile.

Other Amillennial interpreters would prefer to expand the limitations placed on Satan by the binding of 20:1-3. Both Anthony Hoekema and William Hendriksen, for example, argue that one form of deception that Satan perpetrated prior to Christ's first advent pertains to the gospel. There is a sense in which prior to Christ's first coming all "nations," with the exception of Israel, were "deceived" by Satan and thus prevented from embracing the truth (with certain notable exceptions, of course). The universal

embrace of the gospel (Mt. 28:19) subsequent to Christ's advent, so they argue, is the direct result of Satan's incarceration. Hoekema and Hendriksen thus identify the binding of Satan in Rev. 20 with the decisive defeat he suffered at the time of our Lord's first advent.¹²

Especially relevant in this regard is Paul's statement in Acts 26:16-18 concerning the mission given him by the exalted Christ:

"But rise and stand upon your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles – to whom I am sending you *to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God*, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me" (italics added).

The Gentiles ("nations") are portrayed as being in darkness with respect to the gospel, having been blinded ("deceived") while under the dominion of Satan. However, as a result of Christ's first coming, such deception no longer obtains. The nations or Gentiles may now receive the forgiveness of sins and the divine inheritance. Hendriksen draws this conclusion:

"In Rev. 20:1-3 the binding of Satan and the fact that he is hurled into the abyss to remain there for a thousand years indicates that throughout this present Gospel Age, which begins with Christ's first coming and extends nearly to the second coming, the devil's influence on earth is curtailed so that he is unable to prevent the extension of the church among the nations by means of an active missionary program. During this entire period he is prevented from causing the nations – the world in general – to destroy the

¹² See Mt. 12:29 where the same word for "binding" (*deo*) occurs; also cf. Luke 10: 17-18; John 12:31-32; 16:11; Col. 2:15; Heb. 2:14; 1 John 3:8.

church as a mighty, missionary institution. . . . By means of the preaching of the Word as applied by the Holy Spirit, the elect, from all parts of the world, are brought from darkness to light. In that sense the church conquers the nations, and the nations do not conquer the church."¹³

It's entirely possible that these two views may be combined. Perhaps one of the principal means Satan hoped to employ to mobilize the nations for war was the pervasive spiritual darkness and unbelief in which they languished. But with the world-wide spread of the gospel, the necessary power base from which Satan would launch his attack has been dismantled. In other words, it is the influence of the church, as a result of the universal preaching of the gospel, which inhibits the activity of Satan in this particular regard. Though Satan still blinds the minds of the unbelieving (2 Cor. 4:4), he is providentially restricted from hindering the pervasive expansion of the gospel throughout the world. Satan may win an occasional battle, but the war belongs to Christ!

To be continued . . .

¹³ William Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors*, 226-27.