



REFORMED

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*For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion:
in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me;
he shall set me up upon a rock.*

—Psalm 27:5

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MEDITATION

And when Pharaoh drew nigh, the children of Israel lifted up their eyes, and, behold, the Egyptians marched after them; and they were sore afraid: and the children of Israel cried out unto the LORD. And they said unto Moses, Because there were no graves in Egypt, hast thou taken us away to die in the wilderness? wherefore hast thou dealt thus with us, to carry us forth out of Egypt? Is not this the word that we did tell thee in Egypt, saying, Let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians? For it had been better for us to serve the Egyptians, than that we should die in the wilderness.

—Exodus 14:10–12

The children of Israel were sore afraid. *Afraid* literally means *trembling and shaking*. *Sore* literally means *exceedingly great*. Can you picture the scene? Men, women, and children, the millions of Israelites in the wilderness before the Red Sea, shaking, quaking, weeping, trembling, collapsing, sobbing, covering their faces, holding one another, crying, Crying, CRYING in fear.

Sore afraid! But of what? What could possibly strike such fear in the hearts of the people? These were the children of Israel, after all. These were the people whose God was Jehovah. In the midst of their camp was Moses, the man of God. At the front of their camp was Jehovah himself in his mighty, towering pillar of cloud and fire. Jehovah, who had hardened and then shattered the heart of Pharaoh. Jehovah, who had destroyed Egypt with devastating plagues. Jehovah, who had taken a slave nation out of the house of bondage and made its people his own free sons and daughters and heirs. Sore afraid? Of what?

Of the same thing that always makes the heart of man quail: death. The children of Israel lifted up their eyes and beheld death marching after them. Pharaoh drew nigh, and Pharaoh's army, with Pharaoh's chariots and with Pharaoh's deadly instruments of war. Can you picture the scene? Boxed in at the Red Sea, the children of Israel looked behind them at the only exit from their camp and saw a cloud of dust. It must

have been a towering cloud of desert dust kicked up to the very heavens by hundreds of warhorse hooves, hundreds of chariot wheels, and thousands of soldiers' sandals. The Egyptians marched after the children of Israel! Death marched after them! And they were sore afraid.

In their fear they cried. They CRIED. Oh, how they cried. They "cried out unto the LORD." But their cry was hollow and empty. Their cry was hypocrisy. Their cry was unbelief. Behold how unbelieving they were: "It had been better for us to serve the Egyptians, than that we should die in the wilderness." Better to serve the Egyptians! Better to be in the land of Egypt that is the house of bondage, the outstanding type of sin and spiritual death! This is what they said: it would be better to be in hell than to be with Jehovah. Being with Jehovah in the wilderness means suffering the reproach and the wrath of the world. Being with Jehovah in the wilderness means bearing a cross and losing one's life. Better to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness with Jehovah! Carnal man can only think this way. Carnal man is always sore afraid when he sees death's cloud of dust marching after him.

Have you and I felt that fear? Then hear some good news. In our place our Lord Jesus Christ tasted death, was obedient to God unto death, went under the shadow of death, beheld the terrors of death, was compassed by the sorrows of death, and poured out his soul unto

death. Having covered our sins, he arose from the dead, and he dieth no more. When the dust-clouds of death march after us, beloved, let us

turn our eyes to the savior and behold not the cloud of death but the cloud of Jehovah, and rejoice that death is swallowed up in victory.

—AL

HERMAN HOEKSEMA'S *BANNER* ARTICLES

The Banner

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Our Doctrine by Rev. H. Hoeksema

Article XLIX. The Fallen King and His Kingdom (continued)

The purpose of our previous article was to show that literal interpretation of Scripture in the strict sense of the word, when applied to the book of Revelation, and particularly to chapter 20:1–10, simply leads to absurdities. It is an avowed impossibility to maintain the literal interpretation of this passage. And I confess that never have I met with a commentary on the passage that consistently interpreted it in a strict literal sense. But then the right to claim that at least the thousand years must be taken in the exact sense of the phrase is a very dubious one, to say the least.

In this connection I wish to call the attention to the weakness of one more argument advanced to prove that the thousand years may not be taken in a symbolical sense. It is emphasized frequently by literal interpreters of the thousand years, that the definite article is used with “thousand years” at least three times. In vs. 3 we read: “And cast him into the abyss and shut it, and sealed it over him, that he should deceive the nations no more until **the** thousand years should be finished: after this he must be loosed for a little time.” Again, in vs. 5 we read: “The rest of the dead lived not until **the** thousand years are finished.” And finally in verse 7: “And when **the** thousand years are finished, satan shall be loosed out of his prison.” You see, so the millennialist claims, from the repeated use of this little word “the” it is plain that the inspired prophet refers

to a definite period of exactly a thousand years. But this is a very weak argument, indeed. For the meaning of this definite article in this connection is evidently no other than to refer back to an expression already used before. The article is frequently used to refer to a person or thing already named to which the reader simply is referred. Thus for instance in Mt. 2:7. In the first verse of that chapter we are told: “wise men from the east came to Jerusalem.” And in vs. 7: “And Herod privily called the Wise men,” which means of course, nothing more than “the wise men already referred to above.” The same is true of the thousand years in Rev. 20. First we read of “a thousand years,” vs. 2. And with reference to that period we then find the expression with the definite article in vs. 3, where we are told that he shall deceive the nations no more until **the** thousand years (mentioned above) are finished. The same is evident from a comparison of vss. 4 and 5. In the fourth verse we read that the souls lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. And the fifth verse has it: “The rest of the dead lived not until the thousand years (mentioned above) should be finished.” And in the sixth verse, where the expression is used entirely by itself and in general we find again the article, “a thousand years.” And therefore, I confess it is a mystery to me how any argument can be based upon the use of this definite article “the” to prove that the period is literally a thousand years.

There are in general two different elements in the passage that need explanation. The first is the binding of satan and the second the reign of the saints with Christ. In the first three verses we are told that the devil is bound a thousand years. In the next three that the souls of those beheaded for Christ's sake reign with Christ a thousand years. And in the last four we are told what happens when the devil is loosed and is allowed to deceive the nations that live on the four corners of the earth. In the last part of this passage no new element is introduced. We are only told what is the effect when after the thousand years satan goes to deceive the nations that live on the four corners of the earth. And, therefore, we will do well in our interpretation of the passage to ask two questions: 1. What is meant by the binding of satan for the thousand years? 2. What is implied in the reign of the saints with Christ for the same period? All the rest in the passage is subservient to these two elements, even the idea of the first resurrection. For true it is, that the expression "this is the first resurrection" is often used as a main element, so that the reign of Christ is explained in its light. But as we shall see, this is turning the text upside down. The reign of the saints with Christ is the first resurrection, the text says. And, therefore, would we understand what the first resurrection signifies we must first understand what is implied in the reign of the saints with Christ.

As to the binding of satan, we have already remarked that in the first three verses of the passage we have most beautiful symbolism. John beholds in prophetic vision that an angel comes down out of heaven having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. He sees how the angel lays hold on the dragon, the devil, and binds him and casts him into the abyss and shuts and seals the abyss over him. Now there can be no doubt about the fact that the general idea expressed in this vision is that the devil is deprived of his liberty. He is chained and imprisoned. It is even strongly emphasized that his imprisonment is absolute. He will not be able to move about freely. He will not be able to do

anything. The restraint that is placed upon him is absolute. For he is chained, cast into the abyss, and the pit is closed and sealed over his head. He cannot execute his devilish plans. Beautifully we are informed here that the devil is under strict supervision, and that he can only move, even in this dispensation, as long and as far as Christ will let him. Christ holds the book with its seven seals. He controls all things. He supervises the devil also, and when He deems it necessary for the development of His kingdom that the old dragon be placed under restraint, He does so, and the devil can move no more. The idea, therefore, is that the devil is deprived of his liberty, that he is placed under restraint. And this idea is concretely but symbolically represented by the chains, the key, the abyss, the binding, the shutting and sealing of the bottomless pit.

The question, however, arises: Is this binding of the devil absolute also with a view to the extent of the restraint that is placed upon him? Can the devil, after he is bound, work and have his influence nowhere in the world, in no sphere of life? At first thought we would perhaps be inclined to answer this question in the negative. And the millennialist emphasizes very strongly that the text represents the devil as being absolutely bound. He is personally chained, personally imprisoned, and the abyss is sealed above him. And, therefore, they say, and apparently not without reason: after the devil is bound, he can have no influence anywhere in the world. Yet, a closer study of the text soon will change our opinion on this matter. The nature of the restraint is absolute, but the sphere to which this restraint is applied is limited very clearly. The idea is, that the devil is restrained with a view to a certain part of the world. With a view to that particular part the imprisonment is absolute. There he can do nothing. But the sphere itself is limited. Outside of that particular sphere he surely is at liberty. That this idea is based on the text is plain in the first place from vs. 3. There we read that he was chained and sealed for the thousand years "in order that (*hina*) he should deceive the nations no more." What is pictured here is the restraint of the devil with a view to

his influence upon nations, upon the course of the world's history. It is not a question of the influence he exerts upon the hearts of individuals, but of entire nations. Before the devil is bound he has influence over certain nations, after he is bound he can deceive those nations no more. The text plainly says that this and no other is the purpose of the binding. And, therefore, the meaning is evidently that the devil is placed under restraint with regard to the nations of the world. This is emphasized still more strongly by the fact that the same limitation is mentioned again with respect to his being loosed. When he is loosed he can again deceive the nations, vs. 8. But there is more. The idea is not only that the devil is placed under restraint with regard to nations while he is allowed to go about like a roaring lion with respect to individuals, but even the particular nations with a view to which he is bound are plainly indicated. The devil is not bound with respect to all the nations, but only in his influence upon certain particular peoples. The nations of vs. 3 are further defined as those that live on the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, whose number is as the sand of the sea. The other nations, therefore, he may deceive, even during the thousand years, but these nations who live on the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, he may deceive only after the thousand years are finished, vs. 8. Still more. The peculiar effect of his influence upon Gog and Magog after he is loosed out of his prison is that he gathers these nations against the saints and their beloved city. Before he is loosed he cannot gather them for war, after he is loosed he immediately goes out to muster his forces and draft the nations that live on the four corners of the earth for war against the saints. And, therefore, we conclude first of all that the binding of satan symbolically represents a restraint that is placed upon him, absolute in its nature, but limited in regard to the sphere to which it applies, so that he can deceive Gog and Magog no more, the nations that live on the four corners of the earth, particularly for the purpose that he shall not gather them for battle against Christ and His people till the thousand years are finished.

The devil is bound.

He is bound with strong chains and restraint by absolute imprisonment. The nature of the restraint is absolute.

He is bound, however, with a view to a particular sphere, with respect to the nations that live on the four corners of the earth.

He is bound for the expressed purpose that he may deceive those particular nations no more, namely, that he may not succeed in gathering them for battle against Christ and His saints.

All during this period he may do many other things. He may go about like a roaring lion in the midst of Christian nations. He may influence the kings and the nations outside of Gog and Magog. He may deceive individuals. But he cannot deceive Gog and Magog. These he shall deceive only after the thousand years are finished and the devil is loosed out of prison for a short time.

Thus far I feel confident that our interpretation is based on the text. If it is claimed that the devil during these thousand years is bound absolutely with a view to the entire world and to every sphere of life, I ask the question: why, then, is the purpose that the devil should deceive the nations no more, evidently referring only to Gog and Magog, and that only with a view to gathering them for battle against the saints, so emphatically expressed? And if it is answered, that at this time there are no other nations anymore, that the anti-christian nations have already been judged at the commencement of the thousand years, and that, therefore, the text in Rev. 20 could not make mention of any nations, I would again ask the millennialist to clearly point out that there is strict chronological order in the various visions of the book of Revelation, so that Rev. 20 necessarily follows in time of realization upon Rev. 19.

The questions, of course, arise: What is meant by the nations of Gog and Magog? And what period is indicated by the thousand years?

But these we must leave to next week's article.

—Holland, Mich.