



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

CONTENTS

3 MEDITATION

4 HERMAN HOEKSEMA'S *BANNER* ARTICLES

Article 51: The Fallen King and His Kingdom (continued)



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MEDITATION

And the angel of God, which went before the camp of Israel, removed and went behind them; and the pillar of the cloud went from before their face, and stood behind them: and it came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel; and it was a cloud and darkness to them, but it gave light by night to these: so that the one came not near the other all the night. And Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the LORD caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all that night, and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided. And the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea upon the dry ground: and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left.

—Exodus 14:19–22

The children of Israel went into the midst of the sea.

It is one of the preeminent miracles in the Bible. Unbelief hates it. But believers sing it: “He turned the sea into dry land: they went through the flood on foot: there did we rejoice in him” (Ps. 66:6).

What does it mean to go into the midst of the sea? It means to be buried. The children of Israel were buried in the Red Sea. Oh, they stayed dry, of course. They stayed very dry. No mud squelched up between their toes. No water splashed on their heads. The ground was dry. Nevertheless, to go into the midst of the sea means to be buried in it. The sea and the cloud surrounded them. The waters were a wall unto them on either hand, and the cloud of Jehovah was behind them and over them (I Cor. 10:1). In the midst of the sea they were covered, surrounded—buried! That is the spiritual meaning of going into the midst of the sea.

Before one can be buried, one must die. Israel did that too. There at the Red Sea the people of Israel died, and they were buried in the midst of the sea. Oh, they stayed alive, of course. They stayed very much alive, if one looks only at the earthly. With their eyes they saw in the night the light from Jehovah’s pillar. With their feet they walked and marched. With their hearts they wondered and rejoiced. Nevertheless, if one looks at the spiritual reality, Israel died.

You see, the Old Testament is the great picture-book of faith. In the Old Testament all of the great wonders of God’s covenant are acted out in the comings and goings of Israel. And so Israel must go into the midst of the sea to teach you and me our salvation. Dead and buried in the midst of the sea.

And what a glorious death and burial it was! For there, in the midst of the sea, the Israelites were dead and buried with Jesus Christ. The waters baptized them unto Moses, type of Christ (I Cor. 10:2), so that in the midst of the sea they were buried with Christ in his death (Rom. 6:3–4).

Buried with Christ? Baptized unto Christ? What do these things mean? This: Behind Israel was Egypt. Behind the people of Israel was their old life of slavery and bondage. That was the only life they knew, but that life was finished now. God had redeemed them from that life through the blood of the passover lamb. Redeemed from that life by the blood of the Lamb, they were dead to that old life. That was what the Red Sea was for the Israelites: their death and burial to sin and bondage. It was God’s testimony to them that he would never send them back to that old life. They were dead to it! Through the blood of Christ! That is what baptism is for you who are God’s: your death and burial to sin through the blood of Jesus Christ.

And on the other side of the Red Sea? Another life! A new and heavenly life with God in God’s

promised land! And that is ours too through Jesus Christ our Lord. “For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection” (Rom. 6:5).

Beautiful picture! Heavenly reality! The children of Israel went into the midst of the sea.

—AL

HERMAN HOEKSEMA'S *BANNER* ARTICLES

The Banner

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Our Doctrine by Rev. H. Hoeksema

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

After we have presented our view as to the meaning of Gog and Magog it will undoubtedly be rather clear to what period we refer the thousand years.

This number is not to be understood in the literal sense of the word no more than any other element in the passage. It must be taken symbolically and then as a multitude of the number ten. Ten is frequently used in Scripture, and wherever it occurs it denotes in the first place completeness, a fullness of measure, whether of time or of space or of anything else. It was under the severe visitations of the ten plagues that Pharaoh was forced to let Israel depart from Egypt; ten commandments comprise the fullness of God's will for His covenant people; in the structure of the tabernacle the number ten appeared predominately, the most holy place was a perfect cube of ten cubits, the holy place was twice ten cubits in length and ten cubits wide, the outer court was five times ten cubits wide and ten times ten cubits long. And the same number is preserved in all the dimensions of the later temple. The parables of Jesus make mention of ten talents and ten cities and ten virgins. The church of Smyrna shall have tribulation ten days, and the beast that rises out of the sea has ten horns. So also the devil is to be bound ten times ten times ten years. In all these cases we find a fullness of measure, the measure being determined by the counsel and

will of God. And, therefore, we may say in the first place, that ten denotes the idea of fullness or completeness of any measure, whether it be of space or of time or anything else, meted out according to the counsel of the Almighty. This idea, however, is modified in various ways. To make just one comparison, we feel the difference between the measure of time that Smyrna is to be in tribulation and the thousand years that Satan shall be bound. In both cases we find the number ten, in both cases, therefore, there is present the idea of fullness of measure meted out according to God's will. But the general idea in each case is differently modified. The church of Smyrna is to be bound **ten days**, thus expressing both by the use of the single number ten as well as by the employment of the term days, that it will be but a short time. But the devil shall be bound a thousand years, indicating that the period will be of long duration. Ten times ten times ten, not days but years the devil is to be bound, and during all that time he shall not be able to deceive the nations that live outside the pale of history. And, therefore, we reach the conclusion that the thousand years of satan's imprisonment indicate in the first place, that he is to serve the full measure of time meted out to him according to the counsel of God. But in the second place, they just as clearly reveal that the period will not be short but of long duration.

Historically we find this period in the present dispensation. Mark, I prefer not to say we are right in the midst of the millennium, for the simple reason that I do not believe in a millennium in the correct sense of the word. The term “millennium” has acquired a meaning which is not at all applicable to the present dispensation. It indicates in its current sense a period of bliss and peace, of glorious reign for the church of God, for the people of Jehovah in the midst of the world. And as such the present age cannot be characterized as the age of the millennium. Neither does the text at all make mention of such a glorious reign of the people of God in the world. It speaks of the reign of the saints with Christ, indeed, but this refers to something radically different from the reign of God’s people in the world in the millennial sense of the word. And, therefore, I would not be misunderstood. I am no optimist with regard to the present age. And I would rather not say that we are right now in the millennium. There is no, there never will be a millennium. That is my conviction. But the thousand years mentioned in Rev. 20 indicate in general the entire dispensation in which we are now living, the whole new dispensation in general, up to the time shortly before the final return of our Lord and King. For it is in this new dispensation that the devil is rather plainly bound with regard to the nations that live on the four corners of the earth. In the old dispensation heathenism was dominant in the world, Israel had no influence. In the new dispensation, Christendom is of dominating influence, the nations of heathenism are powerless. And the explanation of this evident fact is that the devil cannot muster the forces of heathendom to rise against the Christian nations, Christian, of course, in the outward, nominal sense of the word. And that this condition of affairs in the new dispensation is of great significance for the progress of God’s spiritual kingdom in the world, for the development of the elect race, needs no further elucidation. If the numerically powerful heathen world could rise against the Christian nations even as Babylon of old rose against Israel; if it could still control the world’s

history even as Roman paganism controlled it, the result would be inestimably disastrous for the development of God’s people in the world. Towards the very last, when God shall have gathered His people, when Christendom shall have developed into Anti-christendom, God and Magog shall be deceived. The Lord of lords shall use them to strike against the outwardly Christian nations. They shall come, no doubt, with the intention to give battle to and destroy the people of Christ. But they shall be deceived. And instead of coming against the true people of Jehovah, against spiritual Zion, they shall strike against its outward shell, against a Christendom that has become Babylon in character.

But we must still discuss the middle portion of our passage, verses 4–6.

The millennialist, of course, would insist that with our explanation of the binding of satan during the thousand years we come into conflict with that part of the text that speaks of the reign of the saints with Christ, during these same thousand years. The text says that they lived, and that they reigned with Christ a thousand years. And these thousand years, this may, of course, be granted as indisputably certain, refer to exactly the same period as the thousand years mentioned before. In this period, while the devil is bound with regard to Gog and Magog, the saints reign with Christ. But if this period represents the present age, where, thus the question is raised, where do we find the saints of Christ reigning with Him in glory? Evidently, even if it may be granted that our exposition of the rest of the passage is tolerably correct, this portion is so flagrantly in conflict with it, that it cannot stand.

And yet, we maintain that it is exactly this portion of the text that corroborates all that we have said, and it is in this part of the passage that the millennial view reveals the weakness.

But let us investigate.

John tells us that he saw thrones. It is very evident that with the end of vs. 3 and the beginning of vs. 4 the vision is, as it were, interrupted. Something different is placed within the sphere

of his vision. First he saw how the devil was bound for a thousand years, and with vs. 7 he continues to narrate what became of the devil in his prison, or rather what became of him after the thousand years are ended. But the vision of vss. 4–6 is beautifully thrown in between. He saw thrones and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them. He, evidently, beholds a people, beholds a people that reigns in glory. For the throne is a symbol of royal power, and judgment is a royal prerogative. And the question arises: who are these, that sit upon the thrones and that reign and judge? In the first part of vs. 4 John does not tell us. He merely says that he saw thrones, and entirely impersonally he says that they sat upon them and that judgment was given unto those that sat upon the thrones. But in the rest of that verse he tells us who they are that sit upon the thrones: “and I saw the souls of them that had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus...and they lived, and (they) reigned with Christ a thousand years.” In answer to the question, therefore, who they were that lived and reigned with Christ during the period of the thousand years, John tells us that they were souls, bodiless souls. I want to emphasize this. They are not resurrected saints, they are not persons that have received their resurrected body, but they are souls. Of course, those that find in these words an indication of the glad millennial reign of the saints of Christ on earth deny this. They say that the resurrection of the righteous has already taken place, and that the saints, in their bodies, reign with Christ on earth. But I most positively deny that this can be gathered from the text. Those that favor this interpretation argue that the word “souls” in our text is employed figuratively, that the figure of “pars pro toto” (part for the whole), the figure that expresses only part to denote the whole is here employed. Souls means persons, they say. And they refer you to other passages of Scripture where the same figure is used. We read, for instance, that “all the souls of the house of Jacob which came into Egypt were threescore and ten,” Gen. 46:27. We read that in the ark few, that is, eight souls were

saved, I Peter 3:20. We read that on the day of Pentecost, “there were added unto them about three thousand souls,” Acts 2:41. On his voyage to Rome there were with Paul in the ship “two hundred threescore and sixteen souls,” Acts 27:37. In all these passages the term “souls” is employed in the figurative sense to refer to persons. Now, it is argued, in that very same sense the word is used in our passage from Rev. 20. When John says that he saw souls, the expression must be understood as referring to persons, as denoting the saints that have received the resurrection body. But here it is exactly that we disagree. The figure does not apply in this case. For notice that both in Scripture and in our daily use of the figure it always occurs in connection with a certain number. Scripture does not say that there were souls in the ark, or that there were souls with Paul in the ship, or that souls came with Jacob from Egypt, or that souls were added to the church on Pentecost. But every time a number is used. Eight souls were in the ark. Two hundred and sixty-five souls were in the ship; three thousand souls were added to the church; seventy souls came with Jacob into Egypt. And the same rule holds good in our use of the figure today. I do not say, for instance, that I saw head, but I will say, for example, that there were an hundred head, meaning so many cattle. I do not say that I saw sails, but I will use the expression: there were fifty sails in all, meaning so many ships. The figure here employed is always used in connection with number. But in Rev. 20 we are told simply that John saw souls. No number is used, and, therefore, there is no reason to think that the figure of part for the whole is employed in this connection.

There is, however, a still more weighty argument against this interpretation of the word “souls” in this connection.

In all the other illustrations from Scripture adduced, there is absolutely no danger that we will mistake the figure. No one misunderstands the figure that there were eight souls in the ark, we all feel immediately that souls means persons in this instance. No one is in danger of making a similar mistake in regards to the three

thousand souls of Pentecost, or the seventy that came from Canaan into Egypt, or the two hundred and seventy-six that were in the ship. But in our passage from Rev. 20 the case is different. We read of the souls of those that were beheaded for the testimony of Jesus. They are, therefore, the souls of those that have died, souls that have departed from the body.

It seems to me, this expression is so clear, that hardly two interpretations are possible.

Neither is this interpretation overthrown by the expression: "This is the first resurrection."

About this next week.

—Holland, Mich.



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