



REFORMED

— P A V I L I O N —

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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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And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, that they turn and encamp before Pihahiroth, between Migdol and the sea, over against Baalzephon: before it shall ye encamp by the sea. For Pharaoh will say of the children of Israel, They are entangled in the land, the wilderness hath shut them in. And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, that he shall follow after them; and I will be honoured upon Pharaoh, and upon all his host; that the Egyptians may know that I am the LORD. And they did so. And it was told the king of Egypt that the people fled: and the heart of Pharaoh and of his servants was turned against the people, and they said, Why have we done this, that we have let Israel go from serving us? And he made ready his chariot, and took his people with him: and he took six hundred chosen chariots, and all the chariots of Egypt, and captains over every one of them. And the LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and he pursued after the children of Israel: and the children of Israel went out with an high hand. But the Egyptians purused after them, all the horses and chariots of Pharaoh, and his horsemen, and his army, and overtook them encamping by the sea, beside Pihahiroth, before Baalzephon.

—Exodus 14:1–9

What an unusual way for Jehovah to lead the children of Israel.

Turn and encamp before Pihahiroth? Between Migdol and the sea? Over against Baalzephon? It was a death trap. Before them was the sea. To either side were ridges and cliffs rising up. The millions of Israel were boxed in, with a narrow pass behind them their only exit. No man in his right mind would lead his nation that way, to camp at that spot. Of all of the places in all of the wilderness for Israel to be, this was the worst. All it required for Pharaoh to trap them was for him to march his army into the pass. “Entangled in the land,” indeed.

And Pharaoh was coming. By God's appointment and God's direction, Pharaoh was coming. Even now God was speeding news of Israel's predicament to the ears of Pharaoh. Even now God was hardening the heart of that mighty king and turning Pharaoh's heart against God's covenant people. Even now, by his sovereign hand, God was bringing the horses and chariots and horsemen and army of Egypt sweeping down upon Israel to close the pass and trap them. “The wilderness hath shut them in,” indeed, but

by the sovereign appointment of Jehovah. Jehovah hath shut them in!

What an unusual way for Jehovah to lead his people.

And yet how utterly divine! With Jehovah nothing is usual. Nothing is according to the reckoning or the wisdom or the planning of man. Jehovah's way with his church is always unusual. No, Jehovah's way with his church is always *impossible*. It is always the way that shuts man in, so that his own arm and his own wisdom fail him. It is always the way that exposes man as helpless and dying and dead. Consider the way to God's Canaan: not the near way through the land of the Philistines but the impossible way “through the way of the wilderness of the Red sea” (Ex. 13:17–18). Consider the way to God's heaven: not the flattering way of man's willing and man's working himself up from earthly paradise to heavenly Paradise but the impossible way of man's sin and fall and death. Of all of the places for the church to be, man's sin and death is the worst. There in man's fall, man is shut in by God in the death trap of man's disobedience and God's curse, where it is impossible for man to deliver himself.

Impossible for *man* to deliver himself, but with *God* all things are possible. For the way to God's heaven is the way of God's grace. It is the way of Jesus Christ. It is the way of God's doing the impossible thing of coming to his people as a man, shouldering his own curse against his chosen beloved, dying as atonement for our sins, and rising from the dead in victory. Here is the

way to God and to God's heaven: the deep way of sin and grace, which is the deep way of Jesus Christ.

Unusual? Impossible? For mere man, yes, of course. But it is God's way and thus not only possible but also certain. Shut in, let us behold our God and his Christ, our salvation.

—AL

HERMAN HOEKSEMA'S *BANNER* ARTICLES

The Banner

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Our Doctrine by Rev. H. Hoeksema

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

Against the idea that a glorious reign of Christ on earth lasting a thousand years before the consummation of all things were taught in Rev. 20:1–10 we remarked in the first place that even the binding of satan would not inaugurate an era of peace and bliss for the world, for the simple reason that sin would have its influence and reveal its power apart from the influence of the devil. The reign of peace and bliss in the full sense of the word is not to be expected, before also the power of sin and death has been completely vanquished. And in the second place, we remarked that it must be called strange, indeed, that a truth like that of the millennium, granted it were a truth, would have to be based on a single portion of the N.T. Time and again there is mention in the N.T. of the return of Christ; time and again we read of the signs that serve as precursors to His coming; we read of the coming apostasy, of the development of the man of sin; of the power of antichrist; of the day of judgment; of the New Jerusalem and the new heavens and the new earth; but never of the thousand years of reign before the final consummation, except in this one difficult passage of the book of Revelation. While there are many

passages that leave the impression that no such period will intervene between the judgment of the righteous and that of the wicked. We do not assert that it is impossible to base a doctrine on a single passage of the Word of God. But it must be admitted at least that this is a strange fact.

But let us approach the disputed passage itself, to see if it is really an established fact that it speaks of such a millennium.

First of all we must caution against the impression as if there should be an exact historical, chronological order in the different scenes drawn before our attention in the book of Revelation. Such is frequently the impression. The people often forget that the book is prophetic and peruse its pages with the idea that there is an exact order of time, so that, for instance, what is revealed in chapter 19 precedes in order of time that which is told us in chapter 20. This is not the case. There is, indeed, order in the book of Revelation. There is also development in the scenes it pictures to us. There is notable advance from scene to scene. That this is true is plain from the fact that the seventh seal manifests itself as seven trumpets, and that the last of these dissolves as it were into seven vials.

But the development, the advance, consists rather in an ever increasing severity of the Lord's visitation than in any order of time. At any rate, we would make a dangerous mistake if we should turn to the book and its interpretation with the expectation of finding any exact chronological order. Revelation is not history, it is prophecy. And prophecy is not simply to be called history written before its date of realization; but it gives us an idea of the future, it pictures before us, often in most beautiful symbolism, the character of future history, and that most often without offering any chronology of the events that are foretold. That this is true with respect to the book of Revelation is clearly to be shown by a comparison of Rev. 20:1–10 with previous passages of the book.

There is no dispute about the fact in general that Rev. 20 gives us a picture of the very end of this dispensation. The tenth verse informs us that the devil is cast into the lake of fire to be tormented day and night forever and ever. The passage, therefore, deals with the time of the very consummation of history. But it must not be overlooked that a picture of the end has been given more than once in previous passages of the book. Who can read the last part of chapter 6, where the sun is pictured as being black and the moon is changed into blood, the heavens are rolled up as a scroll while the stars fall from heaven unto the earth as a fig tree sheds her unripe figs when she is shaken of the wind, and the mountains and isles are removed out of their places, while the great and the small of the earth in sore amazement cry out that the great day of the wrath of Him that sitteth upon the throne and of the Lamb has come — I say, who can read that passage without feeling certain that already in that chapter we have a general picture of the very last? Neither is this all. In chapter 14 we receive a similar picture of the end, more in detail and from a different point of view, when the harvest of the earth is reaped and the clusters of the earth's vine are trodden in the winepress of God's wrath. Also there we receive a picture of the last day.

Still more.

As early as in chapter 16 we meet with the pouring out of the seventh vial. At the time of its being poured out, all the nations of the earth have been gathered together for the battle of the great God Almighty, the battle of Armageddon. Not only the outwardly Christian nations, but also those that come from the sunrising have been instigated to fight against the Lord and His Christ. And on the field of Armageddon they are trodden under foot. After that scene there are no nations left. And in chapter 20:1–10 we must see a scene that follows in time upon that revealed in chapter 16. There we see once more how the nations are gathered together for battle against the Christ, and how the Lord comes from heaven with His heavenly armies to destroy them by the power of His wrath. And, therefore, it is rather plain that there is no strict chronological order observed, but that frequently we are offered a picture of essentially the same event, but every time from a different angle. If, for instance, in chapter 19 we receive a picture of the time of the end from the point of view of the judgment upon the beast and the false prophet, in our passage (20:1–10) the question is answered what will become of Gog and Magog, the nations that live on the four corners of the earth.

Secondly, we must answer the question, whether Rev. 20:1–10 must be interpreted literally or must be conceived of as a highly symbolic picture. As we know, the premillennarians are very fond of emphasizing that Scripture must be interpreted literally. You must take Scripture at its word, they say, and you have no right to force your own figurative, metaphorical, spiritual interpretation upon the words of Scripture. They insist on literal interpretation, they say, and the vials of their indignation are often poured out without restraint over the heads of those that venture to suggest that Scripture must sometimes be taken symbolically or spiritually.

But let us investigate.

What is meant by literal interpretation? Literal interpretation is the understanding and explanation of every word according to the letter,

in its real, in its most ordinary sense. According to literal interpretation a thousand years is a thousand years, not 1001, not 999, but exactly a thousand. A temple is always a temple, a literal building of wood and stone. Israel is Israel and nothing else, the Jewish nation. And the premillennialists insist that also in prophecy you have no right to conceive of these terms in a different sense. In support of this stand they usually adduce many illustrations of prophecies that have been literally fulfilled already. It was foretold that Christ should be born of a virgin, Is. 7:14. The prophecy was literally fulfilled. It was foretold that Christ should be born at Bethlehem, Micah 5:2. The prophecy was literally fulfilled. It was prophesied that the Lord would make his entry into Jerusalem, seated on the colt of an ass. The prophecy was literally fulfilled. And thus they can point to many other instances of Scripture. We will not investigate them all.

We do not deny, of course, that prophecies may have a literal fulfillment.

The question is whether they always have, and whether they cannot be fulfilled in more than one sense of the word. To one instance, however, we wish to call your attention. The premillennarian is rather fond of calling our attention to the passage in Luke 1:31–33. The passage reads as follows: “And behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb and bring forth a son, and shalt call His name Jesus,” vs. 31. “He shall be great and shall be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of His father David,” vs. 32. “And he shall reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there shall be no end,” vs. 33. Now the premillennialist quotes this passage to show us our inconsistency. For, he says, the first verse of this passage you all take as literally fulfilled. This cannot be denied. But when it comes to the other two verses, and the angel begins to speak of the throne of David and the house of Jacob, this is suddenly interpreted in a figurative sense. This looks, indeed, a serious accusation. Yet it is not as serious as it would appear at first sight. In the first place, it

may be remarked that the premillennial brother already abandons the strictly literal interpretation when it comes to verse 32. It says there literally, that the Lord will give to Jesus the throne of David. Now, also the millennarian says that this must not be taken literally, as referring to the very throne in which David sat, but that it means the authority, the royal power and glory, the reign of David. And on the other hand, would our brother maintain that we have no right to apply “the house of Jacob” to spiritual Israel of the new dispensation? Then we would answer that in the light of Scripture, there is no other Israel in the new dispensation than the spiritual. Paul very emphatically says in Rom. 2:28, 29: “For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh: but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit not in the letter: whose praise is not of men but of God.” The same apostle tells us in Gal. 3:7, “Know therefore, that they that are of the faith, the same are children of Abraham.” In these passages the apostle not only gives us the right to call ourselves Israel if we believe in Jesus, children of Abraham, but he very specifically states that outside of those that are of faith, there are no children of Abraham in the new dispensation. And, therefore, if to us the house of Jacob is spiritual Israel, they that are of the faith of Abraham, we have scripture to justify our view.

But let us turn to the book of Revelation and to our passage from chapter 20, in order to show how impossible literal interpretation becomes. Revelation is a book of symbols. The future is drawn before us in picture after picture. And literal interpretation becomes quite impossible in application to the book as a whole. Let me adduce just one illustration out of many. In Rev. 13:4 we read: “And I saw a beast coming up out of the sea, having ten horns and seven heads, and on his horns ten diadems, and upon his heads names of blasphemy.” Now, according to the literal interpretation a beast is a beast and a head a head, a horn a horn and a diadem a diadem and nothing else. Is this applied to the beast

out of the sea? Of course not. The beast and the sea, the heads and the horns and the diadems, — every detail of the picture is interpreted symbolically and spiritually. Also by the premillennarian. And quite correctly so. We do not mean to bring an indictment against him for doing this. But why insist upon literal interpretation, if the brother fails to follow his own rules?

And finally let us apply the literal interpretation to chapter 20:1–10. We read, that John saw an angel coming down from heaven to bind the devil. Now we would expect that the premillennial brother would insist upon strictly literal interpretation and maintain that “to see” is “to see” and that the devil was bound right there and then before John’s eyes . But no, they say, it was not accomplished before John’s eyes, it is something that will be accomplished in the distant future. John saw this spiritually, in the spirit, in prophetic vision. Yet, literally the text has it: “And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven,” etc. Again, the angel is represented as having the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand. And we would say: a key is a key and a chain is a chain. But why a chain of steel to bind the devil that is a spirit? Evidently, the chain and

the key belong to the symbolism of the scene, and admittedly so.

Still more.

John tells us that he saw thrones and the souls of them that were beheaded for Christ’s sake. Now surely, a soul is a soul. Especially when that soul is defined as a soul of one that is beheaded. But (wonderful inconsistency) here the premillennarian of a sudden abandons his own method of literal interpretation most illegitimately and claims that these souls are people that are in possession of a resurrected body! Surely, even the premillennialist does not adhere very strictly to his method of literal interpretation. In fact there is scarcely any element in the passage that is literally interpreted. But when it comes to the thousand years he says: “Das Wort sollen Sie stehen lassen,” and of a sudden a year is a year and a thousand is a thousand!

Now, over against this we claim that in Rev. 20 we have symbolism of the highest kind. And we claim that we do not have the right to interpret such a passage as this as if it were literal history.

And is this not a much more sober method?

—Holland, Mich.

