

ESCHATOLOGY: DOCTRINE OF LAST THINGS

PART 10

AMILLENNIALISM, PART 4

It wouldn't be the Kingdom if Satan is running around in it. Satan is now the god of this world. During the Millennium, He will not be active in the world at all; he will not be able to blind the minds of the unbelieving. People will still refuse to believe, but it will be due to their own rebellious sin nature exercised without the help of Satan. Satan has also been granted the power of death, but that will be removed from Him and only the One whose right it is to exercise that power will wield it. The true God of this world will be ruling in perfect righteousness.

2 Corinthians 4:4 ⁴in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

Hebrews 2:14 ¹⁴Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil,

“. . . [I]f there is ever to be a Kingdom of God on earth, a reign characterized by the total absence of war and by rigid control of disease and death, it should be evident that in such a kingdom there can be no place left for the great deceiver of the nations, who is said to have not only the power of inflicting disease upon men (Job 2:7) but also the 'power of death' itself (Heb. 2:14), to say nothing of personal control over the demonic world (Matt. 12:22-26). To be sure, the vast powers of Satan have never been outside the permissive control of our sovereign God, but the continued exercise of such powers would be utterly incongruous within an established Kingdom of God on earth. ... In that wonderful day there will be no room left for the diabolical activities of 'the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience' (Eph. 2:2). Satan shall be bound in such a way that he can deceive the nations 'no more' till the thousand year reign of Christ is done." [Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom*, p. 482].

The near perfect conditions of the Millennial Kingdom with Satan bound will serve to prove that all may know that man's heart is incurably wicked. Even in those ideal conditions there will be some sin but it will be dealt with swiftly and judiciously. There will be a rebellion at the end, but it will be decisively put down. No one will be able to blame the devil for their personal sins and for their rebellion against God.

“. . . [The] binding of Satan for a thousand years will constitute a conclusive demonstration of man's personal responsibility for his own depravity. Although Satan has indeed been the originator of much of the evil of our fallen race, he cannot be charged with all of it. Yet the alibi of Eve—'The serpent beguiled me'—has never ceased to be the excuse offered by men for their sins. Our Lord struck at this alibi when, after enumerating a terrible catalogue of human iniquities, He declared that their source was 'from within, out of the heart of men' (Mark 7:21-23). Yet men—even Christians—have been loathe to believe that this is altogether true. Through the ages of God's dealing with a fallen race, He has tested its members under many different conditions; and in every test, apart from the grace of God, man has always proven to be a failure. But *sinful* men have never been given an opportunity to 'prove' what they will do in an environment from which the great deceiver of souls has been completely banished. The purpose here is not to acquaint God with something which He does not now know, but rather to prove to *men* themselves how desperately wicked they really are. The complete immobilization of Satan for a thousand years, therefore, will lay the basis for God's final argument against the popular doctrine of the inherent goodness of man when placed in the right kind of environment. ... [T]he binding of Satan will show under the rule of Christ the yet unrealized and vast possibilities of human life in physical existence on earth, even where sin still exists in a society composed of both regenerated and unregenerated men." [Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom*, pp. 482-483].

Mark 7:21-23 ²¹"For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, ²²deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. ²³"All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man."

It is clear that part of the reason for binding Satan and removing his influence from the world is to conclusively prove that man is inherently sinful and his natural inclination is to rebel against God. "What an amazing time of blessing this will be [speaking of the Millennial Kingdom]. Satan and his demonic realm will be rendered *completely inoperative* during the coming earthly kingdom of God. But this great blessing also has a flip side: in the removal of the great tempter is the removal of a convenient excuse by which men hide their own rebellious nature. And this, it would seem, is part of God's plan in locking Satan away for the duration of the Millennial Kingdom—to show man his utter incapability of obedience to God, even in the midst of ideal conditions and in the absence of the influence of the serpent of old." [Tony Garland, *A Testimony of Jesus Christ: A Commentary on the Book of Revelation*, p. 2:113].

Amillennialists argue that Satan's binding refers to his inability to deceive. Part of the problem with this is Satan has always been limited in his powers to some degree. If they are correct, binding him, according to their theology, doesn't change anything. What that limitation on his powers is, we do not know but it seems to be evident that he has a

significant amount of power to inflict damage on earth's people. In this age, Satan apparently has a free hand to roam about the earth.

Job 1:7 ⁷The LORD said to Satan, "From where do you come?" Then Satan answered the LORD and said, "From roaming about on the earth and walking around on it."

Job 2:2 ²The LORD said to Satan, "Where have you come from?" Then Satan answered the LORD and said, "From roaming about on the earth and walking around on it."

At the same time, we know that God placed limits on Satan concerning what he could do to test Job's faith. We infer from that, and it seems to be a quite reasonable inference, that Satan is similarly restrained in what he has been able to do throughout history.

Job 1:12 ¹²Then the LORD said to Satan, "Behold, all that he has is in your power, only do not put forth your hand on him." So Satan departed from the presence of the LORD.

Job 2:6 ⁶So the LORD said to Satan, "Behold, he is in your power, only spare his life."

Because literal hermeneutics are abandoned in this theological system, they can't decide among themselves what it means to have Satan bound in this age. Abraham Kuyper, a Dutch Calvinist theologian, admitted a literal reading of Revelation 20:1-7 would lead to the dispensational, premillennial understanding of the Kingdom, but as an amillennialist he couldn't use literal hermeneutics to interpret it. "Reading this passage as if it were a literal description would not only tend to a belief in the Millennium but would settle the question of chiliasm for all who might be in doubt concerning same ... If we take it for granted now, that these thousand years are to be taken literally, that these thousand years are still in the future, and that this resurrection was meant to be a bodily resurrection, why then we may say that at least as far as Rev. 20 is concerned, the question is settled. Then we must admit that Rev. 20:1-7 is a confession of chiliasm with all it contains." [Abraham Kuyper, *Chiliasm*, p. 9]. But Kuyper's theology won't allow him to understand this Scripture as literal truth.

Revelation 20:1-3 ¹Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand. ²And he laid hold of the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; ³and he threw him into the abyss, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he would not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were completed; after these things he must be released for a short time.

Amillennialists and others who do not believe the Scriptures concerning Eschatology can be understood according to literal hermeneutics come up with many different ways to explain Revelation 20:1-3. When doctrine is simply being made up to support theology, that's what happens.

Riddlebarger writes, "The binding of Satan simply means that Satan cannot deceive the nations until he is released at the end of the millennial age. ... The imagery that Satan is presently bound means that he cannot deceive God's people *en masse* nor can he attack the covenant community with relative impunity as he did before the coming of the Messiah. ... Now we are told that 'the gates of hell will not prevail against Christ's church' (Matt. 16:18). Although Satan remains a fierce foe, persecuting God's people as he is allowed, he cannot triumph because he is bound until released at the end of the millennial age. ... The point of John's vision was that the angel restrains Satan's evil activities. His binding does not eliminate them. ... [T]he binding of Satan is a continuous activity through the preaching of the gospel in which Christ's followers make disciples of all nations. ... Satan still rages against Christ and his kingdom in this age in some limited but nevertheless sinister fashion. Although his power to deceive is bound by the truth of the gospel, his fury is not." [Kim Riddlebarger, *A Case for Amillennialism*, pp. 210-212].

Cox also says "Satan's binding refers (in figurative language) to the limiting of his power ..." He goes on to say that premillennial theologians do not and cannot understand this binding of Satan to be anything other than literal. For Cox, the binding of Satan means he "can no longer deceive the nations by keeping the gospel from them." [William E. Cox, *Amillennialism Today*, pp. 58-63].

Horton claims that if "Satan were not bound, there could not be a church—much less one that endures through the centuries despite heresy and schism." [Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way*, p. 941]. How small a view of God must this man have to say that God can't get His church up and running in the face of Satan's activity? Satan does not limit God; God limits Satan. Jesus said the gates of hell will not prevail against the church; He didn't say Satan wouldn't try to prevail against it in any number of ways. Jesus didn't even say Satan would not be able to significantly hinder the church; he has done that. But he hasn't prevailed against it. The church is here and it lives in Christ to do His work.

For Hoekema, "while Satan is bound he cannot deceive the nations in such a way as to keep them from learning about the truth of God. ... [T]he binding of Satan during the gospel age means that, first, he cannot prevent the spread of the gospel, and second, he cannot gather all the enemies of Christ together to attack the church. ... Satan's fall or binding is associated directly with the missionary activity of Jesus' disciples. ... The binding of Satan described in Revelation 20:1-3, therefore, means that throughout the gospel age in which we now live the influence of Satan, though certainly not annihilated, is so curtailed that he cannot prevent the spread of the gospel to the nations of the world. Because of the binding of Satan during this present age, the nations cannot conquer the church, but the church is conquering the nations." [Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, pp. 228-229].

The church has never conquered any nation. Churchianity has conquered nations and installed kings and governments, but the church universal, consisting only of born again

believers, has never done so. There has never been a Christian nation. There have been nations founded on and operated on Judeo-Christian values. Born again people have never constituted a nation; they have always been outnumbered by unbelievers.

Kik believes the gospel is the chain that binds Satan. "It is not difficult to ascertain by what means Satan is bound. The chain is the Gospel. Wherever a soul is released through the preaching of the Gospel there Satan is restrained and limited. ... Unfortunately, the Church of today does not realize the power that Christ has given her. Christ has placed in her hands the chain by which she can bind Satan. She can restrain his influence over the nations. But today the Church bemoans the fact that evil is becoming stronger and stronger. She bemoans the fact that the world is coming more and more under the control of the Devil. Whose fault is that? It is the Church. She has the chain and does not have the faith to bind Satan ever more firmly and the Church does it not!" [J. Marcellus Kik, *Revelation Twenty: An Exposition*, pp. 19-20].

Lorain Boettner presented an imaginative interpretation of Satan's binding. "We are told the Devil is bound with a great chain and imprisoned for 'a thousand years,' and after that the [sic] thousand years he must be loosed for 'a little time.' Verses 4 through 6 tell of the blessed state of the saints who have died and who reign with Christ for a thousand years. We have there two time symbols. When these are contrasted or used in opposition to each other, it is but natural that they should be spoken of as 'before' or 'after.' But in reality they refer not to successive earthly time periods, but to different spheres, to the intermediate state, and to time on earth. And as such they are concurrent. The Devil is bound for a thousand years in the sense that he is not able to molest or attack the saints who are in the intermediate state as he did attack them when they were on earth; and the 'little time' for which he is loosed relates to his activity in this world, during the Church Age, and is a recapitulation of Rev. 19:11-21, in which he is battling against Christ and the saints. The 'little time' is, for the individual, but a short period and is soon over, compared with the thousand years that are spent by the saints who are in the intermediate state. ..." [Lorraine Boettner, an addendum pasted into the back of his book *The Millennium*]. This explanation has nothing to do with the Scriptures and everything to do with maintaining a theological position.

Satan is busy attacking believers on multiple fronts today. His message is brought into Christian homes via the entertainment media, the sports media, and the news media. Satan attacks Christian children via the public educational system and through the higher educational system as it exists in colleges and universities. Christians succumb to Satan's temptations and fail all the time. Satan has infected the pulpits of churches through the seminaries; the preaching of false doctrine is a direct assault by Satan on believers. Satan is continually attacking the veracity of the Word of God. In Muslim countries, Christians are being murdered today in numbers that are astronomical.

Amillennialists are blind to the truths of Revelation 20:1-3 because they have replaced Israel with the church and they deny a literal Millennium. What kind of antibiblical nonsense is it to say that Satan is now bound so that he cannot deceive the nations?

Apart from the truth of the Bible, which is all we need to understand the issue, there are also real experiential reasons to reject this amillennial doctrine. Aren't Muslim nations spiritually deceived today? And isn't that not just in part in total? Certainly, there are some believers to be found in Muslim nations, but for the most part those nations are in total deception. Aren't atheistic communist nations spiritually deceived today? Aren't the politically and economically socialist nations spiritually deceived today? Aren't dictatorships of all kinds spiritually deceived today? Isn't Christianity nearly dead in Europe? Isn't Christianity seriously wounded and on the decline in the USA and Canada? Isn't all of that the result of satanic deception manifesting itself over centuries of history since the life of Christ? All of these things serve to tell us that Satan has a free hand, to whatever extent God allows him, to roam the earth deceiving the nations and their people and that he is in no way bound as Revelation 20:2 says he will be bound in the future. How in the world can anyone read the Bible and observe the world situation as it exists today say that Satan is bound in order to prevent him from deceiving the nations of the world? Isn't this doctrine in and of itself a satanic deception? Of course it is, because it prevents people from understanding the real nature of the long ago promised Messianic Kingdom on earth with the King on His Davidic throne in Jerusalem. Further, Revelation 20:3 says that Satan "would not deceive the nations any longer" meaning he had been deceiving them up to the point that he was bound and thrown into the abyss. Amillennialism is not a simple doctrinal error; this is not about harmless eschatological doctrinal arguments. It is rebellion against God, it is rebellion against the Word of God, and it is rebellion against the Kingdom program as God has revealed it to the world. These things are important and they carry with them both temporal and eternal significance.

The primary lesson we need to learn from all this is use literal hermeneutics. When theology becomes the hermeneutic and trumps the literal method, the imagination of the interpreter is free to make the Bible say whatever he wants it to say. We just examined what six different theologians claim it means to bind Satan as Revelation 20:1-3 presents it. None of them present exactly the same exegetical conclusions and most of them greatly differ one from the other. None of their conclusions comport with a literal reading of the Scriptures. The point is when literal hermeneutics are discarded and theological hermeneutics are used in their place, the interpretation is born of the theology and the imagination of the exegete rather than being born of the Scriptures.

A word of warning is in order. Premillennial theologians need to be consistent in their application of the literal hermeneutical system or risk being challenged on the same grounds that we challenge other than literal hermeneutical systems. In the early twentieth century, a premillennial theologian named Walter Scott wrote a commentary on the book of Revelation. In it, he wrote the key, the chain, and the seal were symbolic but the 1,000 years was literal and not to be considered symbolic. An amillennial theologian named W. J. Grier jumped all over that inconsistency.

“Walter Scott emphasises [sic] ‘the symbolic character of the scene’, as far as the binding of Satan is concerned. He says, ‘The angel has the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand. One need scarcely insist upon the symbolic character of the scene, for *that* seems evident on the surface.’ Scott points out that the *symbols* of key, chain, and seal signify that ‘by angelic agency’ Satan’s ‘liberty is curtailed and his sphere of operations narrowed’. After admitting the use of symbol in verse 1, Scott denies the use of symbol in verses 2 and 4—the key and the chain are symbols, but not the thousand years. The thousand years, he says, ‘in our judgment, should be regarded not in any symbolic sense, but as describing the exact and literal denomination of time. The term *the millennium* as a designation referring to the period of the Lord’s reign—public and personal with his saints—over the earth is gathered from this chapter (p. 398) [in Scott’s commentary].

It is certainly to the good that Scott admits that as Satan is a spiritual being, the key and chain must carry spiritual significance and are not to be regarded as material objects. We must lodge an emphatic protest, however, at the unjustifiable way in which Scott mingles the symbolic and the literal at his own mere whim. One term is symbol because he chooses to take it so, while another in the next or even in the same verse must be taken in an absolutely literal sense. This feature marks Scott’s commentary on Revelation at other points, and marks the entire premillennial interpretation.” [W. J. Grier, *The Momentous Event: A Discussion of Scripture Teaching on the Second Advent*, p. 104].

While I think Grier’s criticism is overdone because literal hermeneutics accounts for figurative and symbolic language, his criticism is a warning to those of us who employ literal hermeneutics that we need to clearly express the meaning of our interpretations. Even if the key, the chain, and the seal are symbolic, they still mean Satan will be totally locked in the abyss for 1,000 years and that is an event still in the future. Even if they are symbols, they represent a literal truth that is entirely consistent with a literal 1,000 years. We need to clearly explain these things in order to avoid this kind of criticism. It appears that Scott did not have a truly literal understanding of Satan’s confinement because he wrote that his “liberty is curtailed and his sphere of operations narrowed” rather than completely stopped. This kind of inconsistency in employing literal hermeneutics gives the critics of dispensational theology a lot of ammunition to use against the dispensational system of literal hermeneutics. We have to be consistent when we are presenting the findings of our exegesis.