

## Sermon – 25/05/2008 pm

### Satan Bound for 1000 Years

Study Text: Revelation 20:1-3

From very early days Christians have taken differing views with regard to the millennium or 1000 years referred to in Revelation 20. The millennium has been the cause of division and even conflict in the church. A lady came to me once almost apologetic that she was talking to other Christian ladies who were premillennialists. She was not sure what premillennialists believe but knew it was not what she believed.

When I started preaching from the book of Revelation I was asked what view I held on the millennium. I preferred to explain the passages as I came to them rather than be pigeonholed from the start; although my views have been expressed on various occasions. In this chapter we come to the only mention of the millennium in Revelation and the Bible – the Greek term is *chilias*=1000.

Our view on the millennium hinges on two factors. Firstly, understanding the genre of literature found in this book. Revelation is clearly different from other parts of the Bible (except Daniel and Ezekiel). The introduction of this book states that it is the *apocalypse/revelation of Jesus Christ regarding things that must shortly take place* (1:1). We call this apocalyptic writing because images, symbols and numbers are used to describe spiritual realities. Numbers like 666, 7, 12, and 144,000 have symbolic significance as most agree. Yet when we come to 1000 many want to read it literally. To be consistent we must understand 1000 symbolically- probably indicating a long period.

Secondly this book is a series of visions which the Lord gave to John. It is not historical narrative. The visions are about the end of the age and divine judgment. A number of visions come to the same end point, namely God's judgment upon the wicked (6:17, 11:18, 16:17) – unless we think there are multiple ends to the world. In the second half of Revelation the focus is upon the spiritual enemies of God who deceive human beings or earth dwellers. The leader of these is the dragon, that ancient serpent called the devil (accuser) and Satan (adversary). The others, namely the beast and the false prophet were cast alive into the lake of fire in 19:20.

### Millennium

What are the different views taken on the millennium? There are three main views with variations in each.

Premillennial – Jesus will return prior to the start of the millennium. When Jesus returns to earth Satan will be bound for 1000 years, Christians will be resurrected and reign with Christ on the earth for literally 1000 years. At the end of this time will be a final rebellion against Christ and then the great white throne judgment (20:11). Dispensationalists hold this position but also say that Israel will be restored along with sacrifices in a rebuilt temple in Jerusalem which is in Palestine. Some also believe in a secret rapture of saints prior to the seven-year tribulation all before the millennium. All this has been drawn up along a detailed time line.

Premillennialism is not new. The church fathers Justin Martyr and Irenaeus were 'chilialists' who believed in a literal 1000 years. Augustine opposed this view and premillennialism

virtually disappeared until the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Modern dispensational teaching stems largely from the teaching of Darby and the Schofield Reference Bible in 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Postmillennial – Jesus will return after (post) the millennium. The millennium, which may be literal or not, occurs towards the end of the church age. It is seen as a time of great blessing, peace, and revival in the church. Some look for a large-scale conversion of the Jews during this period.

Amillennial – the millennium is understood symbolically rather than literally. It begins with the death and resurrection of Christ and ends with his return. There is no belief in better times ahead or of a glorious church age before the return of Christ. Amillennial means no millennium but this is not what is actually believed. It is better to refer to this as 'inaugurated millennialism' because the belief is that the millennium coincides with the church age.

These different views arise from different approaches to the context and content of this chapter. The chapter begins with the word 'then' or more correctly 'and' (*kai*). This 'and' may refer to historical sequence but more probably to a sequence in the visions. There are many parallels in the visions of this book. In 19:20 armies gather for war. In 20:8 we see them gathering again – or is it again. Is this another war or just another perspective on the same war? In 19:20 we saw the beast and the false prophet cast alive in to the lake of fire. In 20:10 the devil (dragon) is cast into the same lake in a scene that parallels that of chapter 19.

## **Satan Bound**

What do we learn from the content of this chapter? John saw an angel coming down from heaven. He was carrying a key and large chain. The key was for locking or unlocking the abyss or bottomless pit. Satan was given the key to this pit in an earlier vision. He opened the pit to release a plague of horrible stinging scorpion like locusts (9:1). But it is Jesus who holds the keys of Hades and death (1:18, 3:7). It seems that Jesus is overall in charge of this key.

The angel from heaven grabs the dragon, binds him and throws him into the pit, locks the door and seals it (20:2, 3). The dragon symbolises the devil and Satan as we saw in 12:9. Satan is bound for a thousand years, to the extent that he cannot deceive the nations. Not all activity of Satan is ruled out. He is only bound not totally inactive. It is amazing what some criminals can get up to even from the confines of prison.

Clearly the angel is more powerful than the dragon. Jesus made this point when the Jews accused him of casting out demons in the name of the devil. He said *no one can enter a strong mans house and plunder his goods unless he first binds the strong man* (Matthew 12:29). Note the word *bind*. Jesus also spoke of Satan falling like lightning from heaven, again in the context of demons being cast out in the name of Jesus (Luke 10:18). Just days before going to the Cross Jesus said *now is the judgment of this world. Now the ruler of this world will be cast out* (Jn 12:31). The binding and casting out of Satan is seen here in the context of Jesus' death and resurrection.

We can understand the binding and casting down of Satan here in Revelation 20 in the same context. Jesus was confronted by widespread demon possession when on the earth. Satan also attacked Jesus directly trying to deceive him. Satan was not bound before Jesus came but it was different after his resurrection. Jesus defeated Satan at the Cross.

*That serpent of old* (20:2). Satan was described by these same words in an earlier vision (12:9). In fact we find a number of parallels in that passage in which the angels fight with the dragon in heaven, and the dragon is cast to the earth along with his fallen angels. That passage goes on to say they overcame the dragon *by the blood of the lamb and by the word of their testimony* (12:11). Down on earth the devil prowls around in great fury because his time is short.

*Serpent of old* of course takes us right back to the Garden of Eden. The serpent deceived Eve into disobeying the command of Almighty God. He led Adam and Eve into sin which separated them from God. God's wrath was turned away by the propitiating sacrifice of Jesus. Satan's power was curtailed. He was bound. He was put on a leash as some say. He is furious and dangerous like a pit bull terrier. But God does not allow him to destroy the elect or the church that belongs to Christ.

Looking at the world at the time of Hitler, and even today, we might question to what extent Satan is bound. If you hold a premillennial view you do not have this problem for Satan is not yet bound. But the words of Jesus already referred to, along with other words of Scripture, point to the triumph of Jesus in his death and resurrection (Colossians 2:15, Hebrews 2:14). 'From the point of view of the history of redemption, Satan's power over the nations of the world is no longer what it was during the Old Testament period'.

Prior to the Cross the Gentiles were totally ignorant of the grace of God. It was the disciples who took the gospel into the world according to the command of the risen Jesus. He said *all authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth* (Matthew 28:18). *All authority* must include authority over the devil and his agents. Jesus will build his church and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. Satan has been bound and cannot stop the church from advancing in the world. Persecution there will be, but the church will not be destroyed. Is this not what we see in the world today? Satan's binding ensures and enables the evangelism of the world.

## **Satan Released**

After this period of 1000 years Satan will be released for a short time to go and deceive the nations and gather them for war (20:3, 7-8). There is no mention of a time of peace and blessing as the end approaches. Satan will be released to make a last ditch effort to overcome Christ. It reminds us of the Lord telling Moses that the sins of the Amorites had not yet reached full measure (Genesis 15:16). The words 'must be' (20:3) indicate that this is all in the eternal plan of God.

It is difficult to fit this 'little while' into the scheme of premillennialists. If Christ is reigning on earth with resurrected believers for 1000 years, Satan must be released into this paradise. Does he go out to deceive the nations comprising resurrected believers (20:8)? Dispensationalists usually include a seven year period of tribulation immediately prior to the millennium.

We see a lot of evil in the world today and we cry out to God because of it. We see humanism increasing in extent and depravity. We see idolatry increasing in some of its ghastly forms. But let us remember that at the Cross Jesus won the victory over Satan who is behind all these manifestations of evil. By his death Jesus destroyed him who has the power of death that is the devil. His final destruction in the lake of fire will surely come.

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