

CHAPTER I

The Millennium--Specific Reference

The Millennium is specifically (1) the period of time between the resurrection of the just and of the unjust, and (2) the period of Satan's imprisonment.

The word "millennium" (derived from Latin *mille*, thousand, plus *annus*, year) is simply a Latin translation of *chilia etee* in the Greek text of Revelation 20:2,3, etc. The word means, simply, a thousand years.

That it should be necessary to affirm here that it refers to a "period of time" seems odd. Yet it is necessary, for it has been vigorously advocated that it does *not* refer to a period of time at all. There are those who insist that there is no primary reference to either a literal period of a thousand years ushered in and closed by definite events or to an ideal period which is a symbol of something else.

The Book of Revelation makes mention of several periods of time--of "silence in heaven about the space of half an hour" (8:1); of four angels "prepared for an hour, and a day, and a month, and a year" (9:15); of "the holy city" to be trodden "under foot forty and two months" (11:2); of two witnesses who "shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and three score days" (12:6). There is no clear evidence that any of these is to be taken in any other sense than a literal period of time. And, even if there were, each case would have to be settled individually. Actually, there is no convincing, self-evident Biblical testimony against the literal interpretation of this thousand-year period.¹

It would take a large book to treat completely the various devices which have been invented to avoid the clear literal teaching of Revelation 20:1-7, concerning a future period of one thousand years of time between the second coming of Christ and the final consummation of all time. I do not hesitate to attribute all of them to the strong tendency in some system-making theology to force difficult but clear texts out of their true shape to fit a system. Augustine had a theory of politico-ecclesiastical government to maintain, so, while admitting the literality of the years, he placed them in the present age out of their eschatological connection. Modern Amillenarians (Kuyper, Allis, Hamilton, Murray, Hendriksen, Warfield, Milligan, and others) have a theory that the eschatological future consummation must take place in a very short period of time, as man counts time, and hence must remove the strictures of the text to make their theory fit. They also have theories concerning the future of the church and Israel which do not fit well into the picture of a Millennium in which saints reign on earth with Christ and Israel blossoms again. So the Millennium must go.

That they are conscious of their difficulty in so disposing of the passage is clear from their writings. Many of them admit that the literal teaching of the passage is that the proposition of which this section is a

¹ See Appendix II for discussion of nonliteral interpretations.

discussion is a true one--that the Millennium is a one-thousand-year period during which Satan shall be bound, and which separates the resurrection of the just from the unjust. I have been much impressed by the obvious Christian devotion of some of these men and their plain faith that the Bible is indeed the Word of God. When I have permitted this portion and some other plain portions of Scripture to be shunted out of the center of discussion (where they must remain) I have even been impressed with the seeming cogency of their arguments. I am not even disposed to dispute their finding a much closer relationship between O.T. prophecy and the church in the present age. Nor does there seem to me to be any serious objection to the claims of many Amillenarian brethren that the Bible speaks of a present reign of the saints with Christ in heaven. However, as one of their own fellows in the Covenant Theology to which most of the contemporary Amillennialists adhere has observed: "I am deeply interested in what my Amillenarian brethren may present as counter arguments; but I am convinced that hitherto neither Augustine nor his followers have adequately dealt with this material in Scripture or as much as dented the millenarian argument which is involved in this material" (D. H. Kromminga, *The Millennium*).

So, in the complete absence of convincing contrary evidence, I assert that the Millennium is a period of one thousand years of time and insist that it is one of the clear teachings of Scripture.

I have asserted that the Millennium is *specifically* the period of Satan's imprisonment and the period between the resurrection of the just and of the unjust. The thousand years are mentioned six times in the first seven verses of Revelation twenty. Three of these occurrences (vs. 2,3, and 7) apply it to the period of Satan's imprisonment. Once, in verse five, it refers to the period between the resurrections. The other two apply it to a period of time during which saints shall reign. But these references to the reign of the saints are in a different class from the others. The thousand years will complete the whole history of Satan's binding as well as of the resurrections of dead men. It will be only a preliminary stage in the reign of the saints in Christ's everlasting kingdom.

It is not an uncommon misconception among Premillennial believers that Christ's kingdom, the reign of Christ, and the reign of the saints are restricted to a one-thousand-year period. Revelation 20:4 ("and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years") and 20:6 ("they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years") have been thought to teach that the reign of the saints and of Christ shall come to an end at the close of the Millennium. How foolish it is to cite these verses in proof of such an assertion is seen at once in a close look at verse four. "Lived" and "reigned" are both in the same person, gender, and number, and tense in the Greek. There is no punctuation mark of any kind between them. Clearly, then, the thousand years modifies both the living² of the saints and their reigning.

2 I have not been greatly impressed with the view of Alford and others that εζησαν (they lived) is the equivalent of "they arose from the dead," i.e., were resurrected--even though such meaning might strengthen the Premillennial position. The condition described as "they lived" is certainly a result of resurrection but does not constitute resurrection.

To insist on a reign of only one thousand years on the basis of this verse would require equal insistence on a living of only one thousand years, which simply will not do. And contrariwise, there are many passages which speak of the perpetuity of the reign of the saints in the kingdom of Messiah.

On this point, and in relation to these verses, George N. H. Peters has written the truth, as follows:

It is asserted by some (as e.g. Calvin, *Inst.*, B.3, ch.25) that our doctrine limits the reign of Christ *only* to the one thousand years. This is incorrect. While some Millenarians explain the "delivering up of the Kingdom" somewhat similar to our opposers, yet even nearly all--if not all--of these, so far as we have any knowledge of their writings, affirm that *Jesus continues* to reign in the same Kingdom, subordinately to the Father, *after* the close of the thousand years. The reasons for *the perpetuity* of Christ's Kingdom will now be presented, and the only passage that seems to militate against it will be examined. [He refers to I Corinthians 15:24.]...While the words "eternal," "everlasting," "forever," are sometimes employed to denote limited duration (*i.e.* duration adapted to the nature of the thing of which it is affirmed), yet such words as applied to the Kingdom of Jesus Christ *cannot* be thus restricted, because an unending duration intended by them is stated in explanatory phraseology (as e.g. Luke 1:32 "of his kingdom there shall be no end," etc.). The thousand years are *specifically* mentioned as *the period* of Satan's binding and of the time existing *between* the two resurrections, and of this era it is also asserted that Christ and His saints shall reign. The declaration of their reigning during this period does *not limit* the reign to it, but is added to indicate that the reign is already commenced and extends through this Millenary age. Jesus is not merely the king of "*an age*" but of "*the ages*" (I Tim. 1:17 Greek), and His Kingdom is united, not merely to "*an age*" but to "*the age of ages*" of "*eternal ages*," thus indicating its extension onward through the vast succession of time in an unending series. Hence the perpetuity of the Kingdom is freely declared in II Sam. 7:16; Heb. 1:8; Luke 1:32,33; Rev. 11:15; Isa. 9:7; ii Pet. 1:11, etc., and this is explained, Dan. 2:44, to be "*a kingdom that shall never be destroyed*," and in Dan. 7:14, "*His dominion is an everlasting dominion which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed*." Indeed, so expressive are these and kindred passages that even those who advocate *a transfer* of the Kingdom to the Father and some kind of an ending of the Kingdom, are still forced, by their weight and concurrence, unhesitatingly to acknowledge, in some form (as Barnes, etc.) "*the perpetuity of Christ's Kingdom and His eternal reign*." Hence this reign, beginning at the Millennial era, is *not terminated* by the close of the thousand years...(The *Theocratic Kingdom*, Vol. 2, 630, 631).

It is not true, as both Amillennialists and Postmillennialists are wont to affirm, that a period of time between the resurrection of the just and of the unjust is affirmed by Scripture in this passage alone. There is at least one Old Testament passage which mentions a long period at the time of the consummation during which certain "high ones that are on high, and the kings of the earth upon the earth" shall "be gathered together, as prisoners are gathered in the pit, and shall be shut up in the prison, and after many days shall they be visited" (Isa. 24:22,23). No satisfactory explanation of this strange passage was afforded until Revelation 20:1-10 was written, and even

then only as the literal Premillennial interpretation was adopted. Dr. Nathaniel West possibly went too far in asserting dogmatically that several other Old Testament passages refer to the Millennium. He asserted this of Ezekiel 38:8; 37:25,26,28; Hosea 3:4,5; Psalm 72:7. Some of these *may* refer to the Millennium. Only Isaiah 24:22,23 *must* refer to it, in my opinion.

But, granting the objection to our doctrine: that it is supported by one passage alone, the fact remains that one passage does clearly teach it and one is enough.

Amillennialists have various methods of handling the reference to a "first resurrection" of the just and a final resurrection of the unjust mentioned in Revelation 20. The most common is that advocated recently by Floyd E. Hamilton, and very clearly stated by him:

The amillennialist...believes that the first resurrection is the new birth of the believer which is crowned by his being taken to heaven to be with Christ in His reign during the interadventual period. This eternal life, which is the present possession of the believer, and is not interrupted by the death of the body, is the first resurrection and participation in it is the millennial reign. (*The Basis of Millennial Faith*, pp. 118,119).

Like most of the Amillennialists, ancient and modern, he traces support for this view from several other Biblical passages which speak of a spiritual resurrection of believers at new birth. In John 5:24-29 he, following Augustine, even finds (and rightfully so) a spiritual and a physical (in that order) resurrection of believers in one paragraph. Yet for two simple reasons his argument is completely worthless. The first is that interpretation of what he calls a symbol in Revelation 20 must have a sound basis in the passage itself. It will not do to run off somewhere else and, finding a spiritual resurrection, cry, "See, Revelation 20:4-6 speaks of spiritual resurrection." This kind of exegesis leads to no certain results. And it is fortunate that most of our orthodox but Amillennial friends do not frequently use this method of exegesis except where the doctrine of Millennium is concerned. The second reason, suggested now already, is that no connection can be traced between even one of his references and Revelation 20:4-6.

Before leaving Hamilton, note that he regards the Millennium not as a period of time but as a condition of existence, and that it takes place in heaven.

Augustine, who is of importance to the discussion as the first acceptable exponent of Amillennialism, had a slightly different view of the nature and location of the Millennium. He placed the Millennium on earth during the present age. He felt that it consisted in the binding of Satan by the progress of the church. He thought it began with the first missionary expansion of the church from Judea and would end with the coming of Christ in the year 650, though he was not dogmatic about that date. He tried to adjust the Millennium with the sixth millennium of human history, following the Septuagint chronology, which he interpreted to place the end of the fifth millennium at about 350 B.C. (*City of God*, XX,8).

Thus, to Augustine, the Millennium is a period of time, and is the period of Satan's imprisonment, but by placing it in the present age, and by making the reign of the saints ecclesiastical instead of eschatological his view is totally unacceptable. It simply does not fit the plain requirements of the passage in Revelation twenty.³

The comments of a great scholar, recognized by Christian scholars of all schools of thought as a worthy interpreter of Scripture, I deem to be worthy of note in concluding on this point.

I refer to Henry Alford, churchman, New Testament critic, scholar, and Christian. Commenting on Revelation 20:1 ff. he says,

It will have been long ago anticipated by the readers of this commentary that I cannot consent to distort words from their plain sense and chronological place in the prophecy on any considerations of difficulty, or any risk with it. Those who lived next to the Apostles, and the whole church from 300 years, understood them in the plain literal sense: and it is a strange sight in these days to see expositors who are among the first in reverence of antiquity complacently casting aside the most cogent instance of consensus, which primitive antiquity presents. As regards the text itself, no legitimate treatment of it will extort what is known as the spiritual interpretation now in fashion. If, in a passage where *two resurrections* are mentioned, where certain ψυχαι ἐζήσαν (souls lived) at the first, and the rest of the νεκροὶ ἐζήσαν (dead lived) only at the end of a specified period after the first--if in such a passage the first resurrection may be understood to mean *spiritual* rising from the grave--then there is an end of all significance of language, and Scripture is wiped out as a definite testimony to any thing. If the first resurrection is spiritual, then so is the second, which I suppose none⁴ will be hardy enough to maintain: but if the second is literal, then so is the first, which, in common with the whole primitive Church and many of the best modern expositors, I do maintain, and receive as an article of faith and hope (*Greek Testament with a Critically Revised Text*, etc. Vol. IV, pp. 732,733).

3 Augustine, after mentioning the view which he later calls Chiliast or Millenarian, seems to admit that he once held the chiliastic view. He also admits that it is only a sensual interpretation of the Millennium that is objectionable in Chiliasm (*op.cit.* XX,7).

4 Alford was overpresumptuous. David Brown (*Christ's Second Coming. Will It Be Pre-Millennial?*) for one argued at considerable length that both the resurrections of Revelation 20 are figurative or "spiritual." The first refers, says he, to the ultimate victory of the church in and over the world; the second, to a recrudescence of evil just before the final judgment (see pp. 234-239). Carroll (*The Book of Revelation*, Broadman Press, Nashville, 1916, 1942; pp. 231,232) shares this view.