

**“The ABC’s of the Christian Life: (34) Following Jesus Christ Rightly:
#19d. Three Great Foes: Third, the devil (part 4)**

Introduction:

Let us begin this morning by reading of the glorious song sung in heaven, giving praise to our Savior Jesus Christ. I would assert that this event occurred at His inauguration as King of kings and Lord of lords, when He ascended from the tomb into heaven and God the Father then enthroned Him over the kingdom of God. We read in Revelation 5:10 and 11 these words in which glory is given to the risen and enthroned Lord Jesus for having accomplished His mission of the salvation of His people through His life, death on the cross, and resurrection. In heaven it is declared to Him,

“You are worthy to take the scroll,
And to open its seals;
For You were slain,
And have redeemed us to God by Your blood
Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation,
And have made us kings and priests to our God;
And we shall reign on the earth.”

With today’s message I thought that we would complete the series to which we have given much time and attention, “The ABC’s of the Christian Life.” But upon more reflection, I know that we will have at least one more sermon before we complete this series. Next week is Palm Sunday, when our friend, Jason Austin, will be here with his family. We have arranged for him to preach before us. The following week is Easter Sunday, when I plan to preach. The week following Easter we will complete this series of sermons, Lord willing.

Today it is our desire and design to complete our study of this third great spiritual enemy to our souls--the devil--with which we always engage in spiritual battle. Initially it was not my intention to take four Sundays to address this subject, but the abundance of biblical information as well as the great deal of ignorance and misinformation regarding the subject made it necessary. And even in completing our treatment today, we will not have done a thorough examination of the subject, for the Holy Scriptures contain much information regarding this enemy of our souls and the nature of our spiritual engagement with him, his efforts, and with the host of malevolent spirits which he has pitched against the people whom God has created in His image.

There are numerous “Christian” books available on this subject, the vast majority I would encourage you *not* to read or to accept their teachings regarding the devil and spiritual warfare. In fact most of them are not only not helpful, but they are errant and dangerous. These books are often based on what the authors claim are personal observations and experiences, coupled with shallow and superficial assertions of being biblical in what they teach. Please stay away from them, except for the few books I have already cited for you.¹

¹ Two weeks ago I included this in our sermon notes: “There are two highly recommended books that I would recommend that address the Christian’s spiritual warfare against satan and his forces. The first is by **William Gurnall** (1616-1679), *The Christian in Complete Armour*. This is a lengthy exposition on the spiritual armour of God in Ephesians 6:10-20. Be sure to obtain the full unedited edition by Banner of Truth. The full text (849 pages) is available on line at <https://archive.org/details/christianincomp00unkngoog>. The second volume is by Thomas Brooks (1608-1680), *Precious Remedies Against Satan’s Devices*. The entire book is available on line at http://www.gracegems.org/Brooks/precious_remedies_against_satan5.htm.

However, this week I did obtain an additional book about this subject that I can recommend to you.² The author is **Fredrick S. Leahy**, and his book is entitled, *Satan Cast Out; A Study of Biblical Demonology*. The publisher is The Banner of Truth Trust, therefore, I can highly commend it. I found it informative and engaging. It is the only recently written book that I know I can recommend as a thoroughly Biblical presentation of this subject from a Reformed understanding. The author not only dealt with the biblical information on the subject, but he also rehearsed the testimony of notable persons through history citing their experiences and theological assessments and opinions regarding demon influence and possession. Toward the end of his book Leahy gave a summary of his conclusions. I thought they were valuable enough to include them as an appendix to today's notes. If you glance at page 10 you will see 10 summary statements regarding this subject that are biblically valid, in my opinion.

Now today I would like us to better understand the victory that the Lord Jesus Christ accomplished through His death on the cross over the devil and his forces. This subject falls under the prevue of spiritual warfare, which we have addressed primarily as we as individual Christians or as a church engage the spiritual forces that are opposed to us. But today I would like us to stand back and see the larger picture of God working in history in His engagement against the devil and his forces. In so doing I would like us to understand clearly what God has already accomplished and what He will yet accomplish through the present kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ. In addressing this matter, we must touch on matters of eschatology, or the doctrine of end times events. But let us first consider...

I. The Old Testament promise of the kingdom of God

It is important that we establish in our thinking a historical, theological context. The Bible is an unfolding story through history of what God has purposed to accomplish through Jesus Christ. We should understand the beginning of the story, if we are to recognize and understand clearly the climax and finale of that story.

God had originally created this world and particularly human beings as a kingdom over which He ruled as its King. In the beginning God created all things good and all things were in compliant submission to its Creator-King. God created man to be His co-regent, to rule over His creation on His behalf within His kingdom. But when Adam and Eve sinned, the human race lost its lofty position and place in God's kingdom. Mankind through Adam became a race of rebels. Before the fall of man into sin, all people and things were in lovingly subjection to God as King. After the fall no one and nothing was in subjection to God the Creator, its rightful King. The human race was lost to the kingdom of God, excluded from the paradise of God in which they had lived a blessed existence in fellowship with their God. Through Adam's sin, all people became the citizens of another kingdom, which is the kingdom of satan, a kingdom of darkness, over which the devil reigns.

Through Adam's sin the human race became subject to the devil. Since Adam's fall into sin, the devil has ruled over the fallen world in which mankind lives. The devil has ruled over all human beings as subjects of his kingdom. He influences them to do evil by coercing them, enticing and tempting them, and controlling them as his subjects who do his bidding. In this kingdom fallen people serve the devil by purposing to live for themselves rather than for and before God who made them. Satan is the "ruler of this age" (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11). He is the "prince of the power of the air" (Eph. 2:2). He rules over the fallen kings of the earth through history. He has his fallen angels influencing and controlling his subjects through deception and subterfuge, through manipulation and false reasoning that is contrary to the will of God.

The devil is said to have great authority and influence in the fallen world through "principalities and powers" (Cf. Rom. 8:38; Eph. 6:12; Col. 2:15). These should be understood as a hierarchy of fallen angels, or demons, through which he influences and directs fallen human authorities who are in positions of influence and power.

² Fredrick Leahy, *Satan Cast Out; A Study in Demonology* (Banner of Truth, 1975, 2015), pp. 199.

It is the purpose of God to glorify Himself in history through the recovery and restoration from sin of a people, to reestablish a kingdom in which His people would love Him, trust, Him, obey Him, and rule over His creation on His behalf. The whole story of Scripture is that of God redeeming and restoring His fallen creation unto Himself, establishing a mediatorial kingdom, and thereby bringing all of creation into willing submission to its true God. By mediatorial kingdom, we are saying that God will restore the creation to Himself through an intermediary, or mediator, who would affect the restoration of all things into a right and holy relationship to God. As one once wrote,

Man was excluded from the kingdom of God at his expulsion from Paradise: his restoration to that kingdom has been the grand end of all God's subsequent dispensations (ages). This restoration, according to the divine plan, was to be accomplished through a mediatorial kingdom, of which the God-man Christ Jesus should be King. Under this kingdom of the Mediator the universe should no longer be governed immediately by God, but immediately through the God-man, all power in heaven and in earth being given unto Him.³

The first promise of this mediatorial kingdom is Genesis 3:15, in which God promises that the devil would be defeated and mankind would be restored to God. This verse is commonly referred to as the *protoevangelium*, for it is the first promise of the gospel in the Bible. It is the promise of God voiced to the serpent that the authority of the devil would be deposed and a promised Son of the woman would ascend as King over the restored kingdom of God. It further set forth a veiled prophecy of Jesus Christ's death of the cross that would secure this great victory. God declared,

"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel." (Gen. 3:15)

As history began to unfold, God began to call people from the human race to return onto Him through faith. We read in Genesis 4:26 we read, "To Seth also a son was born, and he called his name Enosh. *At that time people began to call upon the name of the LORD.*"

Early in history God preserved for Himself individuals, and some families here and there.⁴ But when God called Abram and Sarai to leave their pagan roots and travel to a land that He would one day give to him, God made known that He would save a people, form that people into a nation, and establish that nation before Him in a place that they could live before Him in state of rest and peace (Cf. Gen. 12:1ff).

God had promised Abraham that one of his Seed would come to remove the curse of sin and restore his people to God. Later, after God had constituted Abraham's physical descendants into the nation of Israel at Mount Sinai, God promised to bring His people into The Promised Land, where they could live before Him in a covenant relationship with Him. Israel would be a manifestation of a form of the kingdom of God in history. Later still, God caused kings to arise in Israel who would lead His people in victory over their enemies in order to enable them to live before God in peace and security

But the mediatorial kingdom of God in the Old Testament was largely in the form of God's promise as taught and illustrated through types and shadows that pointed to the coming of Jesus Christ, the promised King over the inaugurated kingdom of God. Yes, a form of the kingdom of God was seen in ancient Israel. Israel was a political entity comprised of a physical, ethnic people, the Jewish people. Israel was to invade and conquer the land that God had promised. Israel was to displace the Canaanite peoples of the Land, and establish a theocracy in which they lived under the authority of the law of God with God as its rightful King. However, it would prove itself not to be the mediatorial kingdom in which all of its citizens would live in joyful submission and compliance to God and His law. Nevertheless, Israel did set forth in the land in some ways what the promised kingdom should be and would be like. God had given to Israel His moral law, even the Ten Commandments, to order its national life. In addition God gave to Israel ceremonial and civil laws by which the people could serve God in a fashion that foreshadowed the true worship of God through Jesus

³ Hezekiah Harvey, *The Church: Its Polity and Ordinances* (Backus Book Publishers, orig. 1879, 1982), p. 21.

⁴ Eg. Enoch, Noah and his family

Christ. But as we said, in the Old Testament the kingdom of God was largely in the form of promise, a kingdom that God had promised and that one day would be inaugurated. The coming kingdom of the Messiah would be an expansive kingdom, reaching far beyond the physical borders of ancient Israel. The promised Messiah's kingdom would encompass the world.

God had raised up David as king over Israel. It was through David that the nature and expanse of the promised messianic kingdom came to be understood more clearly. And as the gradual decay and disintegration of Israel unfolded in history that is recorded in the Old Testament, the hope and expectation of the coming Son of David and the establishment of His kingdom came to the forefront of Jewish expectation.

But in God's promise of the mediatorial kingdom of the coming Messiah, God declared that He would deliver His people from the control and power of evil forces that had them enslaved. He would do so even as He brings them into the kingdom of His Son. Through the salvation that God would accomplish on their behalf, He would secure their willing and joyful obedience and compliance to His government over which He would install the Son of David. Within the kingdom of the Messiah, both Jews and a multitude of Gentiles from every tribe and nation (Cf. Isa. 42:6; 49:6).

II. The realization of God's promise of His kingdom in Jesus Christ

The Bible makes it abundantly clear that when Jesus Christ was born, it signaled the time of fulfillment of God's promise of the long-expected kingdom of God. The opening verse of the New Testament signals this event when Matthew declared, "The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham" (Matt. 1:1). The angel Gabriel made this clear to Mary that the child she would bear was the promised Son of David, who would inaugurate the promised kingdom of God. Gabriel said to her,

"Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS. ³²He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. ³³And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end." (Luke 1:30-33)

And Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, was inspired by the Holy Spirit to declare,

"Blessed is the Lord God of Israel,
For He has visited and redeemed His people,
⁶⁹And has raised up a horn of salvation for us
In the house of His servant David,
⁷⁰As He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets,
Who have been since the world began,
⁷¹That we should be saved from our enemies
And from the hand of all who hate us,
⁷²To perform the mercy promised to our fathers
And to remember His holy covenant,
⁷³The oath which He swore to our father Abraham:
⁷⁴To grant us that we,
Being delivered from the hand of our enemies,
Might serve Him without fear,
⁷⁵In holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life. (Luke 1:68-75)

And so, with the presentation of the Lord Jesus in the Gospels, the gospel of the kingdom of God is announced. The long-awaited promise of God of the kingdom of God had arrived in the life and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth. And so we read of our Lord's ministry, "Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching *the gospel of the kingdom*, and healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people. (Matt. 4:23). And later we read similarly, "Then Jesus went about all the cities and

villages, teaching in their synagogues, *preaching the gospel of the kingdom*, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people” (Matt. 9:35). And later still He declared that after His departure from this world *this gospel of the kingdom* would continue to be proclaimed throughout the world. He told His disciples, “And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come” (Matt. 24:14).⁵

The point we wish to make is this: *the kingdom of God of the New Testament that God inaugurated through the ministry, death, resurrection, and enthronement of the Lord Jesus, is the promised kingdom of David of the Old Testament.* We are privileged and blessed to be citizens of the kingdom of God, living in the kingdom of the Son of David, foretold and foreshadowed in the Old Testament.

But what God had brought before His people through the coming of Jesus Christ was not what the people were anticipating or desired. Their expectations were far removed from that which God inaugurated through Jesus Christ. The Jewish people of New Testament days expected a restored earthly, political kingdom with physical borders. But what God had actually promised ancient Israel was a kingdom that was spiritual in nature. The reason for this was because the real problem that brought an end to Israel’s kingdom in the Old Testament was a spiritual problem. It was a problem with their sin which had alienated them from the life enjoyed by those who know God and live before Him in His kingdom. The Old Testament record of the physical enemies of Israel, their defeat of Israel, and subsequent oppression that all Israel had experienced, were God’s just punishment upon Israel for its sin. Israel had broken its (Mosaic) covenant with God. Therefore, God’s promise of a “restored” kingdom of David would be spiritual in nature, God having brought a remedy to their backsliding and rebellion, causing them to love Him and serve Him in faith and obedience. The Messiah would restore believing Jews to the promised kingdom. But He would also deliver believing Gentiles from their sin, bringing them into His kingdom. As our Lord Jesus declared of Gentiles in the Gospels, “

“And I say to you that many will come from east and west (i.e. Gentile lands), and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” (Matt. 8:11f)

All true disciples of Jesus would enjoy the spiritual and eternal blessings of God for being in a new covenant relationship with Him. The reason would be is that the Son of David would secure the obedience of His citizens through their conversion and by imparting to His people the Holy Spirit who would insure their faith and obedience to their king.

Moreover, the enemies from which God would deliver His people were not political enemies, the physical powers of Rome that ruled over Palestine. The deliverance that Jesus would accomplish was from “the principalities and powers” which the devil employed to keep His people enslaved in their sin and powerless to escape. Jesus would set His people free from the bondage of sin and the devil, enabling them to live before Him in faith, love, and obedience. Jesus told some Jewish leaders who wrongly thought they had salvation:

³¹Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. ³²And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”

³³They answered Him, “We are Abraham’s descendants, and have never been in bondage to anyone. How can You say, ‘You will be made free?’”

³⁴Jesus answered them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin. ³⁵And a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever. ³⁶Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed. (John 8:31-36)

This spiritual freedom in which the disciples would live before God in faith and liberty of conscience was the blessing enjoyed by those who had entered the kingdom of God through faith in Jesus Christ.

⁵ I believe in this context “the end” is the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem in AD 70.

Our Lord taught His disciples throughout His earthly ministry the true nature of the kingdom of God. It was not a physical, political nation, as once existed under King David, it was a spiritual kingdom in which people are set free inwardly to love and serve God. In the parables of the kingdom in Matthew 13 our Lord both corrected and instructed His disciples in the true nature of the kingdom of God. When our Lord first told His disciples the parable of the sower, it prompted their question in 13:10ff.

¹⁰Then the disciples came and said to Him, “Why do You speak to them in parables?” ¹¹And He answered them, “To you it has been given to know *the secrets of the kingdom of heaven*, but to them it has not been given. ¹²For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.” (Matt. 13:10-13)

It was through the death of Jesus Christ on the cross that the Lord Jesus fully and finally defeated the devil and his forces, breaking the devil’s authority over His people, thus setting them free, enabling them to come unto Him in repentance and faith. We read of this in Paul’s letter to the Colossians in which He tells of the work of God the Father in saving His people through Jesus Christ:

He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, ¹⁴in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins. (Col. 1:13)

And in Colossians 2 Paul wrote of the believer’s union with Jesus Christ in His life, death, and resurrection, thus being set free from the principalities that had bound them.

¹³And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, ¹⁴having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. ¹⁵Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it. (Col. 2:13-15)

III. Through His cross, Jesus stripped the devil of his power to prevent God’s elect from coming to salvation.

In order for the Lord Jesus to bring salvation to His people, He had to deliver them from the power of the devil that ruled over them. In our Lord casting demons out of people, He declared that it was proof that He was inaugurating the kingdom of God that God had promised to Israel. We have read several times the episode of **Matthew 12:22-30** in which He declared this truth.

²²Then one was brought to Him who was demon-possessed, blind and mute; and He healed him, so that the blind and mute man both spoke and saw. ²³And all the multitudes were amazed and said, “Could this be the Son of David?”

²⁴Now when the Pharisees heard it they said, “This fellow does not cast out demons except by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons.”

²⁵But Jesus knew their thoughts, and said to them: “Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand. ²⁶If satan casts out satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand? ²⁷And if I cast out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they shall be your judges. ²⁸But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you. ²⁹Or how can one enter a strong man’s house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house. ³⁰He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters abroad.

After He declared the present reality of the promised kingdom of God, the Lord Jesus spoke of the necessity to restrict and restrain the devil in order to set His people free from their sin enabling them to become citizens of the kingdom living under Him. Our Lord spoke of the necessity to first “bind” the strong

man before his (satan's) house could be spoiled. In order for Jesus to become the Savior of His people, He had to first strip the devil of his authority and his ability to keep his people in bondage. This is what He accomplished when He died upon the cross. He in effect deposed satan's authority. When our Lord was raised from the dead, He ascended and was enthroned in heaven, thereby vanquishing the devil as his conquered enemy. As a result, the Lord was able to expand His kingdom throughout the world.

Take note in the passage above that our Lord referenced two kingdoms. He mentioned the kingdom of God in **verse 28**. But He alluded to the kingdom of satan in **verse 26**, "If satan casts out satan, he is divided against himself. How then will *his kingdom* stand?" Our Lord made it clear that through His ministry the kingdom of God was defeating the kingdom of satan.

The Lord used a metaphor of a man who intended to rob another man's house. If the thief were to be successful in his plan to rob a house, he must first be the "stronger man" in order to overcome and tie up the owner of the house who would attempt to defend his goods from being taken from him. To bind the strong man, therefore, is a metaphor to describe the preventing of satan from defending his "house", that is, rendering satan unable to retain under his authority those who belonged to him. When our Lord delivered this man from demon possession, it signaled that He had rendered the devil "bound", unable to prevent the release of the one he had held captive.

IV. The binding of the devil and the doctrine of the millennium

Now we have asserted that God's promise of a coming kingdom in the Old Testament has been realized through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It was due to Jesus' obedience unto His Father even unto His death on the cross that led to and resulted in the enthronement of Jesus Christ over the kingdom of God when He ascended from the dead and ascended into heaven. When Jesus received from the Father the promised kingdom, He sat down on His throne and commenced His reign over the kingdom that God had promised to and through King David. We read of Jesus, "who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him" (1 Pet. 3:22).

But in contrast what we have set forth and affirmed regarding the present kingdom age of the Messiah's reign, most evangelicals do not believe what we have affirmed today. They do not believe that the kingdom of God that was promised to King David was inaugurated by the risen and enthroned Lord Jesus. Rather than understanding the kingdom of God to be the restored kingdom of David, which is wholly spiritual in nature, they advocate and promote a yet future "literal" kingdom of David that will be inaugurated at the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. They believe that the throne on which the Lord Jesus presently reigns is not the promised throne of David promised in the Old Testament. They believe and teach that the nature of the "future" kingdom is just like the one that the Jews had anticipated when the Lord Jesus conducted His ministry. They look for an earthly, political kingdom, which will be given to a renewed political state of Israel, a kingdom whose citizens will be predominantly ethnic Jews. They say that the capital of this this earthly kingdom will be the city of Jerusalem, and that Jesus will one day take his seat on an earthly, political throne of David, to rule over this world for 1,000 years. They actually advocate two future kingdoms, the kingdom of God during this church age, and then a second kingdom, a future earthly Jewish kingdom of David.

Here, then, is where the matter of "the millennium" comes into view. The issue at stake is the nature and identity of the kingdom of God to which the Holy Scriptures speak. We who are thoroughly reformed in our understanding of the Scriptures advocate that when our Lord spoke of the necessity to first "bind" the strong man before his house could be spoiled, that it speaks to what our Lord actually accomplished when He died upon the cross and rose the third day. The kingdom of our Lord was inaugurated, the Lord Jesus was enthroned in heaven, and satan was "bound" with respect to his ability to prevent his kingdom (his house – Matt. 12:29) from being spoiled. The Lord Jesus in effect deposed satan's authority when He ascended above him in authority, vanquishing him as his conquered enemy. Satan's kingdom continues to exist, but because the Lord Jesus had "bound the strong man", the devil rendered incapable to prevent the reception of the gospel among his people. As a result, the Lord Jesus was able to expand His kingdom throughout the Gentile world. The "stronger Man" had come, even Jesus Christ, and through His life and death He had "bound the strong man" and then proceeded to make a spoil of his house, the unbelieving world.

V. Some general considerations of the teaching of the millennium.

The only place in the Bible where a 1,000 year millennium is described is in Revelation 20:1-10. Let us read this passage:

¹Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. ²And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, ***and bound him for a thousand years***, ³and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, ***so that he might not deceive the nations any*** longer, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be released for a little while.

⁴Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. ⁵The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection. ⁶Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years.

⁷And when the thousand years are ended, ***Satan will be released from his prison*** ⁸***and will come out to deceive the nations that are at the four corners of the earth***, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle; their number is like the sand of the sea. ⁹And they marched up over the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, but fire came down from heaven and consumed them, ¹⁰and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

This is a passage of Scripture that at first glance seems to be quite easily understood. It seems to teach that immediately after the Second Coming of Jesus Christ there will be a period of time on earth of duration of 1,000 years that will be characterized by the uncontested reign of Jesus Christ. This is commonly known as the millennium, or the millennial reign of Jesus Christ. It is believed that it will be a time of peace and righteousness for the earth. It appears that it is as though Paradise lost in the first portion of Genesis has been restored and is now enjoyed by the people of God. But in actuality Christians have interpreted this passage in various ways over history. I think that we will come to see that this passage may not be so easily understood as one might think at first glance. Let us consider this matter.

A. What is a definition of the millennium?

When people speak about the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, often the idea of the millennium is brought to the discussion. What is a definition of the **millennium**? ***It is the belief that the Bible teaches that there will be a 1,000 year period of peace on earth when Jesus Christ will reign as King over the nations.***

The concept of a coming millennium is a part of our Western cultural thinking that has been shaped by our biblical heritage. "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" was written during the civil war with millennial ideas of a northern victory. But even non-Christians think and speak in terms of a millennium. Adolph Hitler's concept of the Third Reich was to be a Germany that would last for a 1,000 years. There was millennial language in his speech. His conception, of course, was that of world domination by Germany. Communism has envisioned a world in which a classless society would exist. But many other leaders have had millennial hopes for a time of peace, freedom, and prosperity for the world. Woodrow Wilson's encouragement for the U.S. to enter WWI to "make the world safe for democracy" also suggested millennial overtones. There has been a kind of millennial hope that has historically stirred people to both social and political action. But again, it would seem the whole idea of a future 1,000 year period of peace and prosperity stems from our biblical heritage.

B. Where else in the Bible is a kingdom taught as being 1,000 years in duration?

At this point it may be of interest to note this. Although the Bible everywhere speaks of a future existence for God's people that will be characterized by joy, peace, righteousness, it is only here in Revelation 20 that a period of 1,000 years is specifically set forward. ***Revelation 20:1-10 is the only place in the Bible where a millennium is identified directly.*** This is not to say that there are not many biblical passages that various Bible interpreters assign to the millennium, but this is the only biblical passage that speaks of a period of history on earth as being 1,000 years in duration. I think that this is an important point to understand when considering the nature of the millennium.

C. What are the historical Christian views of the millennium?

1. Premillennialism

This is the belief that the millennium will begin immediately *after* Jesus Christ's Second Coming. Premillennialists believe that upon His return, Jesus Christ will reign over the world for 1,000 years in a kingdom characterized by peace and righteousness. A cursory reading of this chapter as it follows the description of the Second Coming of Christ in chapter 19 seems to lead readily to the logical conclusion that the millennium is a literal period of time and will immediately follow Christ's Coming. Premillennialists, as do the believers in other views of the millennium, believe the Lord Jesus will return literally a second time. At that time the Lord will resurrect the dead. Premillennialists believe, however, that only true believers who had died throughout history will be resurrected on that occasion. All unbelievers, they say, will not be resurrected and brought to final judgment until the end of the 1,000 year earthly millennium.

Premillennialism has existed throughout the Christian era. Proponents of this understanding may be found in the early church fathers. It appears to have been the dominant position of Christians from the 2nd to the 5th centuries AD. Premillennialism is the predominant position held today by most evangelicals. The modern form of premillennialism is the view of the future perpetuated by the popular book series, "Left Behind", written by Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins. Most premillennialists are only familiar with their position, for that is the only position that they have been taught. One of the most respected staunch advocates of premillennialism is John MacArthur. I believe that he is mistaken in his understanding. Premillennialism has also been advocated by many great persons in history, including Charles Spurgeon and John Gill. But please be aware that the historic premillennialism they believed and taught was far different from what premillennialists advocate today; they are entirely different in nature.

2. Postmillennialism

This is the belief that the Second Coming of Jesus Christ will occur not before, but rather *after* the millennium. The proponents of this view teach that the world will be so greatly transformed by the gospel, by the working of God in history in bringing salvation to the world, that there will be ushered in the millennium on earth before the Second Coming of Christ. It will be 1,000 years in duration. At the conclusion of this millennial age, Christ will return to judge the world.

Postmillennialists differ as to how this period of peace will be brought into history. (1) Some believe that through the influence of the gospel the world will be transformed as it is subject to the spiritual reign of Christ that He exercises from heaven. The world will become largely Christian and then at the conclusion of 1,000 years the Second Coming of Christ will occur. (2) A few postmillennialists believe that it will be through God's works of common grace in bringing technological and societal development and maturity.

This position may seem to be quite strange and far-fetched to us living at the end of this century. But we should recognize that this post-millennial view was held by most Bible-believing Christians for at least two centuries until the early part of the 20th century. Postmillennialists have had great confidence in God's power to bring revival to His world. The 18th century Puritans were largely post-millennial. Almost all Bible-believing Christians in the 19th century were post-millennial. Given the advance of the gospel

throughout the 19th century throughout the world, it would be easy to see their readiness to see the onset of the millennium. Post-millennialism was the predominant position of Baptists until this century.

It was a post-millennial view of history that spurred the onset of much social work on the part of Christians at the end of the last century. There was the thought that by preaching the gospel and by transforming society through the principles of the Scriptures, the kingdom could be brought into history. There was an energy and optimism that stemmed from post-millennial thinking that stirred Christians to work hard in missions and social work. There was a general optimism about the future history of society. WWI discredited the idea of postmillennialism in the minds of most Christians. Since then most Bible believers have been pre-millennial.

Postmillennialists are still around. In fact their numbers are increasing. There have been Christian writers that have set forward their position in popularly selling books. Some of these include Russas Rushdoony, Gary North, and Greg Bahnsen.

One rather disturbing aspect of some postmillennialists (not all) is their belief that the millennium will be brought about by the transformation of society through the applying of Scripture to all of life. This might sound like a good thing as I described it, but these folks believe that the Mosaic law of the Old Testament must be reinstated in society and by this means the millennium will be realized. They advocate the Mosaic laws to be forcefully imposed and enforced by the government upon all citizens whether Christian or not. These Christians are sometimes called theonomists, or reconstructionists. In the past decade or so this movement appears to have peaked and is losing influence.

3. Amillennialism

This position holds that there is no literal 1,000-year kingdom on earth taught in the Scriptures. The “1,000 years” of Revelation 20 is a symbolic number signifying this current gospel age. The 1,000 years is to signify the present kingdom age of long but unspecified duration. The Lord does not want His people to know when His Second Coming will take place, therefore He did not give a precise duration of the kingdom of this church age.

Amillennialism became the predominant position of the Christian era beginning with Augustine in the 5th century AD. Roman Catholicism is amillennial; it is one of the doctrines that many Protestants agree with Rome as to the Bible’s teaching. But most of the Reformers were amillennial, including Luther and Calvin. The position is most commonly held today among evangelicals who are Reformed or Calvinistic in their theology. J. I. Packer and R. C. Sproul are amillennial in their understanding. The amillennial position is held today by Protestants who are Presbyterian and Reformed Baptist.

Although I had believed in a premillennial return of Christ in the first years after I had become a Christian (for that is the position I had been taught), I have held to the amillennial view of the end times since the early 1980’s. Holding this position has not been easy, in that I have had numbers of folks who came to reject me and my ministry over the years because of my convictions on this matter. Many, if not most premillennialists can be quite intolerant of views of the end times other than their own. One of the most outspoken opponents of amillennialism today is the very respected teacher John MacArthur. He stirred up some controversy several years ago at an annual conference his church sponsors, when before a gathering of Reformed people, of whom were a number of non-premillennarians, MacArthur brought a message entitled, “Why Every Self-Respecting Calvinist Is a Premillennialist.” Since then, there has been renewed and open debate about the matter. In fact this past week a lady, whom Darrin, my son-in-law, and I had met and befriended on our trip to Israel, wrote me with a link to MacArthur’s sermon asking me to respond to it. The point is this, the issue of the millennium is a controversial one, but it should be one in which tolerance and deference to others should be granted. Please do not misunderstand, the doctrine of the millennium is an important teaching, but it is not an essential doctrine. Good Christians differ on their understanding of these matters, but who have honestly come to the Bible as the Word of God but who sincerely differ on their understanding.

D. A consideration of the Revelation 20

Revelation 20 is one of the most difficult passages of all Scripture to interpret. Care and caution should be exercised in working through it, and then upon one's conclusion, care and caution should be held about being dogmatic in one's conclusions. This passage is a "problem" in one way or another with each position, as we shall see.

1. The binding of the dragon (20:1-3)

¹Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. ²And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, ³and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he might not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be released for a little while.

(1) The view of Premillennialists

Again, this is the belief that the millennium will begin immediately *after* Jesus Christ's Second Coming. Upon His return Jesus Christ will reign over the world from his throne in Jerusalem for 1,000 years in a kingdom characterized by peace and righteousness. They view chapters 19 and 20 to be chronological. Since chapter 19 describes the Second Coming of Christ and chapter 20 describes the millennium (notice the word "then" in 20:1), then it follows that the millennium follows immediately after the Second Coming. They would argue, "Just take it literally and accept what it says at face value." The problem is that what they see as being quite clear, is not that clear on closer inspection. For example, if one takes a pre-millennial view (particularly if one is dispensational and holds to two second comings of Christ), then problems arise. How many physical resurrections will occur in the future? How many judgments will transpire in the future? Premillennialists view Christians as being resurrected at the beginning of the millennium but non-Christians not until after the 1,000 years is over. How can this be squared with the "plain" teaching elsewhere of a general resurrection of the dead both saved and unsaved (cf. John 5:28f).

Premillennialists would argue against the amillennial position as ludicrous in the light of what verses 1-3 says about satan being bound. "How could any Christian logically say in any way that satan is not present in this age?"

(2) The view of Postmillennialists

How do they deal with this? They deny that Revelation 19 speaks of the Second Coming of Christ. They say that it tells of the advance of the Gospel in this age. They say that the Second coming of Christ is not mentioned until 20:7. And so you see, it follows the millennium, they would argue.

(3) The view of Amillennialists

Amillennialists see the binding of satan to be limited in scope. They would say that the passage does not say that satan's presence or power will be removed entirely from the world; rather, what is said is that God places a limitation on satan's power during this church/kingdom age. Until the cross, satan had blinded the nations to the message of God's salvation. Salvation was limited to the Jewish nation. The Gentiles were blinded by satan and held in bondage by him. But because Christ conquered and subjected satan to His authority through His death and resurrection, this power of satan was broken. The gospel could now go forth to the nations. The risen Lord Jesus said to His disciples, "*All authority* has been given me in heaven and earth; go therefore and make disciples *of all the nations*, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." (Matt. 28:18f).

2. The thousand-year reign (20:4-6)

⁴Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. ⁵The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection. ⁶Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years.

(1) The view of Premillennialists

These folks view this to be a period of 1,000 years of literal history yet to take place when two kinds of people will exist on the earth. Two classes of people will exist during the millennium. Christians will have been resurrected at the Second Coming of Christ and they will be in their glorified bodies. But then there will be a world filled with mortals who are still living in their physical bodies, subject to sin and death. The resurrected Christians will reign with Christ over the world that will be populated by people who are for the most part Christian but not all. They believe the “first resurrection” spoken of is the physical resurrection of Christians. The second resurrection is of all the unsaved at the end of the 1,000 year millennium.

They would argue that the text clearly states that the kingdom will be 1,000 years in duration. “Does it not say that Christians will reign “1,000 years? How can anyone (i.e. the amillennialist) dismiss this and not take it literally?”

(2) The view of Postmillennialists

They would argue that God limits satan’s authority through the gospel so as to secure its advancement in history.

(3) The view of Amillennialists

The 1,000 years is a “symbol” for a period of long duration. It signifies this current church age. Those of the “first resurrection” speaks of those who experienced the new birth, a spiritual resurrection. The second resurrection is the physical resurrection of the entire human race. They would argue that everywhere the Scripture speaks of a single, general resurrection of the dead, of all believers and all unbelievers on the same occasion, who then undergo a general judgment of mankind. Premillennialists believe the resurrection of Christians and non-Christians are separate resurrections that are separated from one another by 1,000 years. Consider the following verses that suggest a single, general resurrection:

Daniel 12:2f. “And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. ³And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.”

John 5:28f. “Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice ²⁹and come forth -- those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.”

Matthew 13:47ff. “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet that was cast into the sea and gathered some of every kind, which, when it was full, they drew to shore; and they sat down and gathered the good into vessels, but threw the bad away. So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come forth, separate the wicked from among the just, and cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth.”

Matthew 25:31-33. “When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left.”

In each of these instances, the premillennialist must insert 1,000 years between the resurrection of the just and the resurrection of the unjust.

3. Satan is released again (20:7-10)

⁷And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison ⁸and will come out to deceive the nations that are at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle; their number is like the sand of the sea. ⁹And they marched up over the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, but fire came down from heaven and consumed them, ¹⁰and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

(1) The view of Premillennialists

They see a final end-time battle when satan is loosed at the end of the 1,000 years. Even though Jesus is physically reigning over the earth from His throne in Jerusalem (so they teach), satan will lead the people of the world to rebel against Jesus Christ, only to be defeated by Him, bringing an end to world history.

(2) The view of Postmillennialists

They would see a final oppression of Christians by the satanic world system shortly before the Second Coming.

(3) The view of Amillennialists

Many see that at the end of the age the devil being loosed will once again blind the Gentiles to the gospel (the times of the Gentiles” having been completed), which then will lead to the Jews in mass coming to salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, signaling the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ (cf. Rom. 11:25f). Throughout this church age Christians have primarily been converted Gentiles from all over the world. But the time will come when there will be relatively few Gentile conversions, but God will again open the spiritual eyes of Jewish people everywhere to respond to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Conclusion:

This is a difficult subject. Eschatology should not be a test of fellowship; Christians should not separate from one another based on disagreements about end-time events. As long as there is a belief in a literal physical Second Coming of Jesus Christ when He will judge the world in righteousness, we should be able to abide with one another.

Excursus: Summary of the teachings regarding the devil and demons in the book,

Satan Cast Out; A Study in Demonology⁶

by

Fredrick Leahy

1. Deliverance from demon-possession must not be viewed out of the Gospel context in which, in the New Testament record, it is firmly set.
2. Mere exorcism, in whatever name, is condemned by our Lord. When there is *dispossession* of a demon, it can only be because there is *repossession* of the victim – i.e., by the Holy Spirit as Christ reigns in the heart.
3. The fact that some have exorcised demons in Christ's name, proves nothing in itself (Matt. 7:22). Our standard for belief and practice is the Word of God alone. We cannot substitute any observed phenomena, and our interpretation of them, for this divinely given rule.
4. We are not asked to diagnose cases of supposed possession. It is much wiser and safer in such situations to rely prayerfully in faith upon the proclamation of the Word of God, witnessing to and praying for the sufferer.
5. Nothing less than the 'new birth' will meet the need of the demoniac or any other sinner. When this takes place the demon has been dispossessed. The only guarantee against possession is to be indwelt by the Holy Spirit, that is, to be 'born again'.
6. While a true believer, who is part of Christ's body and indwelt by the Spirit of God, cannot be the abode of a demon, our study has shown that he may be influenced by satan and even become, for the time being, his unwitting tool.
7. When confronted by manifestations of demoniac activity in a community, the Church should emphasize in her ministry the lordship of Christ, and especially His victory over satan and his minions. If this goes out of focus in the mind and devotion of the Church, she will become enfeebled and afraid.
8. The whole Church is involved in the confrontation of satanic forces. If there is a crisis in missions today it is largely because there is a crisis of faith in the Church, and particularly in respect to the lordship of Christ. Yet where faithful witness and service are still found, even if fragmented, prayer and obedience will not be fruitless or in vain.
9. The worship of the Triune God through the risen Christ, and the proclamation of Christ's victory, are always infinitely stronger than all the demonic forces in their strongest combinations.
10. Being 'filled with the Holy Spirit' is a prerequisite for service in an area where demonic presence is obvious, as indeed for all Christian service! It is unlikely that the forces of evil will retreat before carnal Christians.

⁶ Fredrick Leahy, *Satan Cast Out; A Study in Demonology* (Banner of Truth, 1975, 2015), pp. 171f.