

THE BINDING OF SATAN IN REVELATION 20

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Revelation 20 is generally viewed as a crux interpretum in the debate over the timing and nature of the millennium. In verses 1–3, the apostle John describes a vision in which Satan is bound and imprisoned in the abyss for a thousand years. Premillennialists consider this passage to be compelling evidence for a future millennium, because this restriction of Satan is clearly incompatible with his activity and influence in the present age. In contrast, amillennialists believe that Satan is currently bound in the abyss and therefore that the millennium of Revelation 20 is a present reality. As evidence for their view, amillennialists generally point to the significance of the abyss, the purpose of the binding, and parallel passages in the New Testament which are said to shed light on the meaning of John's vision. But a careful evaluation of these three arguments demonstrates that the case for amillennial view cannot be sustained and therefore that the binding of Satan must be future, just as premillennialism teaches.

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Introduction

Revelation 20 has long been considered one of the clearest arguments for the eschatology of premillennialism. But in describing his journey to amillennialism, former premillennialist Sam Storms explains that Revelation 20 served not as a hindrance to this conversion, but rather a catalyst. “Contrary to what I had been taught and long believed,” Storms writes, “I came to see Revelation 20 as a strong and immovable support for the amillennial perspective.”¹ In fact, unlike many of his fellow

¹ Sam Storms, *Kingdom Come: The Amillennial Alternative* (Ross-shire, Scotland: Mentor, 2013), 137.

amillennialists, Storms says he embraced amillennialism *because of* Revelation 20, not in spite of it.²

This kind of confidence among amillennialists regarding their view of Revelation 20 raises the question of whether premillennialists may have overstated the clarity of John's teaching in this chapter.³ For example, premillennialists have often pointed to the binding of Satan in verses 1–3 as proof positive that the millennium of Revelation 20 is not a present reality, as amillennialism teaches. Instead, say premillennialists, Satan is very active and influential on earth during the present age and will not be bound in the abyss until after the Second Coming. But is this argument truly compelling? Isn't it possible that amillennialists are able to explain Revelation 20:1–3 in way that is not merely *feasible*, but actually more faithful to the divine intention of the text?

The purpose of this article is to reexamine this key passage in the millennial debate, with a focus on the amillennial explanation of Satan's binding as a present reality. After setting forth the premillennial argument from Rev 20:1–3, this study will carefully consider the amillennial view of this passage, giving special attention to the significance of the abyss, the purpose of the binding, and the parallel passages often cited by amillennialists as evidence for their view. In the process, this examination will demonstrate not only that the binding of Satan in Revelation 20 fails to provide strong and immovable support for the amillennial perspective, but also that it does indeed serve as a compelling argument for the view of premillennialism.

The Premillennial Argument

In Rev 20:1–3, the apostle John's vision focuses on the status of Satan during the millennial reign of Christ:

Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold of the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; and 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 (Rev 20:1–3).

The primary reason that Satan's imprisonment cannot be considered a present reality is because Rev 20:1–3 is incompatible with the New Testament's portrayal of his influence during the present age.⁴ According to this passage, Satan will be cut off

² Ibid.; Sam Storms, "I Am an Amillennialist 'because of' Revelation 20," <http://www.sam-storms.com/enjoying-god-blog/post/i-am-an-amillennialist--because-of--revelation-20>, accessed on August 3, 2014.

³ This confidence is reflected in the statement of Kim Riddlebarger, who writes that amillennialists see Revelation 20 "as the weak link in any form of premillennialism" (Kim Riddlebarger, *A Case for Amillennialism: Understanding the End Times*, expanded ed. [Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2013], 235).

⁴ On a more fundamental level, Satan's imprisonment in Rev 20:1–3 must be future because it follows the Second Coming of Christ in Rev 19:11–21. But amillennialists dispute the chronological relationship between Rev 19 and 20, arguing instead that the thousand years in Revelation 20 represents the

from all earthly activity during the thousand-year reign of Christ. The imagery of Satan being bound with a great chain and cast into the abyss—which is then shut and sealed over him—provides a vivid picture of the total removal of his influence on earth.⁵ In fact, if a vision were intended to teach that Satan is rendered completely inactive during the thousand years, it is difficult to imagine how this could have been portrayed more clearly.⁶ As Beasley-Murray writes:

A seal on a prison door ensured that prisoners could not escape unobserved. Only he who authorized the imprisonment could authorize release from it (see Dan. 6:17; Mt. 27:66). Thus the incarceration of the Devil is trebly circumscribed. He is bound up, locked in, and sealed over. The writer could hardly have expressed more emphatically the inability of Satan to harm the race of man.⁷

In contrast, the New Testament makes it abundantly clear that Satan—who is described as “the god of this age” (ὁ θεὸς τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου) (2 Cor 4:4) and “the ruler of this world” (ὁ ἄρχων τοῦ κόσμου τούτου) (John 12:31; cf. John 14:30; 16:11; 1 John 4:4)—is extremely active on earth during the present age. He not only “prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour” (1 Pet 5:8), but he is also involved in a host of other activities—he tells lies (John 8:44); he tempts believers to sin (1 Cor 7:5; Eph 4:27); he disguises himself as an angel of light (2 Cor 11:13–15); he seeks to deceive the children of God (2 Cor 11:3; cf. 2 Cor 2:11); he snatches the gospel from unbelieving hearts (Matt 13:19; Mark 4:15; Luke 8:12; cf. 1 Thess 3:5; 1 Tim 1:20; 4:1–2); he takes advantage of believers (2 Cor 2:11); he influences people to lie (Acts 5:3); he holds unbelievers under his power (1 John 5:19; Eph 2:2; Acts 26:18; 1 John 3:8–10); he torments the servants of God (2 Cor 12:7); he thwarts the progress of ministry (1 Thess 2:18); he seeks to destroy the faith of believers (Luke 22:31); he wages war against the church (Eph 6:11–17); and he traps and deceives unbelievers, holding them captive to do his will (2 Tim 2:26). It is impossible to reconcile this portrayal of Satan’s activities in the present age with the view that he is currently sealed in the abyss.

present age prior to the Second Coming. The chronological relationship between Revelation 19 and 20 is beyond the scope of this article; for a brief discussion of this issue, see Matthew Waymeyer, “What about Revelation 20?,” in *Christ’s Prophetic Plans: A Futuristic Premillennial Primer*, eds. John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2012), 134–37.

⁵ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1994), 1117; Harold W. Hoehner, “Evidence from Revelation 20,” in *A Case for Premillennialism: A New Consensus*, eds. Donald K. Campbell and Jeffrey L. Townsend (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992), 250; Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1977), 353.

⁶ John F. Walvoord, “The Theological Significance of Revelation 20:1–6,” in *Essays in Honor of J. Dwight Pentecost*, eds. Stanley D. Toussaint and Charles H. Dyer (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 231.

⁷ G. R. Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation*, NCB (Greenwood, SC: The Attic Press, 1974), 285. Even some amillennialists recognize this, for example, G. C. Berkouwer who states that those who identify the millennium as the present age are forced to relativize the dimensions of Satan’s binding. Berkouwer writes, “I think it is pertinent to ask whether this sort of interpretation really does justice to the radical proportions of the binding of Satan” (G. C. Berkouwer, *The Return of Christ: Studies in Dogmatics* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1972], 305).

The location of the devil's imprisonment makes it especially clear that the confinement of Rev 20:1–3 will prevent any satanic activity and influence on earth during the thousand years. The “abyss” (ἄβυσσος) is a prison for evil spirits (Rev 20:7), and the New Testament indicates that when evil spirits are confined in this prison, they are prevented from participating in their normal demonic activities on earth (Luke 8:31; Rev 9:1–3). For this reason, Satan can either be locked away in the abyss or he can be engaging in the various activities ascribed to him in the present age, but he cannot be both. The description of Satan's imprisonment in Revelation 20 is incompatible with the New Testament's portrayal of his influence during the church age, and therefore the binding of Satan cannot be understood as a present reality.

The difficulty that this presents for amillennialism is obvious: If the binding of Satan is not a present reality, the thousand years of Revelation 20 must represent a future reign of Christ which will take place between the present age and the eternal state. This intermediate phase of the coming kingdom is a key component in the eschatology of premillennialism, but it presents a significant problem for the view of amillennialism.

The Amillennial View

Amillennialist Kim Riddlebarger recognizes the challenge that Revelation 20:1–3 presents for his eschatology, conceding that this passage initially appears to be a formidable objection to the amillennial view. But according to Riddlebarger, “once we look closely at what John actually taught about the binding of Satan, the notion of Satan being bound in the present age becomes an argument in favor of the amillennial position.”⁸

According to amillennialism, the binding of Satan in Rev 20:1–3 took place at the first coming of Christ, and his imprisonment in the abyss extends throughout the present age, concurrent with the millennial reign of Jesus.⁹ Rather than describing a future event that will occur at the Second Coming, then, Satan's binding was accomplished by Christ when He conquered the devil through His death and resurrection during His earthly ministry.¹⁰ In this way, amillennialism asserts that the thousand-year binding of Satan extends from the time of the first coming of Christ to the time of His second coming and is therefore a present reality.

In contrast to the premillennial view that the incarceration of Satan renders him completely inactive on earth, amillennialism sees the binding of Satan in Revelation

⁸ Riddlebarger, *A Case for Amillennialism*, 237.

⁹ Samuel E. Waldron, *The End Times Made Simple: How Could Everyone Be So Wrong about Biblical Prophecy?* (Amityville, NY: Calvary Press, 2003), 94–95; William Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors: An Interpretation of the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1967), 187–88.

¹⁰ Although most amillennialists emphasize that the binding of Satan was accomplished through the death and resurrection of Christ, others believe this binding began earlier when Jesus triumphed over Satan by resisting his temptations in the wilderness (Matt 4:1–11; Luke 4:1–13) (Donald Garlington, “Reigning with Christ: Revelation 20:1–6 and the Question of the Millennium,” *RefR* 6, no. 2 [Spring 1997]: 91; Anthony Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1979], 229; Floyd E. Hamilton, *The Basis of Millennial Faith* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1955], 130–31); Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors*, 187).

20 as “a figurative description of the way in which Satan’s activities will be curbed during the thousand-year period.”¹¹ More specifically, amillennialists believe that this binding does not eliminate the activities of Satan on earth, but merely limits them to some extent. As Riddlebarger explains:

What this binding of Satan means is that, after the coming of the long-expected Messiah, Satan lost certain authority that he possessed prior to the life, death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of the Savior. It does not mean that all satanic operations cease during the millennial age, as many opponents of amillennialism mistakenly assume.¹²

Amillennialists describe the restriction imposed upon Satan in Revelation 20 as the limiting,¹³ the curbing,¹⁴ the curtailing,¹⁵ the relative curtailment,¹⁶ the partial paralyzing,¹⁷ and the restraining¹⁸ of the devil’s influence on earth, but again, not the *elimination* of it.¹⁹ According to amillennialist William Cox, “Satan, though bound, still goes about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. The chain with which he is bound is a long one, allowing him much freedom of movement.”²⁰ As Hendriksen illustrates, “A dog...bound with a long and heavy chain can do great damage within the circle of his imprisonment.”²¹

According to amillennialists, then, Satan is indeed bound in the present age, but his binding is partial rather than absolute.²² This view of Rev 20:1–3 allows the amillennialist to affirm both the binding of Satan as a current reality and the present-day activity of Satan as described in the New Testament. To argue for this view—and against the interpretation of premillennialism—amillennialists typically point to

¹¹ Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, 228; also see Sydney H. T. Page, “Revelation 20 and Pauline Eschatology,” *JETS* 23, no. 1 (March 1980): 35.

¹² Riddlebarger, *A Case for Amillennialism*, 237.

¹³ William E. Cox, *Amillennialism Today* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1966), 59; Page, “Revelation 20 and Pauline Eschatology,” 34; Hamilton, *The Basis of Millennial Faith*, 132.

¹⁴ Page, “Revelation 20 and Pauline Eschatology,” 35; Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors*, 190; Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, 228–29.

¹⁵ Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors*, 188, 190; Sam Hamstra Jr., “An Idealist View of Revelation,” in *Four Views on the Book of Revelation*, ed. C. Marvin Pate (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1998), 120; Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, 229; Storms, *Kingdom Come*, 440.

¹⁶ Jonathan Menn, *Biblical Eschatology* (Eugene, OR: Resource Publications, 2013), 290.

¹⁷ Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors*, 190.

¹⁸ Page, “Revelation 20 and Pauline Eschatology,” 34; Robert B. Strimple, “An Amillennial Response to Craig A. Blaising,” in *Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond*, ed. Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1999), 273; Leon Morris, *Revelation*, TNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1987), 229; Riddlebarger, *A Case for Amillennialism*, 237, 239.

¹⁹ Hamstra, “An Idealist View of Revelation,” 120; Riddlebarger, *A Case for Amillennialism*, 239; Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors*, 190.

²⁰ Cox, *Amillennialism Today*, 139.

²¹ Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors*, 190.

²² Strimple, “Amillennialism,” 123.

three related aspects of the binding of Satan: the significance of the abyss, the purpose of the binding, and the parallels to Rev 20:1–3 elsewhere in the New Testament.

The Significance of the Abyss

During the thousand years of Rev 20:1–3, Satan is said to be bound and sealed specifically in the “abyss” (ἄβυσσος). When addressing the significance of the abyss in this vision, amillennialists typically emphasize the use of symbolism throughout the passage. For example, Dennis Johnson writes:

The multiplication of visual features—key, chain, hand, dragon, throwing, locking, and sealing—underscores the symbolic genre of the entire vision, since John’s audience knows well that Satan is not a literal dragon who can be bound with a physical chain or locked away in a physical pit.²³

For this reason, amillennialists believe that the premillennial view of the abyss as a spatial location imposes “a rigidly wooden and artificial structure on symbolism that it simply isn’t designed to sustain.”²⁴ As G. K. Beale states, understanding the abyss as an actual *location* is to interpret it “in an overly literalistic manner.”²⁵

Accordingly, Storms argues that “if the premillennialist insists on saying that Satan’s being cast into the abyss in Revelation 20 must be interpreted in a literal, spatial way,” he must also affirm the following in order to be consistent: (a) the angel was physically holding a literal key that could literally lock and unlock the pit; (b) the angel was holding a literal chain with material links that could be measured; (c) the angel literally grabbed the devil and wrestled him into submission and threw him into this pit; and (d) Satan was a literal, physical serpent as he is called in verse 2.²⁶ In a similar way, amillennialist Jonathan Menn insists that consistency requires the premillennialist to affirm that the abyss in Revelation 20 “is an actual pit in the earth which has a physical lock and physical ‘seal.’”²⁷

In contrast to the literal interpretation of premillennialism, Beale says the abyss should be understood as representing a spiritual dimension which exists alongside—and in the midst of—the earthly dimension.²⁸ In this way, Beale sees the abyss in Rev

²³ Dennis E. Johnson, *Triumph of the Lamb: A Commentary on Revelation* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 2001), 283.

²⁴ Storms, *Kingdom Come*, 445.

²⁵ G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1999), 987. Storms also rejects the idea of “a localized geo-spatial place called the abyss” (*Kingdom Come*, 442), and according to Menn, the abyss in Rev 20 is “not spatial” but rather functions as a metaphor (*Biblical Eschatology*, 18).

²⁶ Storms, *Kingdom Come*, 442–43.

²⁷ Menn, *Biblical Eschatology*, 18, 357.

²⁸ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 987. According to Beale, “the abyss and the physical world are two different dimensions interpenetrating each other or existing alongside one another” (990), and elsewhere he refers to the abyss as “the realm of demons over which Satan rules” (493). In a similar way, Venema refers to the abyss as “the dwelling place of the demons” (Cornelis P. Venema, *The Promise of the Future* [Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2000], 316), and Storms refers to it as “the abode of demons”

20:1–3 as “one of the various metaphors representing the spiritual sphere in which the devil and his accomplices operate.”²⁹ For this reason, he rejects the idea that the abyss is spatially removed from the earth³⁰ and that Satan’s confinement in the abyss requires a complete abolition of his activity on earth.³¹ This view of the abyss enables the amillennialist to affirm that Satan prowls about like a roaring lion, engaged in the various activities ascribed to him in the New Testament, while simultaneously being confined to the abyss as described in Revelation 20.

The immediate problem with this argument concerns the false alternative it establishes between a literal and figurative interpretation of the abyss. According to the amillennialist, the abyss must be understood as either (a) a literal reference to a physical, bottomless pit which extends endlessly into the depths of the earth, or (b) a symbolic metaphor signifying “the spiritual sphere in which the devil and his accomplices operate.” But this ignores the possibility that the abyss in Revelation 20 is a spirit prison for demonic beings, an actual location which imprisons them and prevents them from functioning outside of its confines. According to this third view, the abyss is neither a physical hole in the ground (the woodenly literal view) nor the spiritual sphere of demonic activity in general (the amillennial view), but rather *an actual location in the spiritual realm where evil spirits are confined and prevented from roaming free on earth*. A careful examination of ἄβυσσος indicates that this is indeed the meaning of this word in Revelation 20.

The word ἄβυσσος was originally an adjective meaning “bottomless” or “unfathomable,” and then a noun signifying a deep place.³² In the Septuagint, it usually translates אַבְיִס and most often refers to “the watery depths of the earth, whether oceans or springs, in contradistinction to the land” (e.g., Pss 77:16; 78:15; 106:9; Isa 55:10; Amos 7:4).³³ In the Jewish writings, ἄβυσσος predominantly referred to a prison where evil spirits were confined and punished (e.g., 1 En 10:4–16; 18:11–19:3; 21–22; 88:1–3; 90:24–27; 108:2–6; Jub 5:6–14; Tob 8:3; cf. Isa 24:20–23).³⁴

(*Kingdom Come*, 429) and “the source or abode of those demonic powers that are opposed to God” (478). But none of them emphasize the fact that the abyss is a “prison” (Rev 20:7). Other amillennialists are even less precise in their explanation of the abyss. For example, Hoekema says the abyss should “be thought of as a figurative description of the way in which Satan’s activities will be curbed during the thousand-year period” (*The Bible and the Future*, 228), but this explanation communicates the effect of confinement in the abyss without defining what the abyss actually is.

²⁹ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 987. This same definition of the abyss is quoted and affirmed by Riddlebarger (*A Case for Amillennialism*, 237) and Menn (*Biblical Eschatology*, 357). In addition, Beale also identifies the abyss as “probably” a synonym for “death and Hades” (*The Book of Revelation*, 984, 987; also see Riddlebarger, *A Case for Amillennialism*, 237).

³⁰ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 990.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 985–90.

³² W. L. Liefeld, “Abyss,” in *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, ed. Merrill C. Tenney (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1976), 1:30; also see *BDAG*, 2; Joachim Jeremias, “ἄβυσσος,” in *TDNT*, ed. Gerhard Kittel (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1964), 1:9; Hans Bietenhard, “ἄβυσσος,” in *NIDNTT*, ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1986), 2:205.

³³ Walter A. Elwell, “Abyss,” in *Baker Theological Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), 9.

³⁴ Otto, Böcher, “ἄβυσσος,” in *EDNT*, eds. Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing), 1:4; Bietenhard, “ἄβυσσος,” 2:205; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 989–90; Elwell, “Abyss,” 9; William J. Webb, “Revelation 20: Exegetical Considerations,” *The Baptist Review of Theology*

In the New Testament, ἄβυσσος is used only nine times and has two basic usages, referring either to (a) the realm of the dead (Rom 10:7), or (b) a prison for evil spirits (Luke 8:31; Rev 9:1–2, 11; 11:7; 17:8).³⁵ Its use in Revelation 20 conveys this second nuance of meaning—a prison for evil spirits—which is clear from (1) the description of Satan being thrown into the abyss and having it “sealed” (ἐσφράγισεν) over him in verse 3, and (2) the description of Satan being released from his “prison” (φυλακῆ) in verse 7. Put simply, the abyss of Revelation 20 is a spirit prison.

The use of ἄβυσσος in Luke 8 and Revelation 9 demonstrates that confinement to this spirit prison entails the complete removal of demonic/satanic activity and influence upon the earth. In Luke 8, Jesus encountered a demon-possessed man and began conversing with the evil spirits indwelling him (vv. 26–30). These demons understood full well that Jesus was “Son of the Most High God” (v. 28), and recognizing His authority over them, they began “imploring Him not to command them to go away into the abyss” (v. 31). Instead, they asked if Jesus would permit them to enter a nearby herd of swine (v. 32)—which He did—and they proceeded to enter the swine and drive them into the lake where the herd drowned (v. 33).

This remarkable episode in Luke 8 reveals several significant truths about the abyss. First, the abyss in Luke 8:31 must be a specific spirit prison which was well-known to both Jesus and the demons. This is clear not merely from the articular use of ἄβυσσος,³⁶ but primarily from the way the demons immediately refer to the abyss as a possible destination now that Jesus has commanded them to depart from their human victim. Here in Luke 8:31, the abyss is not some nebulous metaphor in an apocalyptic vision filled with symbolism—it is a technical term used in narrative literature to refer to a specific prison for evil spirits which was familiar to both Jesus and the demons.

Second, the spirit prison in Luke 8:31 must refer to an actual *location*. This can be seen in the way that Luke’s narrative sets the abyss alongside of the herd of swine as two possible destinations for the demons. Satan and demons are spiritual beings, but they are not omnipresent—they exist and function in a specific location at any given time. When Jesus first approached the demon-possessed man, these demons resided *inside* of this man (v. 27). But once they “came *out of* [ἐξελθὲν ἀπὸ] the

4, no. 2 (Fall, 1994): 20. Beale acknowledges that whenever evil spirits are imprisoned in the abyss in the Jewish writings, they are always confined “in a complete way without any exception” (*The Book of Revelation*, 989). According to Beale, however, this does not necessitate that the same reality is depicted in Rev 20:1–3 because these Jewish writings refer to demons (rather than Satan) being imprisoned in the abyss (989–90). But it is difficult to understand why Beale would conclude that Satan is able to depart from the abyss if other demonic beings are not, especially in light of John’s description in Rev 20:3 that the abyss is sealed over him. Beale also makes the point that “the only apparently explicit Jewish references to the binding of Satan speak of a ‘binding’ that is not absolute” (989). But this fails to support the amillennial view, because it is Satan’s incarceration specifically in the *abyss*—not his binding *per se*—which securely eliminates his activity on earth during the thousand years of Rev 20.

³⁵ Jeremias, “ἄβυσσος,” 1:10; Elwell, “Abyss,” 9.

³⁶ The noun ἄβυσσος is articular every time it is used in the New Testament to refer to a spirit prison (Luke 8:31; Rev 9:1, 2, 11; 11:7; 17:8, 20:1, 3). In each case, it is most likely the “celebrity” or “familiar” use of the article “to point out an object that is well known” (Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1996], 225).

man” (v. 29), two locations for their new place of residence were now possible—they could either “go away *into* [εἰς...ἀπελθεῖν] the abyss” (v. 31), or they could “enter *into* [εἰς...εἰσελθεῖν] the swine” (v. 32). In response to the permission of Jesus, these demons “entered *into* [εἰσῆλθον εἰς] the swine” (v. 33). The use of proper and improper spatial prepositions throughout this narrative—εἰς, ἀπό, and ἐκ—highlights the possible and actual movements of the demons into (or out of) specific places and therefore makes it clear that the abyss should be understood as a location.

Third, the narrative in Luke 8 indicates that confinement in the abyss involves the complete removal of demonic activity and influence upon the earth. This can be seen in the request of the demons in verse 31. The reason for the demons’ request was not because they were so determined to kill the swine. The reason for their request was because imprisonment in the abyss would have cut them off from having any influence in this world—at least as long as they were *in* the abyss—whereas a departure into the swine would allow them to continue to roam free and wreak havoc on the earth.³⁷ This indicates that these evil spirits could either be imprisoned in the abyss or they could be prowling about the earth—engaged in demonic activities—but they could not be both.³⁸

The various uses of ἄβυσσος in the book of Revelation leads to a similar conclusion. For example, in John’s vision in Rev 9:1–6, a multitude of demons—pictured as a swarm of “locusts”—must first be released from the abyss before it is able to cause harm on the earth. The apostle writes:

Then the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star from heaven which had fallen to the earth; and the key of the bottomless pit [τῆς ἄβύσσου] was given to him. He opened the bottomless pit [τῆς ἄβύσσου], and smoke went up out of the pit, like the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened by the smoke of the pit. Then out of the smoke came locusts upon the earth, and power was given them, as the scorpions of the earth have power. They were told not to hurt the grass of the earth, nor any green thing, nor any tree, but only the men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads. And they were not permitted to kill anyone, but to torment for five months; and their torment was like the torment of a scorpion when it stings a man. And in those days men will seek death and will not find it; they will long to die, and death flees from them (Rev 9:1–6).

³⁷ If the demons’ earlier request that Jesus not “torment” them (v. 28) overlaps with their request not to be sent into the abyss (v. 31), this may imply that this spirit prison is also a place of torment and therefore that avoiding its torment was an additional reason for their request.

³⁸ In discussing the incarceration of Satan in Revelation 20, most amillennialists do not even mention—much less comment on—the implications of Luke 8:31 for an accurate understanding of the abyss (e.g., Riddlebarger, *A Case for Amillennialism*; Venema, *The Promise of the Future*; Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*; Storms, *Kingdom Come*).

As Blaising observes, the harm caused by these demonic locusts in this vision occurs only after the abyss is opened and they are released from its confines.³⁹ According to Blaising:

The necessary implication is that their influence is not experienced by anyone as long as they are locked up in the pit. The graphic language about the key, opening the pit, subsequent instructions about harming, and coming on the earth (*eis tēn gēn*, v. 3)...all converges to make the point that these “locusts” had no influence on earthly inhabitants prior to the time of their release.⁴⁰

According to Revelation 9, therefore, confinement of demons in the abyss entails the complete removal of activity and influence upon the earth.⁴¹

The abyss, then, refers to an actual location in the spiritual realm where evil spirits are confined and prevented from roaming free on earth. As Powell observes:

In every reference to the abyss the being or beings in it must emerge from it in order to interact with humans. This suggests that the sphere of the abyss, like the realm of the dead, is separate from the realm of living humanity, and that those who dwell in the abyss have no contact with those outside that sphere.⁴²

This understanding of confinement in the abyss fits perfectly with John’s description of Satan’s imprisonment and release in Revelation 20. Not only is Satan thrown “into the abyss” (εἰς τὴν ἄβυσσον)—which is then “shut” (ἐκλεισεν) and “sealed over him” (ἐσφράγισεν ἐπάνω αὐτοῦ)—but he must first be “released from [λυθήσεται...ἐκ] his prison” (v. 7) before he can “come out [ἐξελεύσεται] to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth” (v. 8). But as long as he is

³⁹ Craig A. Blaising, “Premillennialism,” in *Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond*, ed. Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1999), 217–18.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 218. According to Blaising, “This does not mean that evil was non-existent, but that these locusts themselves played no role prior to their release.”

⁴¹ Webb, “Revelation 20,” 20–21. In a similar way, in Rev 11:7 the satanically inspired beast must first “come up out of the abyss” (τὸ ἀναβαῖνον ἐκ τῆς ἀβύσσου) before he is able to make war with the two witnesses on earth (cf., Rev 17:8, where the beast “is about to come up out of the abyss [ἀναβαίνειν ἐκ τῆς ἀβύσσου] and go to destruction”). As Webb explains, the designation “those who dwell on the earth” (τοὺς κατοικοῦντας ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς) is a key phrase for understanding the cosmology of Revelation (3:10; 6:10; 8:13; 11:10; 13:8, 14; 17:2, 8):

The whole point of locking someone (an angel or the Devil) in the abyss...is so that they cannot bring any harm against those who dwell on the earth. The abyss is not simply a metaphorical “reduction in influence” as amillennialists suggest. Thus an amillennial perspective breaks down when the abyss is considered more broadly throughout the book of Revelation. Also, confinement in the abyss stands in direct contrast to the outcome of Satan being thrown out of heaven to the earth. [John] declares Satan’s arrival upon the earth as one of the three great “woes” to its inhabitants: “woe, woe, woe, to those who dwell on the earth (τοὺς κατοικοῦντας ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς)” (8:13; cf. 12:12–13). Within Revelation demonic confinement in the abyss brings safety to the earthdwellers. In contrast, demonic beings thrown down to the earth (from heaven) or released to go up to the earth (from the abyss) brings harm to the earthdwellers (“Revelation 20,” 20–21).

⁴² Powell, “Progression versus Recapitulation,” 99.

confined in the abyss, the devil is not able to depart from his prison and therefore his activity on earth is completely non-existent.⁴³

In contrast, the amillennial view that the abyss is a metaphor representing “the spiritual sphere in which the devil and his accomplices operate”⁴⁴ is essentially nonsensical when assumed in the various passages where ἄβυσσος is used. For example, what sense does it make for the demons in Luke 8:31 to plead with Jesus not to cast them into the spiritual sphere where they normally function? Weren’t they already there prior to their encounter with Jesus? If the abyss is the spiritual realm in which demons operate, how is being confined in the abyss any different from indwelling the demon-possessed man or the herd of swine?

In Revelation 20, how can Satan be seized and thrown into the spiritual realm in which he normally functions (v. 3)? Wasn’t he already there prior to being seized? This would be similar to seizing a dangerous shark in the Pacific Ocean and locking it in a “prison,” only to then define that prison as the entirety of the Pacific Ocean. Furthermore, what does it mean that Satan is “sealed” in this realm (v. 3), and what does it mean that he is “released” from it (v. 7)? How can Satan be either sealed in or released from the realm in which he usually operates?

By equating the abyss with the spiritual sphere of Satan’s activity, the amillennial definition of ἄβυσσος completely removes the idea of a spirit prison, in spite of the abyss being “sealed” (ἐσφράγισεν) over Satan in verse 3 and being designated his “prison” (φυλακὴ) in verse 7.⁴⁵ The amillennial understanding of the abyss is

⁴³ Some amillennialists dispute the absolute nature of Satan’s confinement by appealing to Jude 6. According to this argument, in the same way that demons are still actively involved on earth even though they are “kept in eternal bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day” according to Jude 6 (cf. 2 Pet 2:4), so Satan is simultaneously bound in the abyss (Rev 20:1–3) and yet still very active on earth (Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 990; Stanely J. Grenz, *The Millennial Maze: Sorting Out Evangelical Options* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992], 162; Strimple, “Amillennialism,” 124). As Grenz writes, “Just as the demons in chains are not totally powerless, but restricted in activity, so also the binding of Satan entails restriction rather than total incapacitation” (*The Millennial Maze*, 162). The premillennial response to this argument depends on the identity of the fallen angels in Jude 6. Some interpreters see these demons as the “sons of God” in Gen 6:2 who “took wives for themselves” and were therefore imprisoned by God as described in Jude 6. If so, this presents no support for the amillennial argument, because Jude 6 would simply be saying that only *some* of the fallen angels are in eternal bonds, not all of them, and therefore demonic activity in the present age could simply be attributed to those fallen angels who are not confined. Other interpreters see Jude 6 as a reference to the original fall of the angels who defected with Satan. If this view is correct, then Jude 6 cannot refer to confinement in the *abyss*, because the confinement of Jude 6 is *permanent* (“kept in eternal bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day”), which would imply that every demon is permanently confined in the abyss until the final judgment. But Luke 8:31 and Rev 9:13 make it clear that not all demons are permanently confined to the abyss. Jude 6 and 2 Pet 2:4, therefore, present no support for this amillennial argument.

⁴⁴ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 987; cf. Riddlebarger, *A Case for Amillennialism*, 237; Menn, *Biblical Eschatology*, 357.

⁴⁵ The amillennial reluctance to see the abyss as a prison is reflected not only in Beale’s reference to “prison” (φυλακὴ) in verse 7 as “a figurative word,” but also in his explanation of the seal in Rev 20:3. According to Beale, rather than connoting an absolute incarceration, the sealing of the abyss could just as easily convey the general idea of “authority over,” in keeping with its primary meaning in Dan 6:17 and Matt 27:66 (*The Book of Revelation*, 985–86). But in contrast to Beale’s claim, the act of sealing in these two verses was indeed designed to ensure absolute incarceration, namely by making sure that Daniel did not escape the lion’s den (Dan 6:17) and that Jesus’ body did not leave the tomb (Matt 27:66). As Osborne

based on neither the consistent use of the word in the New Testament nor the immediate context of its use in Rev 20:1–3. Rather than allowing for the kind of freedom that the amillennialist claims, imprisonment in the abyss eliminates the activity of the devil on earth and therefore the binding of Satan in Revelation 20 cannot be a present reality.⁴⁶

The Purpose of the Binding

One of the primary arguments for the amillennial view focuses on the purpose of Satan's binding in Revelation 20. In contrast to the premillennial view that this binding prevents Satan from engaging in any earthly activity whatsoever, amillennialists often point to the purpose clause in Rev 20:3, which is said to indicate that the devil is bound in one respect and one respect only: "so that [ἵνα] he should not deceive the nations any longer" (v. 3b).⁴⁷ In the words of amillennialist William Hendriksen, "The devil can do much, indeed, during this present period of one thousand years. But there is one thing which, during this period, he cannot do. With respect to this one thing he is definitely and securely bound."⁴⁸

For this reason, because the binding of Satan only prevents him from deceiving the nations, amillennialists believe that he is still free to prowl about the earth like a roaring lion (1 Pet 5:8), partaking in the other activities attributed to him in the New Testament.⁴⁹ As Riddlebarger explains:

The point of John's vision was that the angel restrains Satan's evil activities. His binding does not eliminate them. Even though Satan is presently bound and

writes, "This intensifies the idea of 'locking' the abyss and connotes an absolutely secure situation, guaranteed by sovereign authority. Satan is completely bound in the abyss and cannot escape" (Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, ECNT [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002], 701).

⁴⁶ In arguing that Satan's present-day activities are not incompatible with his present-day imprisonment in Rev 20, Hendriksen uses the analogy that a dog "bound with a long and heavy chain can do great damage within the circle of his imprisonment" (*More Than Conquerors*, 190; cf. Hamstra, "An Idealist View of Revelation," 120). What this illustration seems to ignore is that Satan's "circle of imprisonment" is identified in verse 3 as the *abyss*. If Satan is free to roam and do damage *only in the abyss*, then he is indeed cut off from activity on the earth. In a similar way, Cox affirms that Satan still prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour, because "the chain with which he is bound is a long one, allowing him much freedom of movement" (*Amillennialism Today*, 139). Likewise, Cullman describes Satan as being "bound as to a rope, which can be more or less lengthened" (Oscar Cullman, *Christ and Time: The Primitive Christian Conception of Time and History*, transl. Floyd V. Filson [Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1949], 198). But rather than seeing the chain as the means by which Satan is bound (i.e., tied up), Cox and Cullman write as if the imagery were one of Satan on a leash. The length of the chain is not only unstated but irrelevant, for the imagery is one of Satan being *bound* by it and then locked and sealed in an escape-proof prison. Where in the language of Rev 20:1–3 is there any indication that Satan has "much freedom of movement"?

⁴⁷ Storms, *Kingdom Come*, 439–41; Cox, *Amillennialism Today*, 62; Strimple, "Amillennialism," 123; Morris, *Revelation*, 229; Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors*, 190; James A. Hughes, "Revelation 20:4–6 and the Question of the Millennium," *WTJ* 35, no. 3 (Spring 1973): 281; Hamilton, *The Basis of Millennial Faith*, 132; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 985; Venema, *The Promise of the Future*, 318–19.

⁴⁸ Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors*, 190; also see Venema, *The Promise of the Future*, 319.

⁴⁹ Storms, *Kingdom Come*, 439. According to Storms, "The premillennial interpretation errs in that it has attempted to universalize what John explicitly restricts."

cannot deceive the nations, he remains a dangerous foe, the same way in which a mortally wounded animal is far more dangerous than a healthy one.⁵⁰

According to the amillennial view, then, the binding of Satan is a present reality which consists of a *partial* restriction of his earthly influence, leaving him free to engage in the various activities ascribed to him throughout the New Testament. Satan's activity in the present age is *limited*, but not eliminated.

The initial problem with this argument is that it mistakenly assumes that the purpose clause in verse 3 limits the degree of Satan's confinement.⁵¹ The purpose clause can only state why the action of imprisonment is taken, not the degree of restriction intended, which must be gleaned instead from the immediate context.⁵² To illustrate, if the warden of a prison puts a prisoner in solitary confinement for the primary purpose of preventing him from killing other prisoners, this does not mean that he is then free to steal from them and do other such activities. After all, the location of solitary confinement completely removes him from the rest of the prison and cuts him off entirely from the other prisoners. In the same way, the degree of Satan's restriction in Revelation 20 is determined not by the purpose clause alone, but also by the location of his imprisonment, the abyss, which removes the devil from earth and cuts him off from any influence there.⁵³

A second problem with this argument is that the New Testament teaches that Satan *is* in fact deceiving the nations during the present age. Therefore, even if the amillennialist were correct in his assertion that Satan is only prevented from deceiving the nations during the thousand years—remaining active on earth in every other way—the fact that he is currently engaged in such deception indicates that the millennium cannot be a present reality. This can be seen in a number of New Testament passages.

In 2 Cor 4:3–4, as Paul describes his apostolic ministry, he writes that “if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, in 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.” According to this passage, the truth of the gospel is concealed from unbelievers because the deceptive influence of Satan has blinded their minds from understanding and embracing it.⁵⁴ In a similar

⁵⁰ Riddlebarger, *A Case for Amillennialism*, 239. The irony here is that Riddlebarger seems to imply that Satan is more dangerous while sealed in the abyss than when he is not!

⁵¹ Powell, “Progression versus Recapitulation,” 98.

⁵² *Ibid.* In addition, the use of a purpose clause does not preclude the possibility that the stated action was taken with additional purposes in mind, even though those purposes are not specifically stated in the passage itself. For example, most amillennialists link the binding of Satan with Christ's victory over Satan at the cross (Col 2:15; Heb 2:14–15; 1 John 3:8), and yet none of them would argue that the only purpose of Christ's work of redemption was to keep Satan from deceiving the nations during the thousand years.

⁵³ This illustration is taken from Powell, “Progression versus Recapitulation,” 98.

⁵⁴ The verb τυφλώω (“has blinded”) means “to blind” or “to deprive of sight” (*BDAG*, 1021), and here in 2 Cor 4:4 it refers to spiritual blindness, just as in its other two uses in the New Testament (John 12:40; 1 John 2:11).

way, 2 Tim 2:26 describes unbelievers as being caught in the snare of the devil, having been deceived and held captive by Satan to do his will.⁵⁵ In addition, 1 John 5:19 highlights Satan's deceptive influence in the hearts of unbelievers by stating that "the whole world lies in the power of the evil one." As Townsend writes, "The New Testament makes it clear that Satan is now very much involved in the deception of the nations, for what is the deception of the nations if it is not the deception of individuals who make up the nations?"⁵⁶

Furthermore, the Book of Revelation teaches that Satan and his demons will continue to "deceive" (πλανῶω) the nations right up until the time when Jesus returns to establish His kingdom and Satan is cast into the abyss (Rev 12:9; 13:14; 18:23; 19:20).⁵⁷ Amillennialists have a particularly difficult time explaining how Satan can be described as the one "who deceives the whole world" in Rev 12:9 while simultaneously being sealed in the abyss "so that he would not deceive the nations any longer" (Rev 20:3). How can Satan deceive the whole world (Rev 12:9) and yet be unable to deceive the nations of the world (Rev 20:3) at the same time? If Satan is prevented from deceiving the nations during the millennium, and yet he is currently deceiving the nations—and will continue to do so until the Second Coming—the thousand years of Revelation 20 cannot be equated with the present age.

Some amillennialists respond to this difficulty by insisting that Satan's inability to deceive during the thousand years is merely a matter of *degree*. According to Hendriksen, "If during the present N.T. era the devil 'blinds the minds of unbelievers,' II Cor. 4:4, that was true even *more emphatically* during the old dispensation."⁵⁸ But the purpose clause in Rev 20:3 teaches not that Satan will deceive the nations *less emphatically* than he previously did, but that he will deceive the nations *no longer* (μὴ πλανήσῃ ἔτι). In other words, Satan's ability to deceive is not limited during the thousand years, but rather eliminated.

Other amillennialists respond to this difficulty by insisting that the binding of Satan does not prevent him from engaging in any kind of deception whatsoever, but rather from deceiving the nations in two specific ways. According to this argument, the purpose clause in Rev 20:3 means that the binding of Satan specifically precludes him from (a) deceiving the nations in such a way as to gather them for an all-out

⁵⁵ Cf. Matt 13:19; 1 Tim 4:1–2. Paul says in 2 Tim 2:26 that these unbelievers are in need of repentance leading to knowledge of the truth so they can come to their senses and escape this deceptive satanic snare. As Fee observes, this metaphor "emphasizes the deceitful nature of the false teaching, which here... is depicted as ultimately demonic" (Gordon D. Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, NIBC [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1988], 266; also see George W. Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1992], 425–26; William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, WBC vol. 46 [Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2000], 537–39).

⁵⁶ Jeffrey L. Townsend, "Is the Present Age the Millennium?," *BSac* 140, no. 559 (July 1983): 217.

⁵⁷ The difficulty presented by these verses from Revelation is not alleviated by the amillennial view that they describe the present age (rather than the seven-year tribulation period, as some premillennialists believe), for this would mean that Satan is actively deceiving the nations throughout the present age, the very thing the amillennialist denies according to his interpretation of Rev 20:1–3.

⁵⁸ Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors*, 186–87; emphasis added. Also see Venema, *The Promise of the Future*, 319, and Storms, *Kingdom Come*, 440.

assault against the people of God,⁵⁹ and (b) preventing the spread of the gospel to the nations of the world.⁶⁰

In support of the first assertion—that Satan is restrained from gathering the nations for an all-out assault against the church—amillennialists point to the connection between verse 3 and verses 7–8.⁶¹ In verse 3, Satan is bound so that he would not deceive the nations until after the thousand years. In verses 7–8, after the thousand years are completed, Satan comes out of the abyss to deceive the nations and thereby gather them to wage war on the people of God. If Satan’s release results in an all-out effort to destroy the church, say amillennialists, this reveals something about the kind of deception he is prevented from engaging in during the thousand years—it is not simply deception *per se*, but rather “deceiving the nations in such a way as to gather them together for an all-out assault against God’s saints.”⁶² As Storms writes:

Although Satan may and will do much in this present age (as the New Testament epistles clearly indicate), there is one thing of which John assures us: *Satan will never be permitted to incite and organize the unbelieving nations of the world in a final, catastrophic assault against the Church, until such time as God in his providence so determines.*⁶³

According to amillennialists, the restriction of Satan during the present age prevents him from inciting the nations to destroy the church as a missionary institution.⁶⁴

In support of the second assertion—that Satan is restrained from preventing the spread of the gospel to the nations—amillennialists generally point to the broader landscape of redemptive history. According to this argument, the nations were left in darkness in the Old Testament era, but through His work of redemption, “Christ curtailed the forces of Satan and paved the way for the successful proclamation of the gospel throughout the world.”⁶⁵ In this way,

⁵⁹ Strimple, “An Amillennial Response,” 273; Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors*, 188–90; Morris, *Revelation*, 279; Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, 228–29; Riddlebarger, *A Case for Amillennialism*, 238; Garlington, “Reigning with Christ,” 72; Storms, *Kingdom Come*, 439–40; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 988; Menn, *Biblical Eschatology*, 290.

⁶⁰ Garlington, “Reigning with Christ,” 72; Cox, *Amillennialism Today*, 62; Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, 228–29; Hamstra, “An Idealist View of Revelation,” 120; Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors*, 188–90; Venema, *The Promise of the Future*, 319; Storms, *Kingdom Come*, 442; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 988–89; Hamilton, *The Basis of Millennial Faith*, 130; Davis, *The High King of Heaven*, 469; Menn, *Biblical Eschatology*, 290. As Hoekema summarizes, “the 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” (*The Bible and the Future*, 228). For some amillennialists (a) and (b) are inextricably linked, for they say it is precisely *because* Satan is unable to destroy the church as a missionary institution that the gospel is now able to go forth to the nations (e.g., Garlington, “Reigning with Christ,” 72; Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, 229).

⁶¹ Strimple, “An Amillennial Response,” 273.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ Storms, *Kingdom Come*, 440; emphasis is in the original.

⁶⁴ Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors*, 188.

⁶⁵ Hamstra, “An Idealist View of Revelation,” 120.

The binding of Satan described in Revelation 20:1–3...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.⁶⁶

As Strimple explains:

The age of salvation for the Gentiles has arrived. Prior to Christ's ministry Israel was the one nation called out from all the nations of the world to know God's blessings and to serve him. There were exceptions, of course—those who came to know God's grace even though they were not of the children of Abraham after the flesh. But essentially all the nations on this earth were in darkness, under Satan's deception. But then, praise God! Christ came and accomplished his redemptive work....The age of world missions had begun, and Satan's deceptive work on that grand scale over so many centuries had come to an end.⁶⁷

According to the amillennial view, then, even though Satan blinds the minds of unbelievers in the present age (2 Cor 4:4), he is unable to incite the unbelieving world to seek to destroy the church, and he is unable to prevent the spread of the gospel to the nations (Rev 20:1–3).⁶⁸

The problem with the amillennial view of the nature of Satan's deception concerns the purpose clause in verse 3. When John says that Satan will be sealed in the abyss "so that he would not deceive the nations *any longer* [ἐτι]" (Rev 20:3), this indicates the interruption of something that is already taking place.⁶⁹ For this reason, the deception from which Satan is prevented in Rev 20:1–3 is a deception that was already taking place prior to his incarceration in the abyss.⁷⁰ Therefore, when the amillennialist explains this deception as Satan inciting the nations into an all-out, catastrophic assault against the church, the question arises—when was this final catastrophic assault launched by Satan prior to the cross?⁷¹ The amillennialist's inability

⁶⁶ Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, 229.

⁶⁷ Strimple, "Amillennialism," 123–24; also see Garlington, "Reigning with Christ," 72; Hamilton, *The Basis of Millennial Faith*, 131; Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, 228–29; Venema, *The Promise of the Future*, 318–19.

⁶⁸ Storms, *Kingdom Come*, 442; Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, 238; Vern S. Poythress, *The Returning King: A Guide to the Book of Revelation* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 2000), 181; R. Fowler White, "On The Hermeneutics And Interpretation Of Rev 20:1–3: A Preconsummationist Perspective," *JETS* 42, no. 1 (March 1999): 65.

⁶⁹ Richard A. Ostella, "The Significance of Deception in Revelation 20:3," *WTJ* 37, no. 2 (Winter 1975): 237–38. As Ostella explains, this is clear from John's temporal use of ἐτι with a negative particle (also see *BDAG*, 400).

⁷⁰ For this reason, the deception from which Satan is prevented in Rev 20:1–3 is more directly identified with his deceptive activities prior to the thousand years than with what happens after his release (Ostella, "The Significance of Deception," 238). But amillennialists take just the opposite approach: to defend their understanding of this deception, they typically ignore the satanic deception which takes place prior to the thousand years and focus instead on the deception which takes place in Rev 20:7–8.

⁷¹ Sullivan, "Premillennialism and an Exegesis of Revelation 20," 21–22; accessed on July 20, 2014, <http://www.pre-trib.org/data/pdf/Sullivan-PremillennialismAndA.pdf>. As Sullivan asks, "If we say God

to point to Satan leading the nations of the world in an all-out assault to destroy the people of God just prior to the cross proves to be an insurmountable difficulty for this view.⁷²

Equally problematic is the amillennial view that the binding of Satan simply restrains him from preventing the spread of the Gospel to the nations. The weakness of this explanation is that the purpose clause in verse 3 concerns itself not with the freedom of the church to proclaim the Good News but with the inability of the nations to embrace it. Properly understood, satanic deception of the nations does not prevent believers from preaching the Gospel to the world—satanic deception is something that takes place in the hearts of the unbelievers who make up those nations. Put another way, satanic deception does not close the mouths of believers; it deludes the hearts of unbelievers. There is no indication in Rev 20:1–3 that the purpose of Satan’s binding was to allow the gospel to go forth to Gentiles who had been previously deprived of the Good News.⁷³

The New Testament Parallels

The most common amillennial argument that the binding of Satan is a present reality is found not in Revelation 20 itself but rather in other New Testament passages which are said to illuminate the meaning of John’s vision (e.g., Matt 12:29, Luke

prevented him from doing it then what is the difference between God’s prevention of the final war of all times before the cross and the so-called binding during this age?” (21). Mathewson argues that even if the deception in Rev 20:1–3 is restricted to opposing the saints and mounting an all-out war (Rev 20:8)—as amillennialists claim—this would be no different from the deception referred to in Rev 12:9, which takes place prior to the Second Coming. According to Mathewson, “It is not clear that the deceiving in both cases is different; both have the express purpose of turning the nations from God to follow the dragon (see 13:2, 4, 7, 8, 14). The final deception of the nations in order to get them to follow the dragon ends, then, with an assault on the people of God (20:7–10). This is precisely the activity which is denied Satan for one thousand years in 20:1–3” (Dave Mathewson, “A Reexamination of the Millennium in Rev 20:1–6: Consummation and Recapitulation,” *JETS* 44, no. 2 [June 2001]: 245).

⁷² According to Powell, Beale (*The Book of Revelation*, 983–90) “seems to interpret the deception in terms of its degree of success and failure, not in terms of its attempt” (“Progression versus Recapitulation,” 106). As Powell explains:

While admitting that Satan will ultimately fail in his objective of destroying the covenant community of believers, nevertheless Beale views Satan as continuously attempting such a goal, and only at the end will he succeed in mounting a worldwide lethal attack. However, the imprisonment imagery shows that Satan will be *prevented* from even making an attempt at deceiving the nations, while the purpose clause makes it clear that he will not have *any* success, not simply limited success (emphasis original).

⁷³ An additional problem arises when one considers the question of whether Satan is currently able to keep the nations in darkness by preventing the spread of the Gospel. Strimple and other amillennialists claim that Satan is no longer successful in this endeavor because he is bound during the present age (Strimple, “Amillennialism,” 123–24), but the number of unreached people (and even nations) in the world would argue otherwise. In fact, as Powell explains, deception and persecution of the church have been widespread throughout the entirety of the present age:

Persecution was initiated under the reigns of Nero, Domitian, and Diocletian, the last of which was throughout the Roman Empire. The bastions of Christianity in Asia Minor and North Africa in the first six centuries have all been under Muslim control for the past several centuries. Three quarters of the earth’s population are still Islamic, Buddhist, or Hindu. Communism in the twentieth century threatened to stamp out Christianity. All this suggests that in the present age Satan is “deceiving the nations” and is having more success than failure (“Progression versus Recapitulation,” 106–7).

10:17–18, John 12:31–32, Col 2:15, Heb 2:14–15, 1 John 3:8, and Rev 12:7–12).⁷⁴ According to amillennialists, “These passages provide the biblical context within which the vision of Revelation 20 becomes clear.”⁷⁵ More specifically, these passages are said to prove that the binding of Satan occurred at the time of the first coming of Christ and therefore that the thousand years of Revelation 20 is a present reality.

In these passages, Satan is bound (Matt 12:29); he falls from heaven (Luke 10:17–18); he is cast out (John 12:31–32); he is disarmed and conquered (Col 2:15); he is rendered powerless (Heb 2:14–15); his works are destroyed (1 John 3:8); and he is thrown down from heaven to earth (Rev 12:7–11). According to amillennialists, these descriptions of the victory of Jesus over the devil in the first century are parallel to the binding of Satan in Revelation 20 and therefore indicate that this binding took place at the start of the present age. As Waldron writes, “The biblical evidence proves conclusively that any interpretation of [Rev 20:1–3] that professes to interpret it in accord with the rest of Scripture must conclude that Satan was bound by the events of and at the time of Christ’s first advent.”⁷⁶

In making this argument, amillennialists appeal to the hermeneutical principle “that Scripture should interpret Scripture and that the more obscure passage should be interpreted in the light of the more clear passage.”⁷⁷ In this case, amillennialists see Rev 20:1–3 as the more obscure passage and Matt 12:29, Luke 10:17–18, John 12:31–32, Col 2:15, Heb 2:14–15, 1 John 3:8, and Rev 12:7–12 as those clearer passages which should be used to interpret the binding of Satan. The problem is that none of these supposed parallels actually refer to what is described in Rev 20:1–3, and therefore this approach fails to bring clarity to the divinely intended meaning of John’s vision.⁷⁸

Matthew 12:29

The New Testament parallel most often cited by amillennialists is the statement of Jesus in Matt 12:29. In this verse, Jesus explains to the Pharisees that His ability to cast out demons is dependent on His prior act of having bound Satan: “Or how can anyone enter the strong man’s house and carry off his property, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house” (Matt 12:29). This verse is said to demonstrate that the binding of Satan in Revelation 20 was accomplished by Jesus

⁷⁴ Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors*, 188; Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, 228; Venema, *The Promise of the Future*, 321–23; Waldron, *The End Times Made Simple*, 93; Davis, *The High King of Heaven*, 471; Cox, *Amillennialism Today*, 65, 107, 136–37; Hamstra, “An Idealist View of Revelation,” 120.

⁷⁵ Venema, *The Promise of the Future*, 321.

⁷⁶ Waldron, *The End Times Made Simple*, 95.

⁷⁷ Venema, *The Promise of the Future*, 323; also see Cox, *Amillennialism Today*, 65, 107, 136–37; Waldron, *The End Times Made Simple*, 93; Page, “Revelation 20 and Pauline Eschatology,” 31–33.

⁷⁸ For some amillennialists, consulting these cross-references actually becomes a substitute for exegesis of Rev 20:1–3 itself, e.g., Cox, who writes: “Since [Rev 20] itself gives no explanation of John’s meaning, its meaning must be garnered elsewhere in the Bible” (*Amillennialism Today*, 65).

during his first-century earthly ministry.⁷⁹ As many amillennialists note, the very same Greek verb “to bind” (δέω) is used with reference to Satan in both Matt 12:29 and Rev 20:3, strengthening the case that these passages describe the same action taken against the devil.⁸⁰

The initial difficulty with this argument concerns the timing of this incident in the ministry of Christ. In Matt 12:29, Jesus specifically says He is not able to exorcise the demon “unless he *first* [πρῶτον] binds the strong man.” But most amillennialists believe that the binding of Satan in Revelation 20 took place through the death and resurrection of Christ. Herein lies the problem: If Jesus had not yet bound Satan through His death and resurrection (Matthew 27–28), how was He able to cast out the demon in Matthew 12? The amillennial view that the binding of Satan in Revelation 20 was accomplished by the death and resurrection of Jesus precludes the possibility that this same binding is described in Matt 12:29.⁸¹

A second difficulty concerns the purpose of Satan’s binding in Revelation 20. As previously discussed, amillennialists often point to the purpose clause in verse 3 as indicating that Satan is bound in one respect and one respect only: “so that he should not deceive the nations any longer” (Rev 20:3).⁸² But in Matt 12:29, the purpose of Satan’s binding was to enable Jesus to heal the demon-possessed man. To the degree that amillennialists emphasize the purpose clause in Rev 20:3 as stating the sole purpose of Satan’s binding, they weaken their ability to equate that binding with the binding of the strong man in Matt 12:29.

But the most significant problem with this argument is found in a simple comparison between the two passages. In Matt 12:29, Jesus is continuing His response to accusations that He is casting out demons by the power Satan, and He does so with a parable. He has already shown that He is Satan’s *enemy* (vv. 25–28), and now He

⁷⁹ Hamilton, *The Basis of Millennial Faith*, 129; Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, 228–29; Arthur H. Lewis, *The Dark Side of the Millennium: The Problem of Evil in Revelation 20:1–10* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), 52; Cox, *Amillennialism Today*, 59–60; Anthony A. Hoekema, “Amillennialism,” in *The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views*, ed. Robert G. Clouse (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1977), 162–63; Waldron, *The End Times Made Simple*, 94; Venema, *The Promise of the Future*, 321; Strimple, “Amillennialism,” 122; Johnson, *Triumph of the Lamb*, 287; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 985; Poythress, *The Returning King*, 181; Garlington, “Reigning with Christ,” 69–70; Hamstra, “An Idealist View of Revelation,” 120; Davis, *The High King of Heaven*, 471; Menn, *Biblical Eschatology*, 288; Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, NTC (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2001), 534.

⁸⁰ Strimple, “Amillennialism,” 122; Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, 229; Johnson, *Triumph of the Lamb*, 287; Venema, *The Promise of the Future*, 321; Menn, *Biblical Eschatology*, 288.

⁸¹ A few amillennialists avoid this dilemma by claiming that Christ’s work of binding began earlier when the Lord triumphed over him by resisting his temptations in the wilderness back in Luke 4:1–13 (= Matt 4:1–11) (Garlington, “Reigning with Christ,” 91; Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, 229; Hamilton, *The Basis of Millennial Faith*, 129; Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors*, 187). But Luke 4 specifically indicates that Satan left the temptation scene defeated but unbound by describing the devil as departing from Jesus “until an opportune time” (Luke 4:13) (Townsend, “Is the Present Age the Millennium?,” 217). In addition, there is no indication in Rev 20 that the binding and incarceration of Satan is something that took place progressively, over the course of nearly two years.

⁸² Storms, *Kingdom Come*, 439–41; Cox, *Amillennialism Today*, 62; Strimple, “Amillennialism,” 123; Morris, *Revelation*, 229; Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors*, 190; Hughes, “Revelation 20:4–6 and the Question of the Millennium,” 281; Hamilton, *The Basis of Millennial Faith*, 132; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 985; Venema, *The Promise of the Future*, 318–19.

explains that He is also Satan's *master*,⁸³ saying: "Or how can anyone enter the strong man's house and carry off his property, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house" (Matt 12:29). The point of this parable is that the very exorcism for which Jesus was condemned is a demonstration of His power and superiority over Satan. For how could Jesus have plundered the strong man's house—i.e., robbed Satan of his spiritual property by delivering the demoniac—unless He had first bound the strong man and rendered him powerless to prevent the exorcism.⁸⁴ According to Jesus, rather than casting out demons by Satan's power, He was demonstrating His own power over the devil when He performed exorcisms.⁸⁵

In Matt 12:29, then, the binding of Satan broke the power he had to possess specific individuals and thereby enabled Jesus to deliver those people from Satan's control. In contrast, the binding of Satan in Revelation 20 involved sealing him in the abyss and preventing him from deceiving the nations.⁸⁶ The two passages have more differences than similarities. In Matthew 12 Satan is bound in his own domain—his own "house," according to the parable—but in Revelation 20 he is removed from that domain and cast into the abyss.⁸⁷ The binding in Matthew 12 is a local reference to Satan's inability to control a single individual through demon possession,⁸⁸ but the binding in Revelation 20 is a universal reference to Satan's inability to deceive the nations of the world. As one amillennialist acknowledges:

The binding of the strong man in the Synoptic Gospels. . . bears no recognizable relationship to the thrust of the amillennial view. That thrust is that the binding of Satan applies only to his ability to deceive the nations. But where are the nations in the pericopes that refer to the binding of the strong man? They are not to be seen. What is very much in view is the local sufferers from demon

⁸³ Alexander Balmain Bruce, "The Synoptic Gospels," in *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, vol. 1, ed. W. Robertson Nicoll (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1974), 188.

⁸⁴ John A. Broadus, *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1886), 270; Louis A. Barbieri, "Matthew," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, eds. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983), 46; Craig Blomberg, *Matthew*, NAC vol. 23 (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 203. As Broadus writes, "Jesus was taking away from Satan a part of his property in delivering the demoniac, and this could not be unless he were at variance with Satan, and strong enough to bind him" (*Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, 270).

⁸⁵ As Barbieri writes, "By driving out demons, He was proving He was greater than Satan. He was able to go into Satan's realm (the strong man's house), the demonic world, and come away with the spoils of the victory (12:29). Since He could do this, He was able to institute the kingdom of God among them (v. 28). If He were driving out demons by Satan's power, He certainly could not be offering the people God's kingdom. That would be contradictory. The fact that He was coming to establish the kingdom clearly showed that He worked by the power of the Spirit of God, not by Satan's power" ("Matthew," 46).

⁸⁶ George Eldon Ladd, "An Historic Premillennial Response," in *The Meaning of the Millennium*, 189.

⁸⁷ Powell, "Progression versus Recapitulation," 100.

⁸⁸ As Gromacki explains, the episode in Matt 12 involved one demon being cast out of one person: "If Satan had been bound completely at that event, then all demon possessed individuals should have been delivered simultaneously. However, many remained demon possessed in the Gospel period, the time of apostolic ministry, and in our present day. Christ used that analogy to justify his miraculous action upon one man at one point of time" (Robert Gromacki, "Revelation 20: A Premillennial Analysis," 14; accessed on July 20, 2014, <http://www.pre-trib.org/data/pdf/Gromacki-Revelation20APremille.pdf>).

possession and Satan's inability to prevent Jesus from healing them; what is not at all in view is the now blessedly undeceived nations.⁸⁹

The inability of Satan to prevent Jesus from delivering demoniacs (Matt 12:29) is simply not the same as his inability to deceive the nations of the world (Rev 20:1–3).⁹⁰ The two passages are not describing the same event, and therefore Matt 12:29 provides no support for the amillennial view of the binding of Satan.

Luke 10:18

A second passage often cited by amillennialists is Luke 10:17–20, which describes the return of the missionaries sent out by Jesus:

The seventy returned with joy, saying, “Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name.” And He said to them, “I was watching Satan fall from heaven like lightning. Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing will injure you. Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are recorded in heaven” (Luke 10:17–20).

The key is verse 18, where Jesus says, “I was watching Satan fall from heaven like lightning.” According to amillennialists, Satan's fall from heaven coincides with the binding of Satan in Revelation 20, and therefore Luke 10:18 provides evidence that Satan's binding took place in the first century.⁹¹ To use this verse as an argument, however, the amillennialist must be able to prove not only that the fall of Satan in Luke 10:18 took place during the first-century ministry of Jesus, but also that it can be equated with the binding of Satan in Revelation 20.

Because of the ambiguity of Jesus's statement in Luke 10:18, commentators are divided on the timing and nature of Satan's fall. According to most interpreters, the fall of Satan refers to either (1) the original fall of Satan (Isa 14:12), (2) the defeat of Satan when Jesus resisted his temptations (Luke 4:1–13), (3) the defeat of Satan evidenced by the exorcism of demons (cf. Luke 11:17–23), or (4) the ultimate judgment of Satan in the future (Rev 20:10).⁹² A fifth possibility combines views (3) and (4)

⁸⁹ Harry R. Boer, “What About the Millennium?” *The Reformed Journal* 25, no. 1 (Jan 1975): 29.

⁹⁰ As Townsend writes, “When [Matt 12:29] is compared with the absolute terms used of Satan's imprisonment in the abyss, it becomes apparent that any restriction on Satan in the Gospels is not to be equated with his binding in Revelation” (“Is the Present Age the Millennium?,” 217).

⁹¹ Riddlebarger, *A Case for Amillennialism*, 122; Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, 229; Lewis, *The Dark Side of the Millennium*, 52; Cox, *Amillennialism Today*, 61; Waldron, *The End Times Made Simple*, 94; Hoekema, “Amillennialism,” 163; Venema, *The Promise of the Future*, 322; Hamstra, “An Idealist View of Revelation,” 120; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 985; Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors*, 187; Garlington, “Reigning with Christ,” 70; Davis, *The High King of Heaven*, 471; Kistemaker, *Revelation*, 534.

⁹² For a survey of these views and others, see David E. Garland, *Luke*, ECNT, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 2011), 428–29; Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 9:51–24:53*, ECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1996), 1006–7; Alfred Plummer, *The Gospel according to S. Luke*, ICC (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975), 277–78; Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing,

and asserts that the victory of Jesus over the devil—as evidenced by demons being cast out in His name—served as a preview of the final judgment of Satan, ultimately pointing ahead to his eventual demise in the lake of fire (Rev 20:10).⁹³

But regardless of which view is correct, Jesus simply does not define the fall of Satan clearly enough for the amillennialist to make his case. In fact, each of these five interpretations is consistent with the premillennial view and none of them requires the amillennial view. It is certainly possible to argue that the description of Satan in Luke 10:18 took place when Jesus spoke these words—that Satan fell from heaven when demons were cast out in the first century—but this does not demonstrate that the binding of Satan in Revelation 20 occurred at the same time.

To prove that it did, amillennialists point out that the fall of Satan in Luke 10 is associated with the missionary activity of the seventy.⁹⁴ For this reason, it is argued that the fall of Satan curtailed the devil's power and paved the way for the successful proclamation of the Gospel throughout the world, just like the binding of Satan in Revelation 20.⁹⁵ Therefore, it is said, both actions must have occurred in the first century. As noted above, however, Rev 20:3 does not say that the binding of Satan paved the way for the church to proclaim the Gospel to the nations. Furthermore, the fall of Satan in Luke 10:18 is presented as evidence that the seventy were given authority to cast out demons, not that the church was now able to preach the Good News throughout the world. For this reason, even if the authority of Jesus over demons indicated that Satan was defeated in some way during the first century (Luke 10:18), this does not mean that Satan was sealed in the abyss, unable to deceive the nations (Rev 20:1–3).⁹⁶ In the absence of any clear parallels between the two passages, Luke

1997), 417–19; John Nolland, *Luke 9:21–18:34*, WBC, vol. 35B (Dallas: Word Books, 1993), 562–64; Norman Crawford, *Luke, What the Bible Teaches*, vol. 7 (Kilmarnock, Scotland: John Ritchie Ltd., 1989), 185–86; Leon Morris, *Luke*, TNTC, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1999), 202; William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke*, NTC (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1978), 580–81; Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, NAC vol. 24 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1992), 309–10.

⁹³ This appears to be the most likely view. In this way, the success of the seventy was viewed by Jesus as “a symbol and earnest” of the complete and future overthrow of Satan (Plummer, *The Gospel according to S. Luke*, 278). As Green notes, “The decisive fall of Satan is anticipated in the future, but it is already becoming manifest through the mission of Jesus and, by extension, through the ministry of his envoys” (*The Gospel of Luke*, 419).

⁹⁴ Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, 229; Waldron, *The End Times Made Simple*, 94; Venema, *The Promise of the Future*, 322; Hamstra, “An Idealist View of Revelation,” 120; Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors*, 187; Garlington, “Reigning with Christ,” 70; Davis, *The High King of Heaven*, 471.

⁹⁵ Hamstra, “An Idealist View of Revelation,” 120.

⁹⁶ According to Vlach, the cosmic war between God and Satan includes several battles which progressively lead to the devil's ultimate defeat: (1) Satan is judged and cast down from heaven before the fall of man (Isa 14:12–15; Ezek 28:11–19); (2) Jesus demonstrates His power over Satan's realm by casting out demons (Matt 12:28); (3) Jesus is victorious over Satan at the cross (Col 2:15); (4) Satan is thrown down to the earth for a short time before the Second Coming (Rev 12); (5) Satan is sealed in the abyss for one thousand years at the Second Coming (Rev 20:1–3); and (6) Satan is thrown into the lake of fire forever after the millennial reign of Christ (Rev 20:7–10) (Michael J. Vlach, “The Kingdom of God and the Millennium,” *MSJ* 23, no. 2 [Fall 2012]: 248–49). As Vlach explains, “These events above are separate but interrelated events in the cosmic war” (249).

10:18 falls short as an argument that the binding of Satan in Revelation 20 is a present reality.⁹⁷

John 12:31–32 / Colossians 2:15 / Hebrews 2:14–15 / 1 John 3:8

Several passages cited by amillennialists specifically refer to the victory that Jesus accomplished through His death and resurrection as He triumphed over Satan and redeemed from his control those who repent and believe in Christ:

- John 12:31–32: “Now judgment is upon this world; now the ruler of this world shall be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself.”⁹⁸
- Colossians 2:15: “When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him.”⁹⁹
- Hebrews 2:14–15: “Since then 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; and might deliver those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives.”¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ In fact, unlike Matt 12:29—which at least refers to Satan being bound in some manner—there are no obvious similarities whatsoever between Luke 10:18 and Rev 20:1–3. Furthermore, Luke 10:18 presumably pictures Satan falling from heaven to *earth*, whereas Satan is sealed in the abyss in Rev 20:1–3 (Webb, “Revelation 20,” 20).

⁹⁸ Cited by Lewis, *The Dark Side of the Millennium*, 52; Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, 229; Cox, *Amillennialism Today*, 61; Hoekema, “Amillennialism,” 163; Waldron, *The End Times Made Simple*, 94; Venema, *The Promise of the Future*, 322–23; Strimple, “Amillennialism,” 122; Hamilton, *The Basis of Millennial Faith*, 132; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 985; Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors*, 188; Poythress, *The Returning King*, 181; Garlington, “Reigning with Christ,” 70; Davis, *The High King of Heaven*, 471–72; Menn, *Biblical Eschatology*, 288. In arguing for the connection between the John 12:31–32 and Rev 20:1–3, amillennialists point out that the verb “cast out” (ἐκβάλλω) in John 12:31–32 is from the same root as the verb “threw” (βάλλω) in Rev 20:1–3 (Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, 229; Garlington, “Reigning with Christ,” 70; Venema, *The Promise of the Future*, 323; Strimple, “Amillennialism,” 122; Menn, *Biblical Eschatology*, 288). But the mere use of similar words is insufficient to equate the events described in these two passages. In addition, as used in their own contexts, the two words are less similar than amillennialists seem to imply. John 12:31 pictures Satan being “cast out” [ἐκβληθήσεται] in some way, whereas Rev 20:3 pictures him being “cast...into [ἐβαλεν...εἰς] the abyss.” The difference between being “cast out” and “cast into” does not preclude the possibility that the two passages are describing the same event from different perspectives, but it should silence the claim that the equation can be made on the basis of the use of similar verbs.

⁹⁹ Cited by Cox, *Amillennialism Today*, 61; Waldron, *The End Times Made Simple*, 95; Strimple, “Amillennialism,” 122; Riddlebarger, *A Case for Amillennialism*, 238; Page, “Revelation 20 and Pauline Eschatology,” 33; Hamilton, *The Basis of Millennial Faith*, 132; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 985; Poythress, *The Returning King*, 181.

¹⁰⁰ Cited by Riddlebarger, *A Case for Amillennialism*, 286; Lewis, *The Dark Side of the Millennium*, 52; Cox, *Amillennialism Today*, 61; Strimple, “Amillennialism,” 122–23; Hamilton, *The Basis of Millennial Faith*, 132–33; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 985.

- 1 John 3:8b: “The Son of God appeared for this purpose, that He might destroy the works of the devil.”¹⁰¹

According to the amillennialist, these descriptions of the victory of Jesus over Satan are parallel to the binding of Satan in Revelation 20 and therefore locate the timing of that binding in the first-century ministry of Christ.

The main problem with this argument is its inability to account for the release of Satan in Revelation 20, for whatever is accomplished in the incarceration of verses 1–3 is undone in the release of verse 7.¹⁰² As Ladd explains, the release of Satan is difficult to understand if it is applied to the Lord’s binding of Satan in His earthly ministry: “The victory he won over Satan was won once and for all. Satan will never be loosed from bondage to Christ won by his death and resurrection.”¹⁰³ In other words, if the binding of Satan in Revelation 20 refers to Christ’s work of redemption on the cross (John 12:31–32; Col 2:15; Heb 2:14–15; 1 John 3:8), the finished work of Christ turns out to be the unfinished work of Christ when Satan is released.¹⁰⁴

For example, according to 1 John 3:8 Jesus came to break the dominating power of sin in the lives of those who believe in Him. But if the victory over the devil in this verse is equated with the binding of Satan in Rev 20:3, what does it mean that Satan is released in Rev 20:7? How can the effects of this redemptive victory be reversed? Similarly, the victory of Christ over the devil in Heb 2:14–15 consists of Jesus redeeming sinners from the power of Satan and the fear of death. But if this victory is identified as the binding of Satan in Revelation 20, how can this act of deliverance be nullified when the devil is set free? Likewise, how can the casting out of Satan in John 12:31–32 be reversed, and how can Christ’s triumph over the rulers of darkness in Col 2:15 be overturned? These passages must not describe the same act of divine judgment against Satan as what John describes in Rev 20:1–3.

Revelation 12:7–11

A final passage often cited by amillennialists is found in Rev 12:7–11, which describes the casting down of Satan in terms very similar to those of Rev 20:1–6.¹⁰⁵ Although the details between the two passages are not identical at every point, the parallels are said to “suggest that they depict the same events and mutually interpret

¹⁰¹ Cited by Cox, *Amillennialism Today*, 61; Waldron, *The End Times Made Simple*, 95; Strimple, “Amillennialism,” 123.

¹⁰² As Thomas asks, “What restrictions currently placed on him will be removed at the end of this age? No credible answer to this question has ever been advanced” (Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 8–22: An Exegetical Commentary* [Chicago: Moody Press, 1995], 404).

¹⁰³ George Eldon Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1972), 263.

¹⁰⁴ Sullivan, “Premillennialism,” 21.

¹⁰⁵ Riddlebarger, *A Case for Amillennialism*, 229–30; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 992–93; Cox, *Amillennialism Today*, 61; Waldron, *The End Times Made Simple*, 95; Venema, *The Promise of the Future*, 320–21; Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors*, 188; Poythress, *The Returning King*, 181; Garlington, “Reigning with Christ,” 72; Menn, *Biblical Eschatology*, 289–90; Johnson, *Triumph of the Lamb*, 286.

one another.”¹⁰⁶ The following seven parallels have been highlighted by various amillennialists:

Revelation 12:7–11	Revelation 20:1–6
(1) heavenly scene (v. 7)	(1) heavenly scene (v. 1)
(2) angelic battle against Satan and his host (vv. 7–8)	(2) presupposed angelic battle with Satan (v. 2)
(3) Satan cast to earth (v. 9)	(3) Satan cast into the abyss (v. 3)
(4) the angels' evil opponent called “the great dragon, . . . that ancient serpent called the devil or Satan, who leads the whole world astray” (v. 9)	(4) the angels' evil opponent called “the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan,” restrained from “deceiving the nations anymore” (vv. 2–3), to be released later “to deceive the nations in the four corners of the the earth” (v. 3, 7–8)
(5) Satan “is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short” (v. 12)	(5) Satan to be “set free for a short time” after his imprisonment (v. 3)
(6) Satan’s fall, resulting in the kingdom of Christ and his saints (v. 10)	(6) Satan’s fall, resulting in the kingdom of Christ and his saints (v. 4)
(7) the saints’ kingship, based not only on the fall of Satan and Christ’s victory but also on the saints’ faithfulness even to death in holding to “the word of their testimony” (v. 11)	(7) the saints’ kingship, based not only on the fall of Satan but also on their faithfulness even to death because of their “testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God” (v. 4)

Figure 1. Riddlebarger, *A Case for Amillennialism*, 229.¹⁰⁷

According to amillennialists, the obvious parallelism between Revelation 12 and 20—and especially the verbal connection in the fourfold identification of the dragon in 12:9 and 20:2–3—indicates that both passages are describing the present age.¹⁰⁸ For this reason, the casting down of Satan in Rev 12:7–11 is seen as evidence for the present-day fulfillment of Rev 20:1–3.

The problem with this argument is that it focuses on superficial points of similarity between Rev 12:7–11 and 20:1–6 while ignoring differences between the two passages which make it impossible for them to be describing the same events or time

¹⁰⁶ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 992; also see Riddlebarger, *A Case for Amillennialism*, 229.

¹⁰⁷ Riddlebarger’s charted is adapted from Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 992.

¹⁰⁸ Riddlebarger, *A Case for Amillennialism*, 229; Johnson, *Triumph of the Lamb*, 286; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 993.

period. Suppose a news magazine were to publish two separate articles about the president of the United States. The first article described how the president flew on Air Force One from Washington D.C. to London where he spent the day giving a number of public speeches. A subsequent article described how he flew on Air Force One from London to Hawaii where he spent two weeks vacationing with his family out of the public eye. The discerning reader would not assume that the two articles were describing the same flight simply because they both referred to how (a) the president of the United States (b) flew across the ocean (c) on Air Force One. After all, the point of departure is different, the destination is different, and the substance of the trip is different. The two accounts could not possibly be describing the same flight across the ocean.

So it is with the parallels between Revelation 12 and Revelation 20—even though both passages refer to a casting down of Satan, three critical differences preclude the possibility that they refer to the same casting down.¹⁰⁹ First, the origin and the destination of the casting down of Satan are completely different in the two passages.¹¹⁰ In Revelation 12 Satan is cast down from heaven to *earth*, but in Revelation 20 he is cast down from earth into the *abyss*. In Revelation 12, Satan no longer has access to heaven because he is confined to earth, but in Revelation 20 he no longer has access to earth because he is confined in the abyss. Unless one is prepared to equate the abyss and the earth, this cannot be the same casting down of Satan. He is on earth in Revelation 12 and in the abyss in Revelation 20, but, as discussed above, he cannot be in both places at the same time.

A second major difference is that the expulsion of Satan from heaven in Revelation 12 has the opposite effect as the casting of Satan into the abyss in Revelation 20.¹¹¹ When Satan is cast down to earth in chapter 12, it results in increased deception of the nations (Rev 12:9; cf. 13:14; 16:14; 18:23; 19:20), but when Satan is cast into the abyss in Revelation 20, it prevents him from deceiving the nations any longer (Rev 20:3). How can Satan be described as the one “who deceives the whole world” (Rev 12:9) while simultaneously being sealed in the abyss “so that he would not deceive the nations any longer” (Rev 20:3)? Satan cannot deceive the whole world (Rev 12:9) and yet be unable to deceive the nations of the world (Rev 20:3) at the same time, and therefore the two descriptions are incompatible.

A final difference involves the short amount of time given to Satan in both passages. At the end of Rev 12:12, John describes Satan being cast down to the earth, “having great wrath, knowing that he has only a short time.” In Rev 20:3, John writes that after Satan is locked in the abyss for a thousand years, “he must be released for a short time.” As seen in #5 in the chart above, this parallel—“a short time” (ὀλίγον καιρὸν) in 12:12 and “a short time” (μικρὸν χρόνον) in 20:3—is cited by those who argue for the amillennial view.

¹⁰⁹ Powell, “Progression versus Recapitulation,” 103–5; James M. Hamilton, Jr., *Revelation: The Spirit Speaks to the Churches* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 251–52; Webb, “Revelation 20,” 24.

¹¹⁰ Powell, “Progression versus Recapitulation,” 103–4; Webb, “Revelation 20,” 24.

¹¹¹ Johnson, “Revelation,” 581; Powell, “Progression versus Recapitulation,” 104; Webb, “Revelation 20,” 24.

The problem is that these two brief periods of time do not line up chronologically. In Revelation 12, Satan is cast down to earth for “a short time,” but in Revelation 20 he is cast into the abyss for a *long* time (the thousand years), and then afterward he is released for “a short time.” If the amillennial view is correct, the short time in Revelation 12 coincides with the long time in Revelation 20 (the thousand years), which is then *followed* by a short time.¹¹² The supposed parallel between the “short time” in Revelation 12 and the “short time” in Revelation 20 offers no support for the amillennial view and actually presents a significant difficulty for it.

Therefore, even though Satan is indeed cast down in both visions, the *destination* of Satan, the *result* of him being cast down, and the *duration* of his restriction (either on earth or in the abyss) are completely incompatible. For this reason, Rev 12:7–11 and 20:1–6 do not portray the same events or time period, and a comparison between the two passages provides no evidence for the amillennial view of Satan’s binding.¹¹³

None of these New Testament passages, then, are truly parallel to the binding of Satan because none of them portray the kind of absolute confinement described in Rev 20:1–3. For this reason, these cross-references fail to bring any clarity to the meaning of John’s vision and therefore fail to provide evidence that the millennium began with the first-century ministry of Christ.

Conclusion

Hundreds of years before the first coming of Christ, Satan was “roaming about on the earth and walking around on it” (Job 1:7), and now, hundreds of years after the death and resurrection of Jesus, Satan still “prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour (1 Pet 5:8). His ultimate fate is sealed, but the devil is not currently bound and sealed in the abyss as described in Rev 20:1–3. As Saucy explains:

All attempts to apply this picture to the present period, either as a limitation of Satan’s deceptive power on believers or his inability to prevent the spread of

¹¹² More specifically, the “short time” in Rev 12:12 consists of the three and a half years in the second half of the Tribulation (Rev 11:2–3; 12:6, 14) (Powell, “Progression versus Recapitulation,” 104). Beale denies that the “short time” of Rev 12:12 and the “short time” of Rev 20:3 are identical or synchronous, arguing instead for a temporal overlap in which the “short time” of 20:3 is the final stage of the “short time” in 12:12 (*The Book of Revelation*, 993). The problem is that this makes the “short time” of three and a half years (12:12) much longer than the “long era” of a thousand years (Rev 20:1–6) (Powell, “Progression versus Recapitulation,” 104). As Powell notes, “This overly symbolic approach strips the designations of time of all temporal significance...Whatever the merits are of literal versus symbolic interpretation of numbers and periods of time, the designation for a brief period of time (three and a half years) should certainly not exceed the designation for a long period of time (one thousand years)” (104–5).

¹¹³ An additional problem with the amillennial argument is that the scene in Revelation 12 takes place during the tribulation period rather than the present age. But since amillennialists reject this broader reading of the book of Revelation, it is easier to simply demonstrate that Rev 12:7–11 does not describe the same event or time period as Rev 20:1–3.

the gospel in the world, are difficult to harmonize with the language of the passage and other teaching of the New Testament. The text gives no indication that the limitation on Satan is one of degree.¹¹⁴

To the contrary, the confinement of Revelation 20 is absolute and therefore the binding of Satan is not a present reality. Instead, the thousand years in John's vision represents a millennial kingdom which will take place between the present age and the eternal state (cf. Isa 24:21–23), just as premillennialism teaches.

¹¹⁴ Robert L. Saucy, *Progressive Dispensationalism: The Interface Between Dispensational and Non-Dispensational Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1993), 276.