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Revelation's Millennia and Greco-Roman

Notions of Hades

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Revelation twenty is the most difficult chapter in the Bible to interpret. The symbols of the dragon's thousand-year binding and the martyrs' thousand-year reign have perplexed interpreters for generations. However, the solution is not as difficult as one might expect. God has provided clues to assist us in our interpretation, if only we will avail ourselves of them. Read on, as we here loose the riddle of Revelation twenty.

Basic Imagery of Revelation Twenty and its Interpretation

There are two separate one-thousand year periods in the imagery of Revelation twenty. The first speaks to the binding of the dragon, the second to the reign of the martyred saints. Here is the binding of the dragon:

And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the Bottomless Pit and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on

the Dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, and cast him into the Bottomless Pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season. Rev. 20:1-3

Here is the reign of the martyred saints:

And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the Beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years. Rev. 20:4-6

The dragon is the world civil power (imperial Rome) opposing Christ and the church. The term rendered "dragon" is from the Greek *drakon*, i.e., a *fabulous serpent*. The Septuagint uses the term to translate the Hebrew *tannin* - a land or sea monster, especially a serpent. The term is synonymous with *leviathan*. Typically, the dragon is portrayed as inhabiting oceans or waterways (Ezek. 29:3; 32:2). Invariably it represents a wicked and despotic ruler, or tyrannical and oppressive *civil* power such as Pharaoh and Egypt or Babylon (Ps. 74:13, 14; Isa. 51:9; Jer. 51:34; Ezek. 29:3; 32:2). The bottomless pit is Hades Tartarus, the place of the wicked dead (cf. II Pet. 2:4; Jude 6). Numerous examples of world civil powers being cast down to the pit exist in scripture; the imagery is not unique to Revelation. Typically, casting down to the pit speaks to *national or military defeat*. Ezekiel describes the fall of Tyre thus:

They shall bring thee down to the pit, and thou shalt die the deaths of them that are slain in the midst of the seas" Ezek. 28:8.

Concerning Assyria Ezekiel said:

I made the nations to shake at the sound of his fall, when I cast him down to hell with them that descend into the pit. Ezek. 31:16

The Greek Septuagint renders this verse "At the sound of his fall the nations quaked, when I brought him down to Hades with them that go down to the pit." This clearly identifies the "pit" with Hades Tartarus, the intermediate place of the damned. Other nations described by Ezekiel as being cast down into the pit in the time of world judgment under the Assyrio-Babylonian invasions include Egypt, Elam, Meshec, Tubal, Edom, and Zidon (Ezek. 32:18, 22, 24, 26, 29, 30; cf. Isa. 14:9-23; 30:27-33). The Greek in Revelation differs slightly from Ezekiel and is literally "the pit of the abyss" (φρεαρ της αβυσσους), but the meaning is identical and points to the Hadean realm of the damned. Hence, whatever interpretation of Revelation's imagery we adopt should be consistent with these Old Testament examples. The better view is that the binding of the dragon in the pit points to the *defeat of the persecuting power and its prevention from persecuting the church*. Loosing the dragon, points to the renewal of the civil power's ability to persecute.

Revelation also describes the persecutor of God's people as "*the beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit*" (Rev. 11:7). It is characteristic of beasts to devour men. The special characteristic of Revelation's beast is that it *devours the saints*. The beast is the dragon's alter ego ("other I"); the dragon acts through the beast to persecute God's people. While the beast is in the bottomless pit it is referred to as the beast that "*was, and is not, and yet is*" (Rev. 17:8). That the beast "*was and is not*" speaks to the fact that it had ceased to persecute the saints (e.g., the persecution ceased to exist). However, this was merely temporary; the beast still exists ("*yet is*") and "*shall ascend out of the bottomless pit*" (Rev. 17:8). The period the beast is in the bottomless pit answers the binding of the dragon; ascending out of the bottomless pit answers to the loosing of the dragon; both describe the same historical events under different symbols and characters; both assume *former and latter persecutions*. Two persecutions are contemplated by this language, and two persecutions are portrayed in Revelation. The binding of the dragon comes between these.

The first persecution is of the Mother church in Revelation twelve. This persecution began after the ascension of the man-child (Christ) who was "*caught up to God, and to his throne*" (Rev. 12:5). The fact this persecution follows close upon the heels of the ascension of Christ fixes its time-frame, placing it at or near the beginning of the gospel. We submit that it

describes the persecution that arose over Stephen that St. Paul led or took part in. This persecution lasted for forty-two months, or approximately A.D. 34-38. It collapsed after receiving a triple strike to its most powerful actors: The departure of Pilate from Palestine, the removal of Caiaphas from the high priesthood, and the conversion of St. Paul, all within the space of little more than a year (*e.g.*, A.D. 36-38).¹ We possess no information suggesting procurators following Pilate suffered or permitted the Jews to persecute the church. Tiberius died about the very time Pilate left office, and Caligula became emperor. The emperor Caligula made Agrippa I king over Philip's tetrarchy. After Caligula's death (A.D. 41), Claudius ascended the throne of the empire; Claudius augmented Agrippa's kingdom, removing the procurator, making Agrippa sole authority in Judea. Agrippa briefly renewed persecution of the church (Acts 12:1-19), but he died immediately thereafter (A.D. 44) and the kingdom was returned to a province under Roman procurators.² Returning Judea to a province restored Roman law and order and protection to the church in Judea by the *religio licita*. The *religio licita* (*legally recognized religions*), allowed national and ethnic groups to keep their local deities and religious observances. The Jews had been guaranteed the right to keep their own religion from the times of Julius Caesar.³ Christianity was considered a sect of Judaism, equal in standing to the Pharisees, Saducees, and Esseans. Hence, Claudius' policy extending the *religio licita* to Christianity gave world-wide protection to the church from persecution at the hands of the Jews. By returning Judea to a Roman province under a Roman governor, this protection was made sure in Palestine as well.

The collapse of the persecution under Caiaphas, Pilate, and Paul is represented under the symbolism of the earth swallowing the flood of persecution flowing out of the dragon's mouth (Rev. 12:16). This evokes the image of Korah's rebellion when the earth opened its mouth and swallowed the rebels, who went down alive to the pit (Num. 16:30). It is also referred to by the symbol of the mortal wound to the beast's head (Rev. 13:3). The mortal blow sent the beast dead to Tartarus; but the wound would wondrously healed and the beast would rise up again, and the persecution revive (Rev. 17:8; *cf* 11:7). Until the mortal wound was healed, the beast and dragon were bound in the pit. This refers to

the policy of Claudius Caesar who afforded the church the protection of law. Claudius is "he who lets" and "what withholdeth" of II Thes. 2:6, 7. He is the "angel" of Revelation twenty, which bound the dragon (restrained Rome from persecuting the church). When Claudius was taken out of the way by poison, Nero ascended the throne and was revealed as the "man of sin" and "son of perdition" who persecuted the church (II Thess. 2:3). The restraining power of Claudius answers to the binding of the dragon in the bottomless pit. Loosing the dragon speaks to the persecution under Nero.

The binding of the dragon begins and ends prior to the reign of the saints. The reign of the saints depicts the souls of the martyrs who die under Nero and the beast. Their reign stretches from the persecution under Nero to the second coming and general resurrection (Rev. 20:5, 11-15). Jesus said, "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life...He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death" (Rev. 2:10, 11). "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit *with me* in my throne, even as I also overcame and am sit down with my Father in his throne" (Rev. 3:21; emphasis added). The martyrs have overcome; they have been faithful unto death and have given their lives in testimony under the beast. Hence, they live and reign in Paradise with Christ pending their eternal inheritance in heaven. In chapter fourteen we read: "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them" (Rev. 14:13). Those mentioned in Rev. 14:13 are the *same* individuals portrayed in Rev. 20:4-6 as having won the martyr's crown. The Spirit pronounces a blessing upon them in martyrdom because they will be tenderly gathered by God into Paradise. Their deaths under the dragon, beast, and false prophet are not a defeat, but a victory. They have overcome and have sat down with Christ in his throne (rev. 2:26, 27; 3:20, 21). Rev. 20:4-6 is a window into the blessed estate of the martyrs in Hades alluded to in Rev. 14:9-13 and nothing more.⁴

The Thousand Years

Thus far the historical referents of Revelation twenty; what of the enigmatic "thousand years?" The common

¹ Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, XVIII, iv, 2, 3. Pilate departed Palestine by order of Vitellius, president of Syria, to answer charges in Rome before Tiberius in connection with the death of some Samaritans slain in an uprising.

² Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, XIX, v-iv.

³ Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, XIV, x, 8-12.

⁴ Because, the focus of the present passage is upon the martyrs under Nero, the rest of the righteous are passed over. However, in strictest terms it should be understood that from Abel forward were all the righteous dead were gathered into Paradise and therefore must be considered participants of the first resurrection.

symbol of a thousand years is often confused to mean that a single thousand-year period is contemplated by the text. As we have seen, it is not. There are two one-thousand year periods in Rev. 20:1-6.⁵ The common symbol arises from the fact that the binding of the dragon and reign of the saints both touch and concern Hades. The dragon is cast down to Tartarus (the bottomless pit) and the saints reign in Paradise. What is the significance of these thousand-year periods and how do they relate to Hades?

One of the chief difficulties in interpreting the thousand-year periods is that, unlike virtually every other passage of Revelation, they have no Old Testament precedent. It has been estimated that two-hundred-seventy-eight of Revelation's four-hundred-four verses contain allusions to Old Testament sources.⁶ These allusions are our guide to interpretation; virtually every symbol in Revelation has an Old Testament precedent to guide us. When wrestling with the symbols of Revelation we can almost invariably consult Old Testament sources to see how they were used. Whether it be the beasts, the two witnesses, or the woman standing upon the moon clothed with the sun and crowned with twelve stars, we have Old Testament allusions at every turn that open these symbols for us. This is equally true of the millennia and Hades/Sheol.

The fact that the thousand-year periods are tied to Hades is fairly easily discerned. We have already seen that we possess numerous Old Testament references to the "pit." Also, the fact that the martyrs are described as "souls" who have been beheaded is a clear indication that they are in the nether realm. Because they are righteous dead, we know this means Paradise (Lk. 24:43; Acts 2:31; cf. Lk. 16:19-31; II Cor. 12:1-4). The longest any man has ever lived was nine-hundred-sixty-nine years (Gen. 5:27). Hence, the thousand-year periods exceed the length of all earthly life. Use of a thousand years to suggest the timelessness of the spirit-realm may be seen in Psalm 90:4, where the Psalmist speaks of God's eternal majesty compared with earthly existence: "For a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night." These scriptural factors and precedents compel that we see the thousand-year periods as alluding to the timeless nature of the spirit/Hadean realm. However, there are extra-biblical sources that point with equal

⁵ Others holding that two millennia are contemplated by the text include Thom. Brighton, Jos. Bengel, and John Wesley, among others.

⁶ Gerald Bray, *Biblical Interpretation Past & Present* (Downers Grove, IL, InterVarsity Press, 1996), p. 69.

persuasiveness to the same conclusion. We allude here to Greco-Roman notions about Hades.

Audience Relevance and the Millennia

The New Testament was not written in a vacuum. It was written with a view to the coming destruction of Jerusalem and Greek and Latin speaking Gentiles replacing the Jews as the dominant ethnic group of the church (Matt. 8:5-12; cf. Matt. 3:7-12). The New Testament was written in Greek to peoples who largely thought and spoke in Greek and whose culture and mental associations drew from those sources. When the New Testament uses Greek words, it is natural that the minds of Greek speaking peoples of the first century should run to Greek associations of those terms. A good example of this is the term "logos" (word/wisdom/reason). This term was employed hundreds of years before Christ by Heraclitus, Plato, and various Stoic philosophers. For Plato, the logos was the divine wisdom and idea pre-existing creation's material forms.⁷ Among the Stoics, the logos is an impersonal abstraction, an irresistible force which bears along the entire world and all creatures to a common end, an inevitable and holy law from which nothing can withdraw itself, and which every reasonable man should willingly follow.⁸ Greco-Roman culture was steeped in Stoic and Platonic philosophy; most Greek and Latin speaking peoples would have been thoroughly familiar with the term "logos" and its attendant associations. Indeed, even among Jews use of the term was widely known. Philo Judaeus, the Alexandrian Jew, wrote extensively about the logos, attempting to harmonize Platonic philosophy with the Jewish scriptures. Philo represents the logos as the creative word of God, an intermediary between God and the world; through it God created the world and governs it; through it also men know God and pray to him.⁹

It is against this background that the apostle John, who also wrote Revelation, wrote in his gospel "in the beginning was the Logos, and the Logos was with God, and the Logos was God" (Jn. 1:1). The average reader today knows little or nothing about Plato and the

⁷ See generally, Plato's work entitled "Timaeus." Actually, Plato doesn't speak of the logos per se, but is generally interpreted to have embraced the concept of the logos by neo-Platonists of later centuries. The church fathers commonly attribute this meaning to him.

⁸ Cleanthus, *Hymn to Zeus* in *Fr. Stoic.* I, 527-cf. 537.

⁹ *De Sacrific. Ab. et Cain*; cf. *De Somniis*, I 182; *De Opif. Mundi*, 13; *De Cherub.*, 125; *Quis rerum divin. haeres sit*, 205-06.

Stoics, and therefore fails to appreciate the cultural allusions behind John's words. Where our minds encounter strange, poetic allusions to the Word (logos), resulting in perplexity, uncertain what John is driving at, the Greek speaking reader of the first century would have made an immediate and automatic connection to Plato and the Stoics. This does not mean that in using the term logos John is adapting or adopting Stoic or Platonic philosophy. To the contrary, his purpose is to indicate that, what Plato and the Stoics were grasping for but missed, God has manifested to man in the person of Jesus Christ. The logos is God's self declaration; just as the word is the verbal embodiment of the mind and Spirit of God, so Jesus is the logos made flesh – the fleshly embodiment of God's mind and Spirit. Paul makes a similar appeal to the Greek mind when, on Mar's Hill, he invoked Greek poets to bring out an essential truth concerning the Godhead (Acts 17:28). It is an attempt to reach one's audience by appealing to sources with which they are familiar and approve, without necessarily endorsing all that the source may advocate. When we come to the millennia of Revelation twenty, the same sort of phenomenon is at play. Like John's use of the term logos, students and scholars today generally approach the millennia ignorant of first century cultural associations. Whereas we are perplexed by the symbology of these thousand-year periods, the Greek speaking reader of the first century would have made immediate connection to Hades.

Hades and Thousand-years among Ancient Peoples

An essential element of Greek belief about Hades and the afterlife is that the spirits of the dead dwelt in Hades a thousand years, after which they were reincarnated by being born anew into earthly life.¹⁰ Plato, in the tenth book of his Republic, reports the story of a soldier, thought to be dead, whose body was placed upon a funeral pyre, only to have him revive before being burnt. The soldier told of descending to Hades where he encountered souls who were judged for the deeds done in life and sentenced, some to a heavenly realm of bliss, others to a lower region of torments. After a thousand years in their respective realms, these souls were then reincarnated into earthly life. This thousand-year pilgrimage in the underworld was a major factor in Plato's ethical instruction about virtuous living:

*Wherefore my counsel is that we hold fast ever to the heavenly way and follow after justice and virtue always, considering that the soul is immortal and able to endure every sort of good and every sort of evil. Thus shall we live dear to one another and to the gods, both while remaining here and when, like conquerors in the games who go round to gather gifts, we receive our reward. And it shall be well with us both in this life and in the pilgrimage of a thousand years which we have been describing.*¹¹

Virgil also makes reference to the thousand-year period of the spirit in Hades in his epic poem "Aeneid," the story of the legendary founding of Rome by Aeneas, a Trojan who escapes and survives Troy's famous war with the Greeks. Part of Aeneas' labors before reaching Latium, Italy, was to descend to Hades and there receive a prophecy from his deceased father. According to Virgil, the realm of the underworld was entered by an enormous cavern, whose mouth emitted poisonous vapors from its black throat. The dead were then ferried across a river; some detained in Limbo, others permitted to precede to a fork in the road, one of which leads to Tartarus, the other to the happy fields of Elysium. Tartarus, also called the Pit, is the place of the damned. Peter uses the term Tartarus in reference to the "angels" (probably the sons of Seth) that sinned and were kept under chains of darkness, reserved unto judgment (II Pet. 2:4; cf. Jude 6; Gen. 6:1-4). Souls that do not go to Tartarus or Elysium, suffer punishments in Purgatory for sins committed during life.¹² Some are later released to wander about happily in Elysium. Souls in both Elysium and Purgatory must complete a thousand years, after which they are born anew into earthly life. The purpose of the thousand years is to remove all remembrance of one's past earthly existence:

Yes, not even when the last flicker of life has left us, does evil, or the ills that the flesh is heir to, quite relinquish our souls; it must be that many a taint grows deeply, mysteriously grained in their being from long contact with the body. Therefore the dead are disciplined in purgatory, and pay the penalty of old evil: some hang, stretched to the blast of vacuum winds; for others, the stain of sin is washed away in a vast whirlpool or cauterized with fire. Each of us finds in the next world his own level: a few of us are later released to wander at will through broad Elysium, the

¹⁰ Greeks did not believe in resurrection, but affirmed reincarnation. See Acts 17:32; Justin Martyr, *Horatory to the Greeks*, XXVII, Ante-Nicene Fathers, p. 284.

¹¹ Plato, *Republic*, Bk. X, 315-320; Ben. Jowett ed.

¹² Justin Martyr, confusing Virgil's account with Plato's, equates Purgatory with Tartarus. See Justin Martyr, *Ist Apology*, VIII, Ante-Nicene Fathers, p. 165, where he attributes Virgil's description of Rhadamanthus punishing the wicked to Plato.

*Happy Fields; until, in the fulness of time, the ages have purged that ingrown stain, and nothing is left but pure ethereal sentience and the spirit's essential flame. All these souls, when they have finished their thousand-year cycle, God send for, and they come in crowds to the river Lethe, so, you see, with memory washed out, they may revisit the earth above and begin to wish to be born again.*¹³

(The river Lethe bears the souls to the surface where they are reborn to earthly life.) Thus, we see that Greco-Roman conceptions of Hades involved separate thousand year periods for each soul, after which they were born into earthly anew. Of course, the scriptures do not teach reincarnation. However, Revelation was written to Greek speaking Gentiles in Asia Minor who would have *immediately* (and correctly) associated the millennia of Revelation twenty with Hades – The dragon symbolically bound in Tartarus for a “thousand years,” whence he is released to persecute anew the church, the martyrs in Paradise where they lived a “thousand years.” The Greek speaking Christians of Gentile descent in Asia Minor faced a time of unparalleled persecution; many would be called upon to pay with their lives for their testimony of Jesus. The familiar figure of the thousand-years doubtless was adapted to ensure they fully comprehended the meaning of the symbolism and its message of assurance as they faced the prospect of martyrdom. They could die secure in the knowledge Christ had prepared for them a place of rest in Hades Paradise pending the general resurrection. The French skeptic Voltaire described this association aptly:

*The belief in this reign of a thousand years was long prevalent among the Christians. This period was also in great credit among the Gentiles. The souls of the Egyptians returned to their bodies at the end of a thousand years; and, according to Virgil, the souls in purgatory were exorcised for the same space of time—et mille per annos.*¹⁴

Conclusion

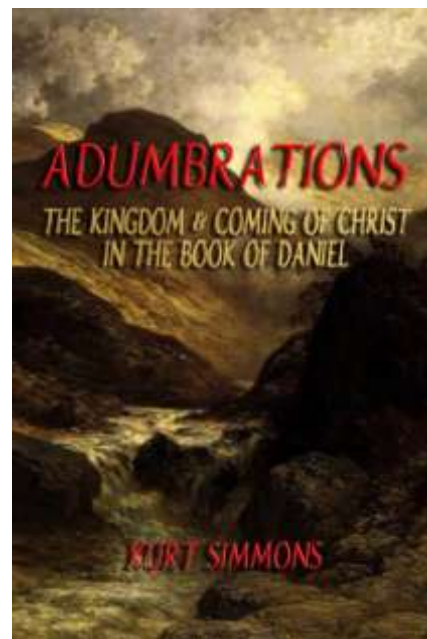
The millennia of Revelation twenty have draw from both Biblical and Greco-Roman associations concerning Hades. The book of Revelation was addressed to Greek speaking residents of Asia minor who would have made an immediate connection

¹³ Virgil, *Aeneid*, Bk. VI, 734-769; C. Day Lewis ed (1952, Hogarth Press, London).

¹⁴ *The Works of Voltaire*, Vol. III, sec. 1 (1764, Philosophical Dictionary, Part I).

between John’s imagery and traditional Greco-Roman belief about the underworld. The purpose in this was to assist them in interpretation of the imagery and thus gain strength against the coming crisis.

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What Happened in AD 70?

What Happened at the Cross?

What Happened at the Cross:

All of the following accrued to the immediate benefit of men from and after the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. AD 70 was irrelevant in terms of man's salvation from the power of sin: Our glory is all the cross!

Atonement was made in full: *"And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement" (Rom. 5:11).* [The verb tense is perfect, showing completed action in the past.]

The debt of sin was expunged: *"Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross" (Col. 2:14).* [Here the verb tense is historical present, showing what happened at the cross: viz., the debt of sin was blotted out.]

Sins were remitted: *"In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace" (Eph. 1:7).*

Sins were washed away: *"And now why tarriest thou? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord" (Acts 22:16)* [If sins are washed away in baptism, it is clear nobody need wait until AD 70 for salvation from sin!]

Men were reconciled to God: *"And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreprouvable in his sight" (Col. 1:21, 22).* [Verb tense is perfect, showing completed action in the past.]

The Old Testament was annulled: *"For there is verily a disannulling of the commandment going before for the weakness and unprofitableness thereof. For the law made nothing perfect...which stood only in meats and drinks, and divers washings imposed on them until the time of reformation" (Heb. 7:17, 19;*

9:10). **Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances" (Eph. 2:15).**

Believers were freed from all obligation to the Old Testament: *"But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law" (Gal. 5:18).* [Not under law. What part of this would any man dare deny?]

Circumcision, the Temple Ritual, and Ceremonial Law Legally Terminated: *"Let no man therefore judge you meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or the new moon, or of the Sabbath days" (Col. 2:16; cf. Gal. 4:9, 10).*

New Testament became of force: *"For a testament is of force after men are dead: otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth" (Heb. 9:17).*

The New Testament replaced the Old Testament: *"He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second. By the which will we are sanctified by the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (Heb. 10:9, 10).* [No man can have two testaments in force at the same time. The Old Testament was removed at the cross so that the New Testament could come into force.]

Spiritual resurrection (acquittal from guilt) occurred at conversion: *"And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses" (Col. 2:13).* [Note: if spiritual resurrection to heaven (Eph. 1:20; 2:6) occurs at conversion, why do some say this did not occur until AD 70?]

The veil of sin separating man from God was removed: *"And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom" (Matt. 27:51).*

Saints admitted into legal & covenantal presence of God: *"Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus...Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith" (Heb. 10:19, 22).*

Men stood perfect and complete before God: *“For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified” (Heb. 10:14).* [Verb tense is perfect, showing completed action in the past. Who, reading this, would dare assert that man was under the debt of sin until AD 70?]

What Happened in AD 70:

AD 70 was a time of eschatological judgment and wrath, as Jesus began ruling the nations with a rod of iron from the right hand of God. This was a time of world-wrath as Christ avenged the blood of his saints and martyrs, putting his enemies beneath his feet, including Hadean death.

The kingdom came in power: *“Verily I say unto you, That there be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power” (Mk. 9:1).* [“Coming in power” signifies Christ asserting his dominion by irresistible force.]

The world entered a time of judgment: *“Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained” (Acts 17:31).*

Jesus demonstrated his omnipotence and divinity: *“That thou keep this commandment without spot, unrebukeable, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ: Which in his times he shall shew, who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords; who only hath immortality, dwelling in light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom be honour and power everlasting. Amen” (I Tim. 6:14-16).*

Christ came in judgment upon Daniel’s “little horn” [Nero]: *“And I beheld, and the same horn made war with the saints, and prevailed against them; until the Ancient of days came and judgment was given to the saints of the most High; and the time came that the saints possessed the kingdom” (Dan. 7:21, 22; cf. II Thess. 2:3-9).*

The image of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream was broken to pieces: *“And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall*

break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever” (Dan. 2:44; cf. Ps. 2:8, 9).

The political powers of the heathen were subjected to Christ: *“I will shake the heavens and the earth; and I will overthrow the throne of kingdoms, and I will destroy the strength of the kingdoms of the heathen” (Hagg. 2:21, 22).* [The “heavens and earth” are symbols for the social and political elements of the world.]

The Jewish nation was destroyed: *“That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar” (Matt. 23:35).*

The Hadean resurrection occurred: *“And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt...and when he shall have accomplished to scatter the power of the holy people, all these things shall be finished” (Dan. 12:2, 7; cf. Rev. 11:15-19).*

What did Not Happen in AD 70

Question: Does the fact that some prophecies and promises contained in the Old Testament scriptures were not fulfilled until AD 70 mean the ceremonial law was still valid, binding, and obligatory?

Answer: No. The shadow ends where the body begins; the body is of Christ (Col.2:17). The temple ritual was a prophetic type and foreshadow, pointing to the sacrifice of Jesus. Once Jesus came and fulfilled the law’s demand, the law ceased. Not ONE verse can be produced showing the Old Testament was binding from and after the cross. To the contrary, whole books (e.g., Galatians and Hebrews) are devoted to the subject that men were NOT to obey the ritual and ceremony of the Old law, including circumcision, which was the very essence of the Old Testament. If circumcision was annulled, the whole ceremonial law was annulled.

Prophecies concerning the destruction of Jerusalem and wrath upon the nations did not derive their validity from the law. God was perfectly competent to remove the ceremonial law and old covenant, and still visit wrath upon

the Jews and Gentiles who rejected the gospel and persecuted the church. Indeed, it is **the very fact that the Jews insisted the law was still valid and had to be kept that marked them as God's enemies.**

“He that killeth an ox is as if he slew a man; he that sacrificeth a lamb as is he cut off a dog's neck; he that offereth an oblation, as if he offered an oblation, as if he offered swine's blood; he that burneth incense as if he blessed an idol. Yet, they have chosen their own ways, and their soul delighteth in their abominations. I

also will choose their delusions, and will bring their fears upon them; because when I called none did answer; when I spake they did not hear; but they did evil before mine eyes, and chose that in which I delighted not. Hear the word of the Lord, ye that tremble at his word; Your brethren that hated you, and that cast you out for my name's sake, said, Let the Lord be glorified: but he shall appear to your joy, and they shall be ashamed. A voice of noise from the city, a voice from the temple, a voice of the Lord that rendereth recompence to his enemies” (Isa. 66:3-6).

Questions from our Readers

Q: Kurt, Thanks to your many answered questions, your advice, and support over the last two years, I was able to sit down with my mother who is visiting us to help us pack and move, and tell her everything I have learned about Preterism and answer all her questions. She said that is the first thing that has made sense about Revelation she ever heard. The lifted weight and release from 'last days madness' and the fear those TV charlatans have laid on her for years to manipulate money from her was tangible in it's comforting and peaceful, yet responsibility laden message. Praise the Spirit of God for guiding her into all truth!

A: Thanks for the encouraging words! I am so happy you mother saw the light. It speaks well of her and her desire to get at the truth. I am grateful to have been a part of it all and it makes my work worthwhile knowing I have helped someone else along the way.

Q: Mr. Simmons,

My friend has been forwarding me your newsletters. I have enjoyed reading them. I would like to subscribe to receive the newsletters directly. Some background: A friend of mine shared with me the preterist view on eschatology just over a year ago now. I've been studying it ever since and have had my eyes opened! I have only ____ and my friend who shared with me to discuss this view. I have

shared it with my husband of 19 year and he listens to all that I am learning but it is still to hard for him to wrap his brain around it. Like me, all he has ever been exposed to and taught was futurism. We attend Chuck Swindoll's church here in Frisco, Texas, with our kids (ages 10 and 17). Now that I believe what I do, I find it a challenge at times (especially when sermons are taught from a futurist standpoint) to attend. My husband and I have many friends at church. I do not share my preterist views with them and do not feel led of the Lord to engage in these conversations with them.

I do need your help in my study to further understand "Satan" as mentioned in the Bible from a preterist perspective. I've talked a little with Bob about this. What is your belief? Was he a fallen angel? Who was the serpent in the Garden of Eden? Was there no literal being who tempted Christ? And who tempts Christian's today? I've read a study on "The Real Devil" by Duncan Heaster <http://www.realdevil.info/> -- have you read it? Wow! A paradigm shift in thinking for sure! I get this sense that what we are now dealing with is our battle with our own flesh and that Christ has overcome Satan and there is no need for us to be going around thinking we're being "attacked" by Satan! I think you get my point. I would love to hear your input and please send me any links or resource suggestions that would help me further my understanding in this area. Thank you so much for your time and for your ministry! I look

forward to receiving your future newsletters!

With Appreciation,

A: Thanks for writing. I have added your name to the list to receive our newsletter, and am attaching the August edition. Please write any time with questions or comments. We often publish these anonymously and people find them helpful. You are never a bother.

Attending a church that teaches as Chuck Swindoll does would indeed be challenging. Although there are not many churches that formally teach full Preterism, there are some that do not err as egregiously as Swindoll and others who affirm that the Jews are still God's chosen people, there will be a millennial reign of Christ on earth, etc. You may find a church that de-emphasizes the second coming is less abrasive. The Church of Christ usually takes a "partial preterist" view, meaning they teach that most of Revelation was for the first century. You may want to give them a try. There are no perfect churches.

I think you are wise not to talk about your view of eschatology with others at the church you attend. Most Christians today are "lazy" students of the Bible and read at a superficial level and are content to leave the many contradictions of futurist paradigms unanswered. Admittedly, it requires a lot of diligence to get at the truth, and one must be prepared to make a protracted study of the issues surrounding the second coming. Since, most Christians are unwilling to undertake such a study, the truth is left unearthened, buried beneath mounds of misunderstanding. Many who come to the preterist view find themselves persecuted by fellow church members when they share their views. I recommend discretion.

There is no "preterist view" about Satan per se. Some take a traditional approach that there is/was a supernatural demonic being/fallen angel described in the Bible. I find that view untenable. But like preterism, this is a topic that can excite persecution and should be handled with discretion.

The word "angel" in the Bible means messenger" and is used indiscriminately of both heavenly messengers (angels) and men, and even nations/governments.

The first occurrence of the word "Satan" is in

Num 22:22 where it is translated "adversary," and is actually used of the angel of the Lord! If you check a concordance, you will find that the word "satan" and "adversary" are the same word and that the latter is often used in reference to men and nations. This is a pretty good clue that "satan" is not a supernatural being.

The idea of demonic beings seems to originate with pagan cultures, particularly the Greeks who conquered Palestine in the 4th century BC and still ruled Galilee in the time of Christ ("Galilee of the Gentiles" is how Mathew terms it). I believe Jews picked up the superstition about demons from the Greeks and used it to describe/explain mental and physical illnesses. Insanity, epilepsy, and many normal physical maladies came to be described as the result of demonic possession or an "unclean spirit." This is well documented by non-inspired Jewish writings, which describes simple things like a shrunken sinew or tendon as the result of an "unclean spirit." Here are some comments from my commentary on Daniel regarding the madness that befell Nebuchadnezzar:

[begin quote] The illustrious and learned Bishop Lightfoot gives the following account of demonic possession: "There were divers diseases, which, in their own nature, were but natural diseases, which yet the Jews did, commonly, repute as seizure and possessing by the devil; especially those that distempered the mind, or did in more special manner convulse the body: and, according to this common language and conception of the nation, the language of the gospel doth speak exceeding frequently. Examples of this kind of dialect among the Jews, we might produce divers, as that in Maimonides: 'A man, which is troubled with an evil spirit, and saith, when the sickness begins upon him, Write a bill of divorcement to my wife, he said as good as nothing, because he is not 'compos sui': and so likewise a drunken man, when he comes near the drunkenness of Lot,' etc. he calls the evil spirit, or 'a sickness;' and by it he means lunacy, or distractedness, that had its 'lucida intervalla.' So the Jews speak of a man 'that is possessed by Cordicus:' which they interpret to be, 'a spirit that seizeth on him, that drinketh too much wine out of the wine-press.' And, to spare more; because the story in hand is of a child, take but this example of an evil spirit, which, when conceived, did seize upon children: 'Shibta (say they) is an evil spirit,

that seizeth upon children by the neck, even upon the sinews behind the neck, and drieth them up from their use and strength, till it kill him. And the time of it is from the child's being two onths old, and the danger of it is till the child be seven years old.' Which seemeth to mean nothing else but convulsion-fits, or shrinking of the sinews, or some suchlike thing; a natural malady." John Lightfoot, *Harmony of the Gospels*, Complete Works (1684) Vol. 3, pp. 102, 103 [end quote]

The Greek origin of demons explains why there is an almost total absence of demons and unclean spirits in the Old Testament. When we open the New Testament, it is as if we are in a totally different world: demons and unclean spirits are everywhere! Where were these beings during the previous 5000 years? Why didn't we read about them all during Old Testament times? Something has clearly happened between the testaments that must account for the difference. I would suggest that it was the Greek occupation of Palestine and introduction of their superstitions and culture best accounts for the difference.

The use of language in scripture attributing physical/mental maladies to unclean spirits is not an endorsement of the error, it is simply speaking to the people in the only language they understood. A first century Jew who saw a man thrashing about on the ground from epilepsy could not understand this was the product of a physical illness, so attributed it to demonic possession. I believe those who stop to think it through will see that the idea of fallen angels and demons is difficult to square with reality. Where are all those demons today? There are a few references in the OT to what appear to be demons or fallen angels, Job for example. But Job is a book of poetry and should be read accordingly. The "sons of God" mentioned in Job and passages like Genesis 6 are best understood as the faithful/believing vs. the unbelieving and apostate. This is clearly the use in the New Testament: we are sons of God by faith, rebirth, and covenant.

Whatever one believes about demons or angels is not critical: these are not issues of salvation, so we can afford to treat each other charitably despite differences. Be warned, however, that some will persecute you for taking a less literal approach to this issue, just like the second coming.

Next month's issue of our newsletter will include an article by Thomas Hobbes from the 1600's about demons/fallen angels. I encourage you to read it.

Q: Hey Kurt – will send the money for the commentary soon – hey by the way – what do you make of all of the Satan/angel passages in the book of Jude??

A: The "angels" that sinned in Jude and in II Pet. 2:4 refer, in my opinion, to the "sons of God" (believing seed of Seth) who committed apostasy by marrying the unbelieving daughters of men (Gen. 6:1-8). If you consult Josephus on the account of the flood, you'll notice that he says the sons of Seth were faithful for seven generations, but then seems to refer to them interchangeably as angels, saying they apostatized by copulating with women. Since, angels cannot copulate with men, it seems clear that angels and sons of God in this passage refers to the children of Seth, and that the phrase "sons of God" gave birth to various erroneous interpretations among the Jews, or else that something was lost in the translation and meaning of the terms somewhere. In any event, I do not believe in evil demonic beings or fallen angels (other than men). The archangel battling with the devil about the body of Moses, I have always understood in reference to Zech.2, where the angel of the Lord disputes with "Satan" about the captivity, as represented by Joshua the high priest. I think the body of Moses refers to the covenant community and the captivity in specific; I believe that "Satan" is the Persian nobility (the adversary) that was resisting the captivity and their building the temple and city of Jerusalem after their return. The angel of the Lord I take as either an actual angel, or a manifestation of the divinity (Michael) when acting as the captain of the Lord's host. Hope that helps!

Excerpts from

Thomas Hobbes

Leviathan

1660

CHAPTER XLV

OF DEMONOLOGY AND OTHER RELICS OF THE RELIGION OF THE GENTILES

"That there were many demoniacs in the primitive Church, and few madmen, and other such singular diseases; whereas in these times we hear of, and see many madmen, and few demoniacs, proceeds not from the change of nature, but of names."

THE impression made on the organs of sight by lucid bodies, either in one direct line or in many lines, reflected from opaque, or refracted in the passage through diaphanous bodies, produceth in living creatures, in whom God hath placed such organs, an imagination of the object from whence the impression proceedeth; which imagination is called sight, and seemeth not to be a mere imagination, but the body itself without us; in the same manner as when a man violently presseth his eye, there appears to him a light without, and before him, which no man perceiveth but himself, because there is indeed no such thing without him, but only a motion in the interior organs, pressing by resistance outward, that makes him think so. And the motion made by this pressure, continuing after the object which caused it is removed, is that we call imagination, and memory, and, in sleep, and sometimes in great distemper of the organs by sickness or violence, a dream, of which things I have already spoken briefly in the second and third Chapters.

This nature of sight having never been discovered by the ancient pretenders to natural knowledge, much less by those that consider not things so remote (as that knowledge is) from their present use, it was hard for men to conceive of those images in the fancy and in the sense otherwise than of things really without us: which some, because they vanish away, they know not whither nor how, will have to be absolutely incorporeal, that is to say, immaterial, or forms without matter (colour and figure, without any coloured or figured body), and that they can put on airy bodies, as a garment, to make them visible when they will to our bodily eyes; and others say, are bodies and living and living creatures, but made of air, or other more

subtle and ethereal matter, which is, then, when they will be seen, condensed. But both of them agree on one general appellation of them, demons. As if the dead of whom they dreamed were not inhabitants of their own brain, but of the air, or of heaven, or hell; not phantasms, but ghosts; with just as much reason as if one should say he saw his own ghost in a looking-glass, or the ghosts of the stars in a river; or call the ordinary apparition of the sun, of the quantity of about a foot, the demon or ghost of that great sun that enlighteneth the whole visible world: and by that means have feared them, as things of an unknown, that is, of an unlimited power to do them good or harm; and consequently, given occasion to the governors of the heathen Commonwealths to regulate this their fear by establishing that demonology (in which the poets, as principal priests of the heathen religion, were specially employed or revered) to the public peace, and to the obedience of subjects necessary thereunto; and to make some of them good demons, and others evil; the one as a spur to the observance, the other as reins to withhold them from violation of the laws.

What kind of things they were to whom they attributed the name of demons appeareth partly in the genealogy of their gods, written by Hesiod, one of the most ancient poets of the Grecians, and partly in other histories, of which I have observed some few before, in the twelfth Chapter of this discourse.

The Grecians, by their colonies and conquests communicated their language and writings into Asia, Egypt, and Italy; and therein, by necessary consequence, their demonology, or, as St. Paul calls it, their doctrines of devils: and by that means

the contagion was derived also to the Jews, both of Judaea and Alexandria, and other parts, whereinto they were dispersed. But the name of demon they did not, as the Grecians, attribute to spirits both good and evil; but to the evil only: and to the good demons they gave the name of the Spirit of God, and esteemed those into whose bodies they entered to be prophets. In sum, all singularity, if good, they attributed to the Spirit of God; and if evil, to some demon, but a kakodaimen, an evil demon, that is, a devil. And therefore, they called demoniacs, that is, possessed by the devil, such as we call madmen or lunatics, or such as had the falling-sickness; or that spoke anything which they, for want of understanding, thought absurd. As also of an unclean person in a notorious degree, they used to say he had an unclean spirit; of a dumb man, that he had a dumb devil; and of John the Baptist, for the singularity of his fasting, that he had a devil; [Matthew, 11. 18] and of our Saviour, because he said, he that keepeth his sayings should not see death in aeternum, "Now we know thou hast a devil; Abraham is dead, and the prophets are dead." [John, 8. 52] And again, because he said they went about to kill him, the people answered, "Thou hast a devil: who goeth about to kill thee?" [John, 7. 20] Whereby it is manifest that the Jews had the same opinions concerning phantasms; namely, that they were not phantasms, that is, idols of the brain, but things real, and independent on the fancy.

Which doctrine, if it be not true, why, may some say, did not our Saviour contradict it, and teach the contrary? Nay, why does He use on diverse occasions such forms of speech as seem to confirm it? To this I answer that, first, where Christ saith, "A spirit hath not flesh and bone," [Luke, 24. 39] though he show that there be spirits, yet he denies not that they are bodies. And where St. Paul says, "We shall rise spiritual bodies," [I Corinthians, 15. 44] he acknowledgeth the nature of spirits, but that they are bodily spirits; which is not difficult to understand. For air and many other things are bodies, though not flesh and bone, or any other gross body to be discerned by the eye. But when our Saviour speaketh to the devil, and commandeth him to go out of a man, if by the devil be meant a disease, as frenzy, or lunacy, or a corporeal spirit, is not the speech improper? Can diseases hear? Or can there be a corporeal spirit in a body of flesh and bone, full already of vital and animal spirits? Are there not therefore spirits, that neither have bodies, nor are mere imaginations? To the first I answer that the addressing of our Saviour's command to the madness or lunacy he cureth is no more improper than was his rebuking of the fever, or of the wind and sea; for neither do these hear: or than was the command of God to the light, to the firmament, to the sun, and stars, when He commanded them to be; for they could not hear

before they had a being. But those speeches are not improper, because they signify the power of God's word: no more therefore is it improper to command madness or lunacy, under the appellation of devils by which they were then commonly understood, to depart out of a man's body. To the second, concerning their being incorporeal, I have not yet observed any place of Scripture from whence it can be gathered that any man was ever possessed with any other corporeal spirit but that of his own by which his body is naturally moved.

Our Saviour, immediately after the Holy Ghost descended upon Him in the form of a dove, is said by St. Matthew to have been "led up by the Spirit into the wilderness"; [Matthew, 4. 1] and the same is recited, Luke, 4. 1, in these words, "Jesus being full of the Holy Ghost, was led in the Spirit into the wilderness": whereby it is evident that by Spirit there is meant the Holy Ghost. This cannot be interpreted for a possession; for Christ and the Holy Ghost are but one and the same substance, which is no possession of one substance, or body, by another. And whereas in the verses following he is said "to have been taken up by the devil into the holy city, and set upon a pinnacle of the temple," shall we conclude thence that he was possessed of the devil, or carried thither by violence? And again, "carried thence by the devil into an exceeding high mountain, who showed him thence all the kingdoms of the world": wherein we are not to believe he was either possessed or forced by the devil; nor that any mountain is high enough, according to the literal sense to show him one whole hemisphere. What then can be the meaning of this place, other than that he went of himself into the wilderness; and that this carrying of him up and down, from the wilderness to the city, and from thence into a mountain, was a vision? Conformable whereunto is also the phrase of St. Luke, that he was led into the wilderness, not by, but in the Spirit: whereas, concerning his being taken up into the mountain, and unto the pinnacle of the temple, he speaketh as St. Matthew doth, which suiteth with the nature of a vision.

Again, where St. Luke says of Judas Iscariot that "Satan entered into him, and thereupon that he went and communed with the chief priests, and captains, how he might betray Christ unto them"; [Luke, 22. 3, 4] it may be answered that by the entering of Satan (that is, the enemy) into him is meant the hostile and traitorous intention of selling his Lord and Master. For as by the Holy Ghost is frequently in Scripture understood the graces and good inclinations given by the Holy Ghost; so by the entering of Satan may be understood the wicked cogitations and designs of the adversaries of Christ and his Disciples. For as it is hard to say that the devil was entered into Judas, before he had any

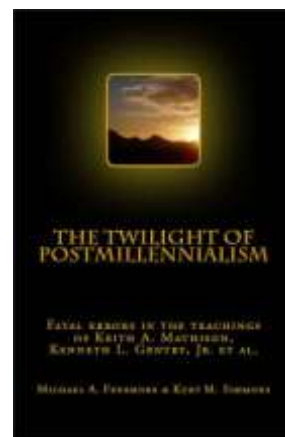
such hostile design; so it is impertinent to say he was first Christ's enemy in his heart, and that the devil entered into him afterwards. Therefore the entering of Satan, and his wicked purpose, was one and the same thing.

But if there be no immaterial spirit, nor any possession of men's bodies by any spirit corporeal, it may again be asked why our Saviour his Apostles did not teach the people so, and in such clear words as they might no more doubt thereof. But such questions as these are more curious than necessary for a Christian man's salvation. Men may as well ask why Christ, that could have given to all men faith, piety, and all manner of moral virtues, gave it to some only, and not to all: and why he left the search of natural causes and sciences to the natural reason and industry of men, and did not reveal it to all, or any man supernaturally; and many other such questions, of which nevertheless there may be alleged probable and pious reasons. For as God, when He brought the Israelites into the Land of Promise, did not secure them therein by subduing all the nations round about them, but left many of them, as thorns in their sides, to awaken from time to time their piety and industry: so our Saviour, in conducting us toward his heavenly kingdom, did not destroy all the difficulties of natural questions, but left them to exercise our industry and reason; the scope of his preaching being only to show us this plain and direct way to salvation, namely, the belief of this article, that he was the Christ, the Son of the living God, sent into the world to sacrifice himself for our sins, and, at his coming again, gloriously to reign over his elect, and to save them from their enemies eternally: to which the opinion of possession by spirits or phantasms is no impediment in the way, though it be to some an occasion of going out of the way, and to follow their own inventions. If we require of the Scripture an account of all questions which may be raised to trouble us in the performance of God's commands, we may as well complain of Moses for not having set down the time of the creation of such spirits, as well as of the creation of the earth and sea, and of men and beasts. To conclude, I find in Scripture that there be angels and spirits, good and evil; but not that they are incorporeal, as are the apparitions men see in the dark, or in a dream or vision, which the Latins call spectra, and took for demons. And I find that there are spirits corporeal, though subtle and invisible; but not that any man's body was possessed or inhabited by them, and that the bodies of the saints shall be such, namely, spiritual bodies, as St. Paul calls them.

Nevertheless, the contrary doctrine, namely, that there be incorporeal spirits, hath hitherto so prevailed in the Church that the use of exorcism (that is to say, of ejection of devils by conjuration)

is thereupon built; and, though rarely and faintly practised, is not yet totally given over. That there were many demoniacs in the primitive Church, and few madmen, and other such singular diseases; whereas in these times we hear of, and see many madmen, and few demoniacs, proceeds not from the change of nature, but of names. But how it comes to pass that whereas heretofore the Apostles, and after them for a time the pastors of the Church, did cure those singular diseases, which now they are not seen to do; as likewise, why it is not in the power of every true believer now to do all that the faithful did then, that is to say, as we read "in Christ's name to cast out devils, to speak with new tongues, to take up serpents, to drink deadly poison without harm taking, and to cure the sick by the laying on of their hands," [Mark, 16. 17] and all this without other words but "in the name of Jesus," is another question. And it is probable that those extraordinary gifts were given to the Church for no longer a time than men trusted wholly to Christ, and looked for their felicity only in his kingdom to come; and consequently, that when they sought authority and riches, and trusted to their own subtlety for a kingdom of this world, these supernatural gifts of God were again taken from them.

The Reason Why Ken Gentry and Keith Mathison have not Sleeping Nights....



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