



The Sword & The Plow

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Is Satan a Fallen Angel?

By

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Preterism and Satan

This article answers the question “*What is your view of Satan, and does Preterism affect it?*” It should be stated at the outset that there is no direct correlation between one’s eschatology and one’s view of Satan. However, because Preterism recognizes the figurative nature of prophetic language, the literalness of other genre of Scripture is sometimes called into question. Because Satan figures prominently in eschatology and the book of Revelation, Satan’s identity should not necessarily be taken at face value, but rather tested to determine the author’s intended meaning. While reasonable minds can differ, the preferred view is that traditional notions about Satan cannot withstand scrutiny.

No Direct Teaching in Scripture

There is no explicit or direct statement, teaching, or explanation in Scripture regarding the identity and origin of “Satan,” demons, or unclean spirits. What we believe about these therefore involves a certain amount of speculation and deduction, and is heavily dependent upon the conditioning and influences of our culture, including that encountered in our respective worship communities.

There are two basic views about devils, demons, and unclean spirits. One view has it that they are supernatural beings, either the spirits of the wicked dead or fallen angels; that Satan’s proper name is Lucifer; that he was chief among the angels, but sought to be equal with God and thus led a revolt in heaven, only to be defeated by Michael and his angels. Satan was then cast down to earth, where his inveterate hatred for God drives him to wreak havoc, tempt man, persecute Christians, and prosecute God’s people before His throne in his role as the “adversary.” Further, Adam’s sin somehow gave Satan dominion in earth and over death and Hades, where he reigns, tormenting the souls of the damned.

Stuff of Superstition

Although held by many intelligent people, I consider this popular and traditional view to have no basis in fact. I have been a Christian thirty years, and have never seen or even heard of someone possessed by a demon or unclean spirit. I believe this is the common experience of almost all Western Christians, and that there are no credible accounts of demonic possession within our experience. In fact, the only reason

any Christian would affirm the existence of devils at all is because of Scripture—and this because of profound misunderstanding and lack of critical thinking. The same sort of wooden, non-critical reading that futurists bring to eschatology fuels belief in Satan and demons. I believe a deeper, more thoughtful reading of Scripture will dispel these notions entirely.

More Critical Thinking

The preferred view is that angels, existing as spiritual beings, do not have free will and cannot be tempted with evil or the lusts of the flesh, and therefore cannot fall or revolt. The terms *devil* and *Satan* are used various ways in Scripture. New Testament authors used these terms in referring to a particular source of *evil* or *temptation* (Matt 16:23, *Simon Peter*; John 6:70, *Judas Iscariot*), women guilty of *malicious gossip* (1 Tim 3:11; Titus 2:3, where *diabolos* is translated *false accuser/slanderer*), an *enemy nation* or *persecuting power* (Zech 3:1; Rom 16:20), a personification of an inanimate object such as an *idol* (1 Cor 10:20; cf. Ex. 34:15; Lev 17:7; Deut 32:17; 2 Chron 11:15), or something abstract, like *sin* (Heb 2:14; cf. Gen 4:7). In fact, the Hebrew word *satan* is not a proper name at all, but rather a generic term that signifies an *adversary* or *opponent*. It first occurs in Numbers 22:22, where it is used of the angel of the LORD when he stood as an “adversary” to Balaam. The same term is used of the Philistines *vis-à-vis* David (1 Sam 29:4), and the adversaries of Solomon are likewise so called several times (1 Kings 5:4; 11:14, *Hadad the Edomite*; 1 Kings 5:4:23, 25, *Rezon, the son of Eliadah*). When we read in 1 Chronicles 21:1 that “*Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel,*” the adversary almost certainly was not a demonic being, but an enemy nation, probably the Philistines (cf. 2 Sam 24:1). In Revelation, the dragon, which is the devil and Satan (Rev 20:2), is Rome—Leviathan, the world civil power oppressing God’s people and opposing the gospel—and not a demonic being at all.

Some Examples from Scripture Examined

In Zechariah, the prophet records a vision thought traditionally to confirm the existence of a supernatural agent called Satan: The prophet saw Joshua the high priest in filthy garments and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him (Zech 3:1, 2). However, scholarly translations typically identify “an adversary” as an alternate reading for “Satan.” More importantly, most scholars recognize that the passage is symbolic:

Joshua represents the children of Israel returned out of captivity. When we consult the historical situation behind the vision, we find that the Jews were attempting to rebuild the temple, but were hindered and opposed by the region’s governing authorities, who persuaded the king of Persia to stop the work (cf. Dan 10:13; Ezra 4; Neh 4). However, it was the ministry of the prophets Zechariah and Haggai which encouraged the people to continue the work of rebuilding the temple (Ezra 5:1; Zech 4:9). Hence, this is almost certainly the meaning of the vision, and that the Persian monarchy, nobility, and other governing authorities opposing the work were, collectively, the adversary represented by “Satan.”

In Revelation, John depicts a battle in heaven in which a dragon and his angels fight with Michael and his angels (Rev 12:7-11). The dragon is often interpreted to be Satan, but here again the passage is symbolic and should not be interpreted literally. The preferred view is that the battle represents Christ’s earthly ministry and that of His disciples. Michael (Heb “*Who is like God?*”) is Christ; Michael’s angels are the disciples and messengers of the gospel. The dragon harkens back to the serpent in the garden and is a personification of sin and death; the dragon’s angels are those who oppose the gospel. Following our first ancestors’ fall, God said that He would put enmity between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent; the serpent’s seed would bruise his heel, but he would crush the serpent’s head (Gen 3:15). The seed of the woman was Christ; the seed of the serpent were the children of disobedience (the Romans and Jews; cf. John 8:44). The serpent bruised the heel of the promised Seed in the crucifixion; but Christ crushed its head. The sting (venom) of death (the serpent) is sin; the strength of sin was the law (1 Cor 15:56). By his substitutionary death and atoning blood, the law was fulfilled and taken out of the way, “*spoiling principalities and powers*” (Col 2:13-17). By His resurrection, Jesus delivered the crushing blow to the serpent (2 Tim 1:10). Death, which had ruled from Adam to Moses as the prince of this world (Rom 5:14, 17; John 12:31, 14:30, 16:11), was cast out, and its principality destroyed. Thus, John says Michael and his angels overcame the dragon and his angels “*by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death*” (Rev 12:11). This shows that the battle concluded with the

cross and preaching of the gospel, and was not a literal battle waged in heaven at all.

Lucifer is the King of Babylon

Regarding the term “Lucifer,” this word is derived from the Latin Vulgate and is a compound made up of *lux* (light) and *ferre* (to bear). It occurs in Isaiah 14:12 in reference to the king of Babylon (Isa 14:4), where scholars commonly translate the Hebrew *heylel* as “Venus” or “the morning star.” The same term also occurs in the Latin Vulgate—the Bible translated into common Latin by Jerome in A.D. 382—in 2 Peter 1:19: “*We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star (Lat lucifer) arise in your hearts.*” Here we see that the term is not a proper name at all and has no reference whatever to a demonic being or fallen angel. Another example commonly cited as evidence that Satan is a fallen angel is from the book of Ezekiel. But, like Isaiah, the prophet is merely describing an earthly king, the king of Tyre, grown swollen with pride and self-conceit, who therefore sets himself up in his heart as God (Ezek 28:1-19). Such demonstrations of pride are relatively common in Scripture (Isa 37:21-27; Acts 12:20-23) and were the especial sin of the Caesars. This sort of pride stems from a carnal mind; angels, being spirit beings, are incapable of falling into this sort of sin or temptation. In fact, scripture teaches that all temptation and sin arises in the flesh, which lusts against God’s Spirit (Gal.5:16-24). Since angels are not flesh, it is axiomatic that they cannot lust or be tempted by sin, which is a uniquely human condition.

Mental illness and Physical disease – Bishop Lightfoot

Unclean spirits and demonic possession seem to be no more than physical and mental illness, the Jews having learned to refer to them this way beginning with the Babylonian captivity and the Greek conquest of Palestine. No cases of demonic possession occur in the Old Testament, and those recorded in the gospels occur almost exclusively in Galilee, the Decapolis, and other areas heavily populated by Gentiles. When Jesus heals men afflicted by physical maladies in those regions, it is often described as casting out an unclean spirit, but the same afflictions and miracles of healing in Judea make no reference to devils whatever. Hence, the whole thing seems to be nothing more than the regional superstition and terminology of those living in areas

populated by Gentiles. This is similar to today’s situation where there are virtually no occurrences of demonic possession in Western civilization, but in Africa and other superstitious and uneducated areas of the globe, belief in evil spirits is widespread and locals commonly attribute bodily ailments to these sources. Bishop Lightfoot confirms this with 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 [חולי] 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 [חולי], 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 months 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.”¹

Lunacy, Madness, and Epilepsy

The word “lunatic” means “moonstruck,” and describes someone who is insane or suffers convulsions or epilepsy. However, lacking knowledge of medical science, many Jews and other superstitious peoples fell into the error of

¹ John Lightfoot, *Harmony of the Gospels, Complete Works* (1684) Vol. 3, pp. 102, 103.

supposing men were possessed with devils. Thus, in Matthew 17:14-21, a father brought his child to Jesus saying he was “lunatic” (v.15), but in healing the child Matthew describes Jesus as having “rebuked the devil” (v.18). In Mark’s parallel account, the father said his son had a “dumb spirit, and wheresoever he taketh him, he teareth him: and he foameth, and gnasheth with his teeth, and pineth away” (Mark 9:17, 18). But who cannot see that the child suffered epilepsy or some form of recurring seizure, and was not possessed by a devil at all? Indeed, Thayer defines “lunatic” (selhniazomai) as epilepsy: “to be moon-struck (cf. lunatic); to be epileptic (*epilepsy being supposed to return and increase with the increase of the moon*): Mt. iv.24; xvii:15.”²

Opinions of Isaac Newton and Thomas Hobbs

Let us hear the voices of other learned men: Isaac Newton (AD 1642 – 1727) was a physicist and mathematician and is widely regarded as one of the most influential scientists of all time. Newton also wrote copiously on Biblical topics, including eschatology. Newton states:

- “A Dragon or serpent, if called the old serpent or the Devil signifies the spirit of error delusion & inordinate affections reigning in the world. For spirits good or evil are sometimes put for the tempers dispositions & persuasions of men’s minds much after the manner that we often take death for a substance.”³
- “From this figure of putting serpents for spirits & spirits or Daemons for distempers of the mind, came the vulgar opinion of the Jews & other eastern nations that mad men & lunaticks were possessed with evil spirits or Daemons. Whence Christ seems to have used this language not only as Prophet but also in compliance with the Jews way of speaking: so when he is said to cast out

² J. H. Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon (Fourth Edition)*, p. 573.

³ Newton, Yahuda MS 9.1, ff. 19v-20v.

Devils, those Devils may be nothing but diseases unless it can be proved by the circumstances that they are substantial spirits.”⁴

Thomas Hobbes (AD 1588 – 1679) lived under Oliver Cromwell’s government and the Puritan Commonwealth (1641– 1660). He is mostly remembered today for his political treatise *Leviathan*:

- “That there were many Daemoniaques in the Primitive Church, and few Mad-men, and other such singular diseases; whereas in these times we hear of, and see many Mad-men, and few Daemoniaques, proceeds not from the change of Nature; but of Names” (ch. 45, p. 445).

Examples of this sort could be multiplied. In a word, just as pagan notions and superstitions crept into the church (e.g., purgatory, worship of statues, veneration of relics, prayers to saints, etc.), so the superstitious usages of the Gentiles found its way into the language and thinking of the Jews dwelling in Galilee, and thence into the Bible. This is not an endorsement of the idea of demons, just the reality of common thinking and the vernacular of the day. But in the Old Testament, no such thing as demonic possession existed; it is entirely a New Testament phenomenon due to Gentile occupation of Palestine following the Assyrio-Babylonian captivity.

Conclusion

Although the doctrine of Satan is not directly related to eschatology or Preterism, it is a topic Preterists tend to visit and test, and, like futurism, traditional doctrines are often found wanting.



⁴ Newton, Yahuda MS 9.1, f. 21v.

Remarks on the 9th Chapter of Romans

[Editor's Note: This article first appeared in the September 1807 edition of the Churchman's Magazine, an English publication devoted to issues of the Anglican Church vis-à-vis Methodism, Calvinism, and other sects then troubling the English Church. This is the best explanation of Romans nine I have encountered, though I have added a couple thoughts and modifications of my own.]

In order rightly to understand the main object which the apostle here has in view, it is necessary to remark, what is very manifest from numerous places in the New Testament, that the Jews, even after they became Christians, could not be brought, but with a great deal of difficulty, to believe that the visible church of God was to comprehend the Gentiles: They still continued to think that the law of Moses was binding; that the covenant of circumcision made with Abraham, and confirmed into the people of Israel, was of unalterable obligation, and that none could be entitled to the visible privileges of God's covenant, unless they entered the fold of his chosen people by circumcision. This mistake St. Paul very largely combats, in many of his epistles; and he touches upon it in several places in this to the Romans; particularly in the fourth chapter, where he argues that Abraham was justified without circumcision, inasmuch as he had the testimony of God that he was righteous before the covenant was given. And from the promise made to Abraham, that in his seed all the nations of the earth should be blessed, he argues that righteousness, or acceptance with God must be by faith, and not by circumcision; *Therefore, says he, it is of faith—to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but that also which is of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all.*

In this ninth chapter he takes up the same subject again, as is manifest from the very earnest protestations he makes of his regard for the Jews: assuring them that they had *a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge*; that *he had continual sorrow and heaviness of heart* on their account, who had been so distinguished by the special favours of God, *to whom* (in his words) *pertained the adoption, and the glory, and the covenant, and the giving of the law, and the*

service of God, and the promises—That those should fall away, and refuse to come into the church because it was set open to other nations also, was to him matter of great grief; especially as they were his countrymen. He then proceeds to show them how upon their own principles God might make choice of other nations to come into his church, as well as to have chosen them, for it was not all the seed of Abraham that were the children of promise; but *in Isaac shall thy seed be reckoned*. Nor again was it all the seed of Isaac which were entitled to the promise. *For while the children were yet unborn, and having done neither good nor evil; that the purpose of God, according to election, might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth, it was said the elder shall serve the younger; as it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.*

When we look into the transaction here spoken of, it will appear to have relation only to the one being chosen to be the special seed, to whom the promise was made, and the other rejected; that from Jacob was to descend the Messiah, *in whom all nations of the earth were to be blessed*; and not at all to their personal future salvation. The expression, *the elder shall serve the younger*, implies no such thing surely. God conferred on Jacob the honor, and denied it to Esau, of being the progenitor of Christ according to the flesh; but this does not imply that he gave him any advantage with respect to a future life. He showed him a favor or mercy, which he denied to Esau; and this he had a right to do—for he may give to one five talents, and to another but one. And as to the expression, *Jacob have I loved, and Esau have I hated*; it is spoken in regard to the same designation of one *to*, and rejection of the other *from* the special dispensation of being the promised seed; and is to be explained by that circumstance, meaning

no more than that he intended more favours for one than for the other. It can no more be understood literally than our Lord's words, where he says, *think not that I came to send peace on earth; I tell you nay, but a sword.* He hated Esau comparatively, not showing so many favors, so many marks of his bounty towards him as he did towards Jacob.

But he proceeds; *what shall we say then, is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid; for he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and will have compassion upon whom I will have compassion.* By turning to the place where God says this to Moses, we find that he says it altogether in regard to his special dispensation in calling the Jews to be his peculiar people or visible church on earth; and has no relation to the future condition of any one. Again he says to Pharaoh; *for the same cause have I raised thee up to show in thee my power, and that my name might be known in in all the earth.* When we look into the account given of Pharaoh in Exodus, we find indeed, that God sometimes says, *I will harden his heart, that he shall not hearken unto thy voice, and I will get me honor upon Pharaoh.* He sometimes says *I have hardened his heart.* At other times it is only a declaration that he has, or will harden his own heart. *And I know that he will not let you go, no, not by a mighty hand,* says God to Moses.

Thus it seems nothing more is meant when it is said that God hardened Pharaoh's heart, than that it was hardened by Pharaoh himself in consequence of what God did, which ought to have produced the contrary effect; just as our Savior's coming, through the perverseness of men, sent war and the sword on earth, instead of peace. Pharaoh hardened his heart the more he was punished. He would not listen unto the voice of God by Moses, and so was hardened. And indeed the reason assigned by God, why he raised him up, does not seem to have any relation to his or any other person's future condition, but to the special case of the visible calling of the Jews; the point which the apostle has all the while in view. *For this purpose have I raised thee up, to show in thee my power, and that my name may be known in all the world.* That it might be known that God had certainly called Moses and the Jews; and had not called Pharaoh, and the Egyptians to be his church on earth. Pharaoh's heart was hardened against the evidence of this call, and he would not let the people go.

But we cannot infer from what is said in Exodus that he was shut out from any share in the covenant of circumcision; that it was hardened by any decree of God. We can clearly infer he was hardened against it, and would not come into it, while he still stood on the same foundation with other heathens. He was hardened as all other heathens then were, and now are against the light of revelation; God not having as yet seen fit to call them into the fold of his church. The order of his providence, and the course of his special dispensations not yet being ripe for extending the gospel to all the world.

[Editor's note: In our opinion, the author's explanation here is in error: The kingdom has always been open to all peoples, and the idea that God had not yet seen fit to call them into the fold of his church is incorrect. A mixed multitude of Egyptians and others joined the Jews when they departed from Egypt and became a permanent part of the Old Testament church, travelling with them to the Promised Land (Ex. 12:38; Num. 11:4). When scripture says "For this purpose have I raised thee up, to show in thee my power, and that my name may be known in all the world" the meaning rather is that God foresaw that Pharaoh would not respond to Moses or let the people go. Foreseeing this, God thus raised Pharaoh to world-power so that the plagues and judgments visited upon Egypt would exalt God's name in the earth and the world would come to know the God of Israel.]

But however this may be, it is not said of Pharaoh that he hardened, or that God hardened him to his eternal ruin. We cannot in justice extend the meaning of the words to such a sense, because this does not appear to be the subject of which the apostle is speaking, but only of an appointment, decree, or foreordination to temporal advantages. And he brings these instances of Isaac in preference to Ishmael; Jacob in preference to Esau, and of the people of Israel, in preference to Pharaoh and the Egyptians, on whom God bestowed special favors, and covenant privileges. From these examples he draws this conclusion; *therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth.* Now if in the examples God is not represented as acting by a sovereign decree, in regard to a future life, as we have shown he is not, then neither does the foregoing conclusion imply any such doctrine, for the conclusion can include no more than the examples from which it

is drawn. The words then can mean no more than this; that God vouchsafes the favor of calling particular nations and countries into his church, when in his wisdom he sees fit, and denies that privilege to others so long as he please. He shows this mercy in his own way and time, according to his absolute decree, and denies it to others. Thus did he by Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau; by the Jews and all others nations; and therefore thus may he, and is he now doing in calling in the Gentiles, to share in the visible covenant of his church; which is what the apostle is laboring to prove against the prejudices and errors of the Jews.

[Editor's note: Here again the author errs; for it is not the calling into his covenant that the examples display, but the national election of Israel for purposes of Christ's *physical decent* through the seed of Abraham. Participation in God's covenant has always been open to all people, without respect of persons; however, the *chosen line* by which Christ would come into the world was made according to the election of God by the purpose and council of his own will, and is what the examples cited show.]

Further to prove that this is a true statement of the apostle's sense, let us proceed on with the chapter. *But thou wilt say then, why doth he yet find fault, for who hath resisted his will—nay, but O man! Who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay of the same lump, to make one vessel to honor, and another to dishonor?* The answer given to the objection stated in the former part of this passage is very proper, supposing the objection to be made against the doctrine as we have stated it to be; but not very applicable on any other supposition. God, as creator and giver of every good gift, has a right to make one to honor and another to dishonor; that is, to give more to one and less to another, as the potter does with the clay. The instance of the potter refers us to the act of God in creating and bestowing his gifts on men, and not at all to his treatment of them after they are created. It is true that the words honor and dishonor are sometimes used in the Bible to express the states of exaltation and condemnation in another world; but their most usual meaning is that of dignity, respectability and worth; and on the other hand, the want of these qualities. In these respects the potter

exercises his power in making his vessels, and so does God without injustice. He has made angels without any wrong to men. And he has made men endowed with reason and speech without any wrong to other beings who inhabit this earth; and consequently among the same order of beings, he may, and has for the same reason, endowed some with more and one with fewer faculties and powers; some with more, and with fewer means. To some is given the word of revelation, and to others it is not. To the Jews pertained the covenant, and the giving of the law and the promises, while they were withheld, and still are withheld from many others. To this partial dealing in God the apostle raises the objection, which he answers by the similitude of the potter; an answer by which the objection is completely removed, because God who is wise and good, can and will deal with all his creatures, by an exact rule of right, never requiring brick without straw; but where he has given more he will require more, and where he has given less, he will require less; as is plainly represented in the parable of the talents.

Thus the answer given to the objection proves what is the doctrine taught by the apostle, that God is sovereign, and acts by the counsel of his own will in creating and bestowing his gifts; but from hence it will not follow that he doth so in his mode of treating his creatures after they are created.

[Editor's note: The author here misses the mark a bit. The issue here is not gifts to particular men at birth or creation, but the national calling and election of the Jews versus other nations or peoples for purposes of bringing salvation to mankind through Jesus Christ. God is the potter who forms various nations and peoples for his own purpose and neither Esau (Edomites) nor Pharaoh [the Egyptians] can complain that God chose to bring the Messiah into the world through Jacob or Israel, "for it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy" (Rom. 9:16) what nation shall fulfill what role and how Christ would be born and derive his descent. The apostle represents God as hardening the Jews that the Gentiles might come into the church (Rom. 11:2, 25), but in fairness and reality the Jews hardened themselves, refusing to believe in Christ. The only sense in which it can be said God "hardened" them was indirectly, by the "foolishness of preaching" Christ

crucified (I Cor. 1:18-23), which many of the Jews refused to accept because it did not comport with their notions of the Messiah as a national liberator and king. No special act of divine intervention causes anyone to believe or disbelieve the gospel. God would have all me to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth (I Tim. 2:4; II Pet. 3:9).]

Finally to make it more manifest that the whole of this chapter relates to God's temporal dispensations in regard to a visible church on earth, after what has been remarked upon, he proceeds to cite several passages from the prophets, which speak of God's calling the Gentiles into his church: *As he saith in Osee, I will call them my people which were not my people; and her beloved which was not beloved. And it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, ye are not my people, there shall they be called the children of the living God.* This was an argument which ought to have had great weight with the Jews. The word of God itself had said that the Gentiles should be called in; how then could a Jew, who took that word of God for the guide of his faith, deny the truth of what he is laboring to prove, that God having distinguished the Jews by special dispensations, had the same right to distinguish other nations in the same way; and had done so by calling them into his church? If this be his object, the texts he cites are direct proofs of it. But if as some suppose, he is proving that God by an absolute decree elects some to eternal life, and turns others over to misery, these texts are little or nothing to his point. We cannot help seeing the force of them to prove that God intended to call other nations *his people*, that is *his people* in the same sense that the Jews were his people, for he says, *I will call them my people which were not my people.* Unless then we suppose that all Jews were elected to eternal life, which no one will pretend, this passage cannot be supposed to have reference to that subject; which it clearly proves what the apostle was really aiming to prove, that God *might* rightly, and *had* called other nations into his visible church, which they proudly disbelieved and denied.

What shall we say then, says he; what is the conclusion and consequence of all that has been said? To which he answers; *That the Gentiles which followed not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith; but Israel which followed after*

the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness. These words clearly prove that the sum of all that has just been said relates to the calling of the Gentiles into the church, and the rejection of the Jews as a nation. The Gentiles and Jews are set in opposition the one to the other; one is affirmed to have attained, and other to have failed of the *law of righteousness by faith.* They are spoken of collectively in a national capacity, the one attaining and the other failing; which therefore could not be meant of eternal life, since not every Gentile was saved, nor every Jew damned: but Gentiles were adopted into the visible church, and the Jews cast out; and this is the sum of all that is attempted to be proved in this chapter.

Lastly, the reason why it has so come to pass is assigned. For to the question why they attained not, it is answered, *because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law; for they stumbled at that stumbling stone.* The Jews were rejected as a nation because they rejected the Messiah, and would remain under the dominion of the law of Moses. This was the law, by the works of which they sought to be, and claimed to be the people of God, and to be righteous before him; but so seeking they attained not, and the Gentiles came in their place. Thus then, seeing the apostle uses such arguments, and draws such conclusions as we should do were we going to prove that God may and has distinguished particular nations and countries with special favors, which he has withheld from others, we ought in justice to conclude that this was his object, and that he had no view to the eternal state of individuals in anything he here says. The opposite doctrine, which supposes this chapter to relate to the eternal state of individuals, and considers it as fixed by an irreversible decree, seems to cast such an imputation upon the justice of God, and so much to impeach his goodness, that we should be induced to adopt the interpretation here given, provided it can be made to appear consistent with the meaning of the words. According to this interpretation God is represented as acting in a way perfectly consistent with all our notions of justice. Being under no obligations to create us at all, he may give us what faculties he pleases, and withhold what he pleases without doing wrong. But having created us and given us our powers and means, his own eternal rectitude must induce him to act on other principles than those of his power; for *shall not the judge of all the earth do right?* There is, throughout the word of God, a

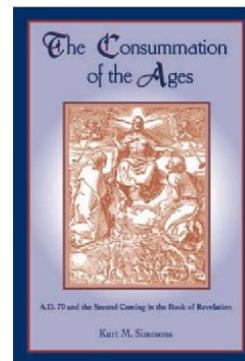
manifest distinction which he gives of himself, as creator and as judge. As creator he represents himself as all powerful, and as acting solely by the counsel of his own will. But whenever he speaks of himself as our ruler and judge, we find him acting on very different principles; then we find him speaking of *justice, righteousness, faithfulness, and truth* going before him, and being *the girdle of his loins*. He tells us of rewarding everyone according to his works; of putting *judgment to the line, and righteousness to the plummet*; of bestowing eternal life on them who obey him *but indignation and wrath* on all them who know him not, and obey him not; with a very great many like passages which the time would fail me to mention. All which put together, should make men doubt whether they understand St. Paul right in this chapter, when they suppose him teaching that God is arbitrary in the awards of another life. They would do well to look and see whether he is not speaking of the character of God as creator, instead of ruler and judge, as we have endeavored to show he is, and therefore that he may well enough be arbitrary. On the whole then, when it is said, that God *hath mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth*, we cannot fairly conclude that this is spoken in regard to the awards of another life, and therefore that no such doctrine as election and reprobation depending on an absolute decree of God is here taught. And if it cannot be proved from this chapter, it will be more difficult to make it appear from any other in the Bible. And if it does not appear to be taught in the Bible, it certainly is not the creed of unassisted human reason: we shall not therefore need to discuss any arguments drawn from this source.

[Editor's note: God wills to have mercy upon all men, but confers mercy according as men obey his covenant. Having "mercy upon whom he will have mercy" therefore means only that the terms upon which mercy is found rests in covenant relationship with God. God established his covenant with Israel, but it was open to men of every nation, and many proselytes converted to Judaism, and later to Christianity. Those who chose to believe and obey obtained "mercy;" those who refused to believe and obey did not. God does not harden men from believing; a man's moral disposition determines his response to God's word. The "foolishness of preaching" Christ crucified is such that it hardens those morally disposed to reject God's authority over their

lives, but finds a place in the heart of those who love the truth and are looking a Savior, and for life's answers.]

Let us then come to a conclusion by one or two general remarks relating to the point. All men act and speak as though they really believed they could promote their own salvation; as though God had put it in their power to do something; as though they were in some measure the disposers of their own future state: they praise and blame, they exhort and persuade others to work out the own salvation in this day of grace. From hence let us remember that at the bottom we agree in our feelings, whatever difference there may seem to be in our words. And, if all men thus act as though they wrought they had something to do in order to obtain eternal life, let us remember to be up and doing; and call to mind that it is of infinitely more importance that we perform our duty to Do and each other, than that we be able to understand all mysteries, and have all faith. Let us be careful how we build our hopes of eternal life, on our capacity rightly to explain the difficulties in the word of God. But rather strive to practice those duties that are plain, and humbly wait upon God for wisdom to understand aright what he would have us do and grace to assist us in doing all to his glory, and our eternal interests.

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Origen on the Jews rejection of Jesus and Destruction of Jerusalem

[Editor's note: Origen was one of the greatest minds the early church; it is thought he composed over 6,000 works; he was also a preterist.]

For it is indeed manifest, that when they beheld Jesus they did not see who He was; and when they heard Him, they did not understand from His words the divinity that was in Him, and which transferred God's providential care, hitherto exercised over the Jews, to His converts from the heathen. Therefore we may see, that after the advent of Jesus the Jews were altogether abandoned, and possess now none of what were considered their ancient glories, so that there is no indication of any Divinity abiding amongst them...[O]n account of their unbelief, and the other insults which they heaped upon Jesus, the Jews will not only suffer more than others in that judgment which is believed to impend over the world, but have even already endured such sufferings. For what nation is an exile from their own metropolis, and from the place sacred to the worship of their fathers, save the Jews alone? And these calamities they have suffered, because they were a most wicked nation, which, although guilty of many other sins, yet has been punished so severely for none, as for those that were committed against our Jesus. Origen, *Contra Celsus*, 2.8, Ante-Nicene Fathers Vol. 4, p. 433.

If the Jews, then, after the treatment which they dared to inflict upon Jesus, perished with all their youth, and had their city consumed by fire, they suffered this punishment in consequence of no other wrath than that which they treasured up for themselves; for the judgment of God against them, which was determined by the divine appointment, is termed "wrath" agreeably to a traditional usage of the Hebrews. *Contra Celsus* 4.73., Ante-Nicene Fathers Vol. 4, p. 530

But when he goes on to say that "those who inflicted death upon Jesus suffered nothing afterwards through so long a time," we must inform him, as well as all who are disposed to learn the truth, that the city in which the Jewish people called for the crucifixion of Jesus with shouts of "Crucify him, crucify him," preferring to have the robber set free, who had been cast into prison for sedition and murder, and Jesus, who had been delivered through envy to be crucified, that this city not long afterwards was attacked, and, after a long siege, was utterly overthrown and laid waste; for God judged the inhabitants of that place unworthy of living together the life of citizens. And yet, though it may seem an incredible thing to say, God spared this people in delivering them to their enemies; for he saw that they were incurably averse to any amendment, and were daily sinking deeper and deeper into evil. And all this befell them, because the blood of Jesus was shed at their instigation and on their land; and the land was no longer able to bear those who were built of so fearful a crime against Jesus. Origen, *Contra Celsus*, 8.42, Ante-Nicene Fathers Vol. 4, p. 655

"We do not deny, then, that the purificatory fire and the destruction of the world took place in order that evil might be swept away, and all things be renewed; for we assert that we have learned these things from the sacred books of the prophets...But according to Celsus, 'the Christians making certain additional statements to those of the Jews, assert that the Son of God has been already sent on account of the sins of the Jews; and that the Jews having chastised Jesus, and given him gall to drink, have brought upon themselves the divine wrath.' And any one who likes may convict this statement of falsehood, if it be not the case that the whole Jewish nation was overthrown within one single generation after Jesus had undergone these sufferings at their hands. For forty and two years, I think, after the date of the crucifixion of Jesus, did the destruction of Jerusalem take place." Origen, *Contra Celsus*, 4.22; Ante-Nicene Fathers Vol. 4, pp. 505, 506.



Comments on the Sermon on the Mount

The Sermon on the Mount is the greatest single lesson ever delivered. It consists of only about 2,600 words and was delivered extemporaneously. Yet, its depth and profundity can scarcely be fathomed, or its treasure exhausted. It penetrates the very soul of man and sets before him his fallenness and the secret motivations of the heart. The sermon stands in testimony of the Lord's divinity and the inspiration of the holy scriptures. If given a lifetime to write an original sermon of similar depth and quality, mortal man could not do it.

Verses three through twelve contain what are commonly called the "beatitudes," from the Latin *beatus* (happy, blessed) and *tudo* (a suffix indicating a state or condition). The word rendered "blessed" does not signify blessed by God (Matt. 25:34), but happy – "*If ye know these things, happy are ye if you do them*" (Jn. 13:17). We want to look at verse three here:

3 - Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

This verse is the first of several pronouncing conditions or circumstances "happy" that are normally deemed undesirable or bad. The world measures happiness by the external conditions of this life—affluence, power, luxury, comfort. The spiritual man gages happiness by the inward condition of the soul. The present life is but fleeting, and external circumstances are subject to alteration. True happiness can only be realized inwardly, in the spirit, where man meets with God, and humble subjection to his will carries the joy of a clear conscience and the promise of eternal reward.

However, the poor are not inherently virtuous, nor does poverty recommend us to God. But, when mixed with faith, poverty fosters humble dependence upon God, which is advantageous to man's salvation. "*Now she that is a widow indeed, and desolate, trusteth in God, and continueth in supplications and prayers night*

and day. But she that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth" (1 Tim. 5:5, 6).

Indeed, the gospel's appeal is such that the poor are more apt to respond than the rich: "*Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him?*" (Jm. 2:5; cf. Rev. 2:9). This is not to say material wealth is somehow evil. It is to say, however, that wealth tends to foster worldliness, to blunt spiritual zeal, and to distract us from pursuit of heaven, and is therefore generally disadvantageous. "*But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition*" (1 Tim. 6:9).

The care of the world and deceitfulness of riches are among the things Jesus said "choke the word," rendering it unfruitful (Matt. 13:22). Thus, where the world loathes poverty, scripture teaches us to view it favorably, as helping to cast us upon God and to place our treasure in things above.

Even so, in the final analysis it is not to external circumstances or worldly poverty that the Lord here refers when he mentions the poor, but the poor *in spirit*; those who feel inwardly the desolation of the soul apart from God; those impressed with their mortality and a sense of their sin; those who see themselves as so completely devoid of spiritual merit that they can do no more than smite upon their breasts and say "God be merciful to me the sinner" (Lk. 18:13). This sort of poverty can be felt even by the rich. Solomon was the richest and most powerful man of his time. At life's end, having surveyed the greatness of his wealth and possessions, Solomon declaimed the poverty of riches, saying, "*All was vanity and vexation of spirit*" (Eccl. 2:11), and there was nothing better than to "*fear God and keep his commandments: for this is the whole of man*" (Eccl. 12:13).

For the poor of this description, for the humble and contrite in heart, Christ promises the kingdom of heaven as their abiding possession. (Cf. Matt. 11:5 – "*The poor have the gospel preached to them.*") To be the "poor" of this description is to be blessed indeed.

4 - Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.

To feel the soul's desolation; to understand man's inherent fallenness and moral depravity; to suffer the pangs of conscience, and shame and mortification for sin is to mourn one's hopeless estate. However, it was the Messiah's special mission to "comfort all that mourn" by proclaiming the acceptable year of the Lord, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself:

"The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn; to appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he might be glorified." Isa. 61:1-3

The historical context of these verses and those that follow (Isa. 61:6-9) looked to the return from the Assyrio-Babylonian captivity (*"they shall build the old wastes, and they shall raise up the former desolations"* – v.4). The return of the captives from the Assyrio-Babylonian captivity, like the exodus from Egypt before it, was but a prophetic type anticipating the salvation of the Messiah. The captives languishing under bondage to sin would be saved by the cross of Christ and become heirs of eternal life.

5 - Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.

Isaiah's prophecy that Christ would comfort those who mourn for their sins, also says that Christ was anointed to preach "good tidings to the meek" (Isa. 61:1). The meek are the little flock of God; the gentle and lowly people who wait upon the Lord; the people of faith who down through the centuries had been crushed and oppressed by the world powers and civil authorities over and around them. The complete phrase used by Jesus here *"the meek shall inherit the earth"* occurs in Ps. 37:11. The meaning is that, although the wicked were then in power, God's people would receive dominion and so

possess the earth. This was the essence of the promise to Abraham that his seed would possess the "gate of its enemies" (Gen. 22:17; cf. Lk. 1:73, 74); it was also the subject of various Psalms (Ps. 72) and prophecies, particularly the kingdom prophecies of Daniel chapters two and seven, both of which unmistakably place the coming of the kingdom in the days of the Roman Empire.

"And the kingdom and dominion, and greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him." Dan. 7:27

Jesus told the disciples that the kingdom would come in power during their lifetimes (Matt. 16:27, 28; Mk. 8:38; 9:1). He repeated this assertion at his trial before the Sanhedrin (Matt. 26:64; Mk. 14:62). It began to be fulfilled in the events of A.D. 66-70, the Year of Four Emperors and the destruction of Jerusalem, when Christ put his enemies and the persecutors of the church beneath his feet. By A.D. 313 Christianity was the religion of Emperor Constantine and received official endorsement; by A.D. 380 it was the official religion of the Roman Empire. The dominion of God's people has continued to grow and expand ever since, filling the whole earth.

6 - Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.

The use of hunger and thirst to describe the soul's craving for God and his salvation is common in scripture. Mary's "song" describes the Lord's provision for the poor in spirit who hunger for salvation, saying, "He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away" (Lk. 1:53). The Psalmist wrote "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?" (Ps. 42:1, 2)

The Greek word rendered "righteousness" here bespeaks moral rectitude and the condition of being right with God. However, since all men are subject to human fallenness and moral corruption, the righteousness craved for can never properly be our own, but must be imputed by God: "To him that...believeth on him that

justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness” (Rom. 4:5).

Righteousness is imputed by God in a judicial act of justification and acquittal from sin, based upon the substitutionary death and atoning sacrifice of Christ “who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification” (Rom. 4:25). Salvation depends upon a covenantal relationship with God; we enter the New Covenant by faith, repentance, and baptism (Mk. 16:15, 16).

7 - Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.

The mercy contemplated here is not confined so much to forgiveness or leniency, though certainly these are included, as it is the overall disposition to show acts of kindness to those destitute of help. The Good Samaritan showed mercy to the man who fell among the robbers (Lk. 10:37); the two blind men besought Jesus’ help, saying, “Thou Son of David, have mercy on us” (Matt. 9:27; cf. 15:22; 17:15). Those who show mercy shall thus receive mercy of the Lord:

“Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me” (Matt. 25:37-40)

8 - Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.

The heart is the seat of the affections (“*For where you treasure is, there will your heart be also - Matt. 6:21*), and understanding (“*For this people’s heart is waxed gross...lest they should understand with the heart*” etc. – Matt. 13:15), and serves as that which prompts human word and action (“*For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies*” – Matt. 15:19). To be pure is to be free from contaminates, dilution, or admixture. A pure heart is sincere, and free of duplicity, striving for

holiness and complete submission to the will of God.

Yet, the prophet Jeremiah says “*The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked: Who can know it?*” (Jer. 17:9). How can the heart of unregenerate man be pure or holy except it first be converted by the word and Spirit of God? Therefore, the pure in heart are those who sense their sinfulness and yield to the gospel of Christ, which urges men to faith and repentance; whose affections are set on things above, not on earth; who weary themselves striving against the flesh, and who yearn to see God.

In saying the pure in heart will see God, necessarily refers to the resurrection of the just. However, Jesus is not merely repeating the promise of eternal life; he is announcing that it is *near* to being fulfilled. With several other Beatitudes, this saying is essentially eschatological; it anticipates the work of Christ upon the cross, salvation from the power of sin and death, and the resurrection of the just that would come at the end of the pre-Messianic age when Hades surrendered up her dead.

Our survey of the Sermon on the Mount continues with Matthew 5:11, 12. These verses have special reference to the persecutions the early church was called to go through, and the reward of eternal life for those who persevered.

11 - Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.

Even while the Lord was alive, the rulers of the Jews decided to punish those who confessed Jesus by casting them out of the synagogue (Jn. 9:22, 34; 12:42; 16:2). To be cast out of the synagogue meant the complete loss of many civil rights and complete social and economic isolation. Indeed, Jesus told the disciple that the time would come when those who put them to death would suppose they did service to God (Jn. 16:1, 2).

12 – “Rejoice, and be exceeding glad” - The phrase, “rejoice and be exceeding glad” is used to describe the joy of the saints at the marriage of the Lamb after the time of eschatological persecution had passed (Rev. 19:7). Marriage is a figure used to describe God’s covenant relationship with his people (Rom. 7:1-4). In the

Old Testament, the people were betrothed to God at Sinai (Jer. 2:2); the consummation of the nuptials occurred when the glory of God filled the tabernacle, and he was seen to dwell among the people (Ex. 40:34).

In the New Testament, the betrothal occurred beginning at Pentecost (II Cor. 11:2; Eph. 2:21, 22; 5:25-27), and was consummated when the church and canon of the New Testament were complete, and Christ returned to avenge his saints and to cohabit with his bride at the end of the pre-messianic age (Matt. 24:3; Rev. 21:3, 9). The phrase describes the completion of their joy, first, by salvation from their enemies, then by receipt of eternal life.

“for great is your reward” - Although in principle the words of Jesus are applicable for all time, yet they had especial relevance for the first generation of believers. The early church passed through great tribulation and persecution, first at the hands of the Jews, then Nero and the Romans. But their suffering was not unnoticed by the Savior: Christ was revealed from heaven in the world-events marked by the destruction of Jerusalem (A.D. 66-70) and the Roman civil wars (A.D. 68-70), redeeming the saints from the hands of their enemies. The saints could take joy in their sufferings knowing that these were small compared to the reward of the inheritance at life’s end.

“in heaven” - Various writers, both ancient and modern, have supposed that there is to be a wondrous regeneration of the earth and cosmos, which will be inhabited by the saints in the resurrection. Some assign this to the “millennium” (Dispensationalists); others to the end and consummation (Jehovah’s Witnesses). The notion of a regenerated earth as a habitation of man in the resurrection is based on a misreading of the Apocalypse and various Old Testament prophets, especially Isaiah and Ezekiel. For example, Isaiah describes the nations of men under the gospel, which leave off their barbarous, piratical, and war-like demeanors, under the figure of wild animals becoming gentle and tame (Isa. 11:1-9). Mistaking the figurative and poetic nature of the language, men have supposed the very creation itself is to be marvelously reordered.

However, Jesus makes very clear that the reward of the inheritance is *in heaven*, not upon a new earth. The new heavens and new earth

prophesied by Isaiah and John (Isa. 65:17; 66:22; Rev. 21, 22) describe the present world under the reigning Christ, who is seated at the right hand of God and governs the nations (I Pet. 3:22; Heb. 10:12, 13; Rev. 2:27).

“for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.” - The prophets came under persecution because they denounced the sins and crimes of the people and rulers. The church is called to follow their example that it may share in their reward. If the world does not oppose us, then surely our message and witness have been compromised. It is because we preach repentance from sin that the world hates and opposes us. It hates us because it first hated God and Christ.

Objections to the “Transmillennial Model”

The millennia of Revelation are an extremely challenging symbol to understand. The millennial model most popularly embraced by Preterist today is that of Max King, which states that there is but one millennium, and that it represents the “transition period” between the two covenants. We here offer three objections to the model held by the probable majority of Preterists.

The Transmillennial Model is a Single Millennium Model

King’s model calls for a single millennial period. Yet, King himself described two millennia in Revelation twenty:

“These two one thousand years periods are like the North and South Poles – the distance of the North pole from the equator is also the distance of the south Pole from the equator. The opposite or extreme points, the binding of the Satan and the reigning of the Saints, were reached in the middle of the seventieth week.”⁵

⁵ Max R. King, *Spirit of Prophecy* (1971, Warren OH), p. 347.

So, King clearly saw two *opposing* one thousand years periods in the text. There is a thousand year binding of the dragon, and there is a thousand year reign of the saints, just as unique as the North Pole is from the South Pole. King, however, failed to follow up on this observation, and reverted to the single millennium model, defining the reign of the saints by the binding of the dragon. But the single millennium model makes no sense at all. The dragon is loosed before the general resurrection, to begin the battle of Gog and Magog (Rev. 20:7-11). But the reign of the saints – the first resurrection - does not end until the 2nd, general resurrection when the souls were delivered from Hades. Thus, the “thousand year” periods do not match! If they do not match, then they cannot possibly be the same period, nor can the reign of the saints be defined by the binding of the dragon.

The Transmillennial Model Makes the Bottomless Pit in Rev. 20 Incongruous with its Usage elsewhere in Revelation

According to King (which he borrows from Augustine), the *keys* of the bottomless pit in Rev. 20 are the *cross and gospel* of Christ – Preaching the gospel binds the dragon. It binds the dragon because when the truth is preached allegedly he cannot deceive. This of course is not true; the gospel is preached today, but billions of people are deceived. But let us assume for purposes of argument that preaching the gospel somehow binds the dragon. If the keys are the cross and gospel in chapter 20, what are they in chapter 9? In Chapter Nine the *abomination of desolation* rises out of the bottomless pit when a fallen star or angel who has the keys of the bottomless pit, releases them. All Preterists agree that the invasion of the locust army is the Roman invasion of Palestine. All remark that the five months the locusts are given to torment men corresponds with the length of the siege of Jerusalem. They are likened to scorpions, corresponding to the name given the Roman catapults used during the siege. But if the keys of the bottomless pit in Rev. 9 symbolize power over the Roman empire and its legions, how can they represent the cross and gospel of Christ in Rev. 20?

The angel who has the keys and releases the locusts in Rev. 9 is said to be their “king.” Chapter 17 says there are *seven kings* – five were *fallen*, one *is* and another was *yet to come*. (Rev. 17:10) The one who “is” when

John wrote was Nero, the 6th emperor. Nero held the keys of the Roman empire and it fell to him to command the legions of Rome and loose its armies. If an emperor of Rome holds the keys in Rev. 9, their possessor in Rev. 20 is almost surely an emperor also; *to wit*: Claudius. By no stretch of the furthest imagination can the keys be interpreted as the cross and gospel of Christ.

Makes Language of Martyrdom Language of Regeneration

The language of the first resurrection speaks of those *martyred* under the dragon and the beast. To make beheading and martyrdom a symbol for regeneration – for repentance & baptism - is hard to grasp and stretches the language of the passage further than it is wont to go. Revelation was written to the church standing upon the threshold of the eschatological crisis called the great tribulation, when the church would suffer near universal martyrdom. The point of the imagery is to comfort the church by assuring them God had prepared a place of rest for them pending the general resurrection. Paul spoke to this same issue in I Thess. 4:13, when he said he would not have the Thessalonians ignorant concerning them that had fallen asleep, that “ye sorrow not, even as other which have no hope.” Likewise, Rev. 14:13 pronounces a blessing upon those that would suffer martyrdom under the beast, saying, “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.” Those that died in the Lord are the same as those portrayed living and reigning with Christ in Rev. 20:3-6. It is nonsensical to say that Rev. 20 is describing regeneration.

Applies Language and Time-Models of the Spiritual Realm to Earth

The symbolism of the dragon being bound in the “bottomless pit” is universally agreed to represent Hades Tartarus or Hell. I know of no one who contradicts this. Thus, all concur that Hades or Hell is in view in Rev. 10:1-3. It is an undeniable fact that Greeks and Romans believed that the souls in Hades were raised/born anew after 1,000 years, which corroborates this view. Thus, the 1,000 years speak to the time during which the dragon was “dead” in Hades Tartarus. Similarly, the souls under the altar in v. 4 are almost universally agreed to be in the spiritual realm, or interim place of the dead. No

one went to heaven (except Christ) before the general resurrection. Hence, Hades Paradise is the ONLY place these souls can be. Since, it is an undeniable fact that the Greeks and Romans believed souls were in Hades 1,000 years, this interpretation is fully corroborated. The whole chapter is thus involved in the resurrection from Hades. The dragon was symbolically bound in Hades Tartarus and would rise again therefore. The souls of the martyrs are in Hades Paradise and will rise from there at the general resurrection depicted in vv. 11-15.

Despite the overarching theme of “resurrection from Hades” that pervades the chapter, the Transmillennial view imports living saints into the text. It says that some of those depicted in v. 4 are actually the *church on earth*. Proponents of this view point to language of regeneration in passages like Eph. 2:1, 2, 6, in which those “dead in sins” are “raised up” and made to “sit together” with Christ in heavenly places. The problem with applying this language to Rev. 20:4 (“and I saw thrones and they sat upon them and judgment was given unto them”) is that Ephesians places those “raised up” *in heaven*, not Hades. Moreover, it says we are seated together in heavenly places *in Christ Jesus*. In other words, Paul is not saying the saints on earth are actually in heaven (an obvious fact that needed no clarification!). What he is saying is that Jesus’ humanity means that in his ascension to the right hand of God, all believers are represented there by him. Jesus is there, and we appear before the throne *by and through* him. More to the point, however, there simply is no contextual justification for importing issues and concepts of regeneration from sin into a passage about martyrdom under the beast, or a chapter whose pervading theme is resurrection from Hades.

Transmillennial Model Assumes the Dragon is a Supernatural, Demonic Being

Augustinian Postmillennialism and King’s Transmillennialism both assume that the dragon of Revelation is a supernatural, semi-omnipotent, omnipresent, demonic being. Yet, Revelation is a book of symbols. The dragon in Revelation is not a demonic being, but Leviathan, a symbol for the world civil power at war with Christ and his church. In the OT the dragon variously symbolized Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon (Isa. 14:29; 51:9; Ezek. 29:3). In Revelation, the dragon is Imperial Rome; its

seven heads and ten horns represent the division of empire’s political powers. The seven heads are the seven emperors that reigned unto the final consummation: Julius, Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, Nero, and Galba. Nero was reigning when Revelation was written. (Rev. 17:10) The ten horns are the ten senatorial provinces created by Augustus in 27 BC. Interpreting the symbols in reference to a demonic being deprives the book of sense and renders it unintelligible. All agree that the beast, false prophet, and harlot are symbols for world civil powers and political movements. Why should the dragon be any different? Rev. 20:10 has the dragon thrown into the lake of fire, Gehenna, the second death. Yet, the same fate was suffered by the Harlot, the false prophet, and the beast (Rev. 19:20, 21). If the former describe the fall of political powers aligned against God, what basis is there for interpreting the dragon and its destruction differently?

The Saints do not Start Reigning until the Dragon is Loosed

This is the most obvious error of the traditional interpretation. A prisoner bound in prison cannot attack or harm those outside. Thus, in order for the martyrs to come under attack and die, the dragon must first be loosed! This clearly prevents the reign of the martyrs from being simultaneous with the binding of the dragon. The better view, therefore, is that it is at the point where the dragon is loosed that the persecution under Nero began and the martyrs died and thus entered into their 1,000-year Hadean reign. The dragon and beast received a mortal wound in the persecution that collapsed in chapter twelve. They went to Hades Tartarus (symbolically) where they were bound until the time the wound healed, and they revived to persecute the church anew under Nero. Those beheaded for not receiving the mark of the beast are those that die under Nero’s persecution, which means that their reign follows the loosing of the dragon.

Conclusion

These are a few of the more obvious objections to the majority view presently espoused among Preterists.