



The Sword & The Plow

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Origen was a Preterist

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In this article, we show that the earliest and greatest of the “church fathers” was a confirmed Preterist.

Orthodoxy and the Patristic Writers

Overall, Christians today probably are not as familiar with the “patristic writers” and “church fathers” as men of former ages were. We do not read early church history or the treasury of writings that have come down to us as perhaps we should. We take for granted the apologetic proofs of Christ in the Old Testament and Psalms that fill so much of their writings. The issues that fill their pages seem obscure or irrelevant to our day; the heresies they wrote about no longer exist and we feel no need to acquaint ourselves with them. Hence, we tend to neglect the writings of early church fathers.

If there is an up-side to this, it is that we tend to rely more upon the Bible as our rule of faith and practice, rather than the example and precedent of former times. However, the down-side of not reading the church

fathers is that we lose an important source for defending ourselves and demonstrating our place in the historical faith of the church. When men accuse us of being “unorthodox” because we are Preterists, charging that we have departed from the traditional teaching of the church, what are we to answer? What if one of the earliest and greatest church fathers was a Preterist? Would not that information be useful in answering a charge that Preterism is heterodox? Preterists may take heart: We have just such a witness in Origen.

Who Was Origen?

In the period following the apostles, Antioch in Syria became the chief city and center of Christian faith. But by the third century, Alexandria, Egypt, rose to predominance, first, through the genius first of Clement, then Origen.¹

¹ Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. IV, p 223.

Origen (A.D. 185-254) was born in Alexandria to Christian parents. His father, Leonides, instructed him in the various branches of Greek learning, and also required that he daily recite and commit to memory portions of scripture. When Origen was about seventeen years old, his father died a martyr (A.D. 202) in the persecution under Septimius Severus, and the family fortune was forfeit to the crown. The oldest of seven brothers, support of the family fell to Origen who thus began a career as a teacher of grammar. His abilities soon brought him many pupils and great renown. Included among his students were members of the Christian community who sought him out for his learning in the scriptures. Origen was soon advanced to the position of master of the Catechetical School by Demetrius, Bishop of Alexandria, filling the position Clement left vacant when he quit the city at the outbreak of persecution. Thrust into the teacher's chair, Origen broke off his instructions in grammar and devoted himself exclusively to the work of teaching in the Catechetical School. He refused all remuneration, selling his books and manuscripts to support himself and continue his education. Origen was easily the most illustrious and learned man of his day. His erudition became so widely admired that he was called to various foreign cities to help settle theological issues and dispel the heresies of the day. He was imprisoned in Tyre during the persecution under Decius, where he suffered many cruelties by his persecutors. Although later released, the effect of his imprisonment so weakened him that he died in Tyre in A.D. 254.

Origen's writings were voluminous. His friend and patron, Ambrosius, bore the expense of seven amanuenses and an equal number of transcribers, as well as girls practiced in calligraphy, to make copies for publication of the works dictated by Origen. Jerome says that he wrote more than any individual could read. Epiphanius related that his works amounted to 6,000 writings. His *magnum opus* was the Hexapala, a critical edition of the Greek and Hebrew scriptures set in six columns, including versions of the 1) Hebrew, 2) Hebrew transliterated into Greek, 3) Aquila of Sinope, 4) Symmachus the Ebionite, 5) a recension of the Septuagint, 6) Theodotion. His works published in the Ante-Nicene Fathers include *De Principiis*, *A Letter to Africanus about the History of Susanna*, *A Letter to Gregory*, and *Contra Celsus*.

Origen's Early Writings

Origen's reputation has been forever marred due to some of his early errors. The introduction to the Ante-Nicene Fathers gives the following as points where Origen departed from the mainstream in his *De Principiis*:

- 1) The souls of men had existed in a previous state, and that their imprisonment in material bodies was a punishment for sins which they had then committed.
- 2) The human soul of Christ had also previously existed, and been united to the Divine nature before that incarnation of the Son of God which is related in the Gospels.
- 3) Our material bodies shall be transformed into absolutely ethereal ones at the resurrection.²
- 4) All men, and even devils, shall be finally restored through the mediation of Christ.

The first and fourth admittedly are serious. The second seems to affirm only that Jesus was God, or the Spirit of God, before his incarnation and became a "Son" only by his conception the virgin's womb, a view that is quite prevalent and perfectly orthodox today. The third, that only the spirit of man is the object of the resurrection, not physical bodies, represents the view held today by the probable majority of Christians and all Preterists. The first, that the soul of man preexisted, has close affinity to Greek notions about the immortality of the soul and its reincarnation after a thousand-year sojourn in Hades. It would thus appear that Origen retained certain notions derived from the Greeks, and that they found their way into his theology, in the same way "purgatory" would later take up permanent residence in the Catholic Church.³ The fourth, Universalism, was attached to Origen's eschatology. When he composed *De Principiis*, Origen was still a futurist, who believed in the impending destruction of the world.⁴ His understanding of Isaiah's "new heavens and earth" (Isa. 65:17; 66:22; cf. II Pet. 3:13), coupled with St. Paul's comment that the "whole creation" would be loosed from the bondage of corruption (Rom. 8:19-23), led Origen to suppose that the material creation would be freed from its corporeal existence unto ethereal liberty of the sons of God at the resurrection:

² From this view, Origen never changed: "We, therefore, do not maintain that the body which has undergone corruption resumes its original nature, any more than the grain of wheat which has decayed returns to its former condition. But we do maintain, that as above the grain of wheat there arises a stalk, so a certain power is implanted in the body, which is not destroyed, and from which the body is raised up in incorruption." Origen, *Contra Celsus* V, xxiii.

³ In fact, purgatory shows up in Origen's *Contra Celsus*: VI, xxvi, Ante-Nicene Fathers VI, pg. 585.

⁴ "So, in the last times, when the end of the world is already imminent and near, and the whole human race is verging upon the last destruction..."

“So then, when the end has been restored to the beginning, and the termination of things compared with their commencement, that condition of things will be re-established in which rational nature was placed, when it had no need to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; so that when all feeling of wickedness has been removed, and the individual has been purified and cleansed, He who alone is the one good God becomes to him ‘all,’ and that not in the case of a few individuals, or in a considerable number, but He Himself is ‘all in all.’”⁵

Origen rejected the idea that the physical creation would be wondrously regenerated, and chided those holding such view as thinking no deeper than the “letter” and falling into the literalism of the Jews:

“Certain person, then, refusing the labour of thinking, and adopting a superficial view of the letter of the law...say that after the resurrection there will be marriages, and the begetting of children, imaging to themselves that the earthly city of Jerusalem is to be rebuilt, its foundations laid with precious stones...Such are the views of those who, while believing in Christ, understand the divine Scriptures in a sort of Jewish sense, drawing from them nothing worthy of the divine promises.”⁶

The literalism described by Origen is identical with Lactantius’ view of the earth after the second coming⁷, and reminds us Justin Martyr’s and Tertullian’s notions of the earth during the millennium. It is also identical with the “material new creation” of modern day Postmillennialists like Keith Mathison and Kenneth Gentry Jr.⁸ How much more blameworthy Origen

⁵ Origen, *De Principiis*, III, vi, 3; Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. 4, pg. 345. Cf. *De Principiis*, I, vi, 1-viii, 4; Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. 4, pp. 260-267.

⁶ Origen, *Contra Celsus*, II, xi, 2; Ante-Nicene Fathers IV, pg. 297.

⁷ Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, LXXXIX- LXXXI, Ante-Nicene Fathers Vol. I, pp. 238-240; Tertullian, *Against Marcion*, III, xxv; Ante Nicene Fathers, Vol III, p. 342; Lactantius, *Divine Institutes*, XXIV; Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. VII, p. 219.

⁸ “The same omnipotent God who made all the nations will convert all the nations...The whole creation will not be completely set free from corruption until the Second Coming (cf. Rom. 8:19-23). It is the progressive aspect of the redemption of creation. Sin affected more than the souls of men; it affected all of creation. In Revelation 21-22, we see that the redemptive work of Christ is as world wide in scope as were the effects of God’s curse. The original purpose of God for creation will finally be accomplished.”

should be deemed for his views than these others we will not venture to say. There is reason to believe, however, that Origen eventually renounced his Universalism, for he speaks of God abandoning the wicked, and of eternal punishment.⁹ Thus, we may look with charity upon this great man and early church father. Certainly, that was the view of Eusebius who devoted almost the entire sixth book of his “Ecclesiastical History” to Origen and, in collaboration with the martyr Pamphilus, composed the “Apology for Origen.”

His Later Writings – Origen the Preterist

Whatever errors show up in Origen’s early works, *Contra Celsus* was composed in his old age and should be received as the final statement of Origen’s views.¹⁰ It is also in *Contra Celsus* that we find Origen abandoned his futurism, and became a Preterist. Written against a Greek Philosopher, Book IV opens with Origen stating that Celsus had arrayed himself against both Jews and Christians, deriding the idea that God would come to earth:

“Above all is it necessary to show, as against the assertions of Celsus which follow those he has already made, that the prophecies regarding Christ are true predictions. For, arraying himself at the same time against both parties – against the Jews on the one hand, who deny that the advent of Christ has taken place, but who expect it as future, and against Christians on the other, who acknowledge that Jesus is the Christ spoken of in prophecy – he makes the following statement: ‘But that certain Christians and (all) Jews should

Keith A. Mathison, *Postmillennialism: An Eschatology of Hope* (P&R, Publishing, 1999), p. 82, 157.

⁹ “But we say that the soul of the bad man, and of him who is overwhelmed in wickedness, is abandoned by God.” *Contra Celsus*, IV, v; Ante-Nicene Fathers, IV, p. 499. “The multitude needs no further instruction than that which the punishment of sinners; while to ascend beyond this is not expedient, for the sake of those who are with difficulty restrained, even by fear of eternal punishment, from plunging in any degree of wickedness, and into the flood of evils which result from sin.” *Contra Celsus*: VI, xxvi, Ante-Nicene Fathers VI, pg. 585

¹⁰ “This work was written in the old age of our author, and is composed with great care; while it abounds with proofs of the widest erudition. It is also perfectly orthodox; and, as Bishop Bull has remarked, it is only fair that we should judge from a work written with the view of being considered by the world at large, and with the most elaborate care, as to the mature and finally accepted views of the author.” Rev. Fredrick Crombie, *Introductory Note to the Translation of Origen*, Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. IV, p. 233.

maintain, the former that there has already descended, the latter there will descend, upon the earth a certain God, or Son of God, who will make the inhabitants of the earth righteous, is a most shameless assertion and one the refutation of which does not need many words.’”¹¹

Notice at the outset that where we would expect Celsus to allege *all* Christians held that Christ was already come or descended, instead we find that only *certain* Christians affirmed this. All Christians naturally affirm that Jesus is the Christ and the historical facts recorded in the gospels. But only *some* Christians (apparently a goodly number) were affirming Christ’s “full descent.” The explanation for this anomaly becomes clear as Origen’s book unfolds: The “descent” of God Celsus derides is not merely the incarnation, but his *coming in wrath and judgment*.

It should be borne in mind that the prophets did not distinguish between the “first” and “second” comings of Christ, but treated the coming of the Messiah as a *singular event*. All through the Old Testament, there is but one coming of the Messiah. The scriptures treat Christ’s first and second comings as an historical unit, with no appreciable separation in time or event intervening between them. So closely conjoined were Christ’s comings that it is only by hindsight that we are able to distinguish them in the prophets; readers in Old Testament times could not have done so. Indeed, the very notion of a “second coming” is conspicuously absent from the Old Testament and could not have occurred to the disciples had Christ not instructed them concerning his temporary departure “to receive unto himself a kingdom, and to return” (Lk. 19:12-27). To mention but a few examples, Isaiah describes the birth of the Savior to the virgin, his rejection and death, and the destruction of his enemies without anything to distinguish these events in point of time (Isa. 7:14; 9:6, 7; 53; 66:1-6, 15). Similarly, Zechariah describes scenes of Christ’s death and crucifixion in one breath, only to describe his coming in wrath in the next (Zech. 12:11; 13:6; 14:1-3) and Joel, Haggai, Habakkuk, and Malachi omit Christ’s “first” coming altogether (Joel 2:28-32; Hag 2:6, 7; Hab. 2:3; Mal. 3:2; 4:1-6).

Celsus and certain Christians apparently recognized this fact and it is the full descent of Christ that is thus being questioned. Hence, in chapter eleven, Celsus charges that Jews and Christians, misunderstanding that floods and conflagrations occur in regular cycles determined by the planets, wrongly attribute these to the wrath of God:

*“The belief has spread among them, from a misunderstanding of the accounts of these occurrences, that after lengthened cycles of time, and the returns of and conjunctions of planets, conflagrations and floods are wont to happen, and because after the last flood, which took place in the time of Deucalion, the lapse of time, agreeably to the vicissitude of all things, requires a conflagration; and this made them give utterance to the erroneous opinion that **God will descend, bringing fire like a torturer**” (emphasis added).¹²*

Here then is the descent which Celsus mocked and Origen is concerned to prove Christ has fulfilled: a coming or descent *with fire*. In response to the charge of Celsus, Origen first denies that the deluge or conflagration were the result of planetary conjunctions occurring at regular cycles, and rather attributes them to divine wrath;

“But we do not refer either the deluge or the conflagration to cycles and planetary periods; but the cause of them we declare to be the extensive wickedness, and its (consequent) removal by a deluge or a conflagration.”¹³

This said, Origen defends the idea of God “coming down” to earth, affirming that scriptural usage shows that this language is *figurative*:

*“And if the voices of the prophets say that God ‘comes down,’ who has said, ‘Do I not fill heaven and earth? saith the Lord,’ the term is used in a **figurative** sense. For God ‘comes down’ from His own height and greatness when He arranges the affairs of men, and especially those of the wicked.”¹⁴*

Furthermore, the bodily descent of God is also accommodative language, not to be taken literally:

*“And as custom leads men to say that teachers ‘condescend’ to children, and wise men to those youths who have just betaken themselves to philosophy, not by ‘descending in a **bodily** manner; so, if God is said anywhere in the holy Scriptures to ‘come down, it is understood as spoken in conformity with the usage which so employs the word,*

¹¹ *Contra Celsus*, IV, i; Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. IV, pg. 497.

¹² *Contra Celsus*, IV, xi; Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. IV, pg. 501.

¹³ *Contra Celsus*, IV, xii; Ante-Nicene Father, Vol IV, pg. 501.

¹⁴ *Contra Celsus*, IV, xiii; Ante-Nicene Father, Vol IV, pg. 501, 2.

and in like manner also with the expression, 'go up.'¹⁵

But if the “coming down” of God is figurative, and is not literal or bodily, Origen also affirms that the fire of Christ’s conflagration is merely figurative:

*“But it is in mockery that Celsus says we speak of ‘God coming down like a torturer bearing fire,’ and thus compels us unreasonably to investigate words of deeper meaning, we shall make a few remarks, sufficient to enable our hearers to form an idea of the defense which disposes of the ridicule of Celsus against us, and then we shall turn to what follows. The divine word says that our God is ‘a consuming fire,’ and that ‘He draws rivers of fire before Him;’ nay, that he even entereth in as ‘a refiner’s fire, and as a fuller’s herb,’ to purify His own people. But when He is said to be a ‘consuming fire,” we inquire what are the things which are appropriate to be consumed by God. And we assert that they are wickedness, and the works which result from it, and which, being **figuratively** called ‘wood, hay, stubble,’ God consumes as a fire. The wicked man, accordingly, is said to build upon the previously-laid foundation of reason, ‘wood, and hay, and stubble.’ If, then, any one can show that these words were differently understood by the writer, and can prove that the wicked man **literally** builds up ‘wood, or hay, or stubble,’ it is evident that the fire must be understood to be material, and an object of sense. But if, on the contrary, the works of the wicked man are spoken of **figuratively**, under the names of ‘wood, or hay, or stubble,” why does it not once occur (to inquire) in what sense the word ‘fire’ is to be taken, so that ‘wood’ of such a kind should be consumed? For (the scripture) says: “The fire will try each man’s work of what sort it is. If any man’s work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man’s work be burned, he shall suffer loss.”¹⁶*

Here we have Origen’s answer to Celsus’ mock that God comes down as a “torturer bearing fire.” First, the coming down is figurative; second, the bodily form is merely accommodative, not literal; third, the fire of Christ’s wrath is also figurative. In connection with this

¹⁵ *Contra Celsus*, IV, xii; Ante-Nicene Father, Vol. IV, pg. 502.

¹⁶ *Contra Celsus*, IV, xiii; Ante-Nicene Fathers IV, pg. 502.

last, a survey of the texts quoted by Origen shows all are traditional “second coming” passages:

Heb. 12:26-29 - “Our God is a consuming fire.”

Dan. 7:9, 10 - “His throne was like the fiery flame, and his wheels as burning fire. A fiery stream issued and came forth from before him.”

Mal. 3:2, 3 – “But who may abide the day of his coming? And who shall stand when he appeareth? For he is like a refiner’s fire, and like fuller’s soap.”

I Cor. 3:13 - “Every man’s work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man’s work of what sort it is.”

These “second coming” passages, coupled with Origen’s figurative understanding of prophetic language, show that Origen viewed the second coming in terms precisely as Preterists do today, and *prima facie* prove Origen was firmly in the Preterist camp.

Destruction of the World by Fire

As we have seen, in his early days Origen believed the scriptures taught that creation was marked for impending destruction associated with Christ’s return. His later writings, however, show that Origen changed, and came to understand the language of prophecy in less literal terms. Specifically, Origen believed Christ’s bodily descent with fire at his second coming was to be figuratively understood. However, there is more. If the “fire” associated with Christ’s advent was figurative, then the destruction of the world by conflagration was also figurative (non-physical). And if its destruction was figurative, then the new heavens and earth were also necessarily figurative (non-physical). These are logical corollaries from which there is no escape. Thus, Origen’s writings evidence a profound paradigm shift away from the literalism normally associated with futurism, to a paradigm more in terms with Preterism. But understanding prophetic language figuratively is not the same as believing that the prophecies were already fulfilled. What proof do we have of this? In chapters twenty through twenty-two, Origen provides full evidence of his Preterism. In chapter twenty, Origen states:

“In the next place, as he represents the Jews account in a way peculiar to themselves for their belief that the advent of Christ among

them is still in the future, and the Christians as maintaining in their way that the **coming of the Son of God into the life of men has already taken place**, let us, as far as we can, briefly consider these points. According to Celsus, the Jews say that '(human) life, being filled with all wickedness, needed one sent from God, that the wicked might be punished, and all things purified in a manner analogous to the first deluge which happened.' And as the Christians are said to make **statements additional to this, it is evident that he alleges that they admit these**. Now, where is the absurdity in the **coming of one** who is, on account of the prevailing flood of wickedness, to **purify the world, and to treat every one according to his deserts?** For it is not in keeping with the character of God that the diffusion of wickedness should not cease, and **all things be renewed**.¹⁷

Several points here should be noted: 1) Christians affirmed that the advent of Christ had *already taken place*. As we will see, this included the second coming. 2) Both the Jews and Christians affirmed a universal flood. 3) The Christians made statements *additional* to those regarding the flood. These statements were comprehended in 4) the coming of Christ to 5) purify the world and render everyman according to his works.

Origen's statements in No.'s 4 ("render everyman according to his deserts") and 5 ("all things be renewed") are almost certainly references to Matt. 16:27, 28 and Rev. 21:5, and confirm that the "additional statements" of Christians (No. 3) are to the conflagration associated with Christ's second coming.

Matt. 16:27, 28		Rev. 21:5
<p><i>"For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works. Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming his kingdom."</i></p>		<p><i>"And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful."</i></p>

¹⁷ *Contra Celsus*, IV, xx; Ante-Nicene Fathers IV, pg. 505.

Thus prefaced, Origen then states that the world has *already* undergone destruction by fire and was being renewed:

*"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."*¹⁸

Origen has told us that the "fire" of prophetic utterance is not literal, but figurative. Hence, it is not to a literal conflagration in history (e.g., Sodom and Gomorrah) that Origen refers.¹⁹ What event does he associate with this destruction? The fall of Jerusalem!

*"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."*²⁰

Earlier (No. 3, above), Origen mentioned certain "additional statements" of the Christians in reference to the coming of One to purify the world. Here, the identical phrase occurs again, showing that he is now explaining what the substance of those "additional statements" was; *viz.*, that the Son of God *had already*

¹⁸ *Contra Celsus*, IV, xxi; Ante-Nicene Fathers IV, pg. 505.

¹⁹ We were recently challenged on this statement of Origen, our detractor alleging that Sodom and Gomorrah were in view. However, this is easily dismissed: 1) The fire of Sodom was literal, not figurative as those here spoken of by Origen; 2) the prophets do not relate the history of Sodom, Moses does, a distinction maintained by both scripture and Origen who always refer these by the appellation "Moses and the prophets"; 3) Celsus does not refer to Sodom and Gomorrah, thus there is no reason for Origen to do so; 4) the destruction of Sodom was not published or prophesied beforehand, but merely announced the day before to Abraham; 5) Origen's reference to "all things renewed" is almost certainly to Rev. 21:5, not Genesis; 6) "all things renewed" in the quote refers to the work of the Messiah, not to the remote past.

²⁰ *Contra Celsus*, IV, xxii; Ante-Nicene Fathers IV, pg. 506.

been sent (No's 1 and 4, above) within the very generation following Christ's crucifixion to punish the Jews and destroy Jerusalem. If we set out those things Origen associated with the coming of Christ and compare them with those he connected with the destruction of Jerusalem, we will see that each was fulfilled:

Comparison of Origen's Statements Regarding the Coming of Christ

Comments on left reflect what Origen said would occur at Christ's coming; those on right show that he saw them as already fulfilled.

<p>"In the next place, as he represents the Jews account in a way peculiar to themselves for their belief that the advent of Christ among them is still in the future, and the Christians as maintaining in their way that the coming of the Son of God into the life of men has already taken place, let us, as far as we can, briefly consider these points. According to Celsus, the Jews say that '(human) life, being filled with all wickedness, needed one sent from God, that the wicked might be punished, and all things purified in a manner analogous to the first deluge which happened.' And as the Christian are said to make statements additional to this, it is evident that he alleges that they admit these. Now, where is the absurdity in the coming of one who is, on account of the prevailing flood of wickedness, to purify the world, and to treat every one according to his deserts? For it is not in keeping with the character of God that the diffusion of wickedness should not cease, and all things be renewed."</p>	<p>"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."</p> <p>"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."</p>
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Sense in which World Destroyed and All Renewed

Obviously, Jerusalem is not the world. Hence, it is worth inquiring how it happens that Origen equated the fall of a city with the end of the world. The most plausible explanation is that when Origen wrote *Contra Celsus* he had not yet attained a full understanding of the eschaton. There is great emphasis upon the destruction of Jerusalem in the Old Testament, which, coupled with the Olivet Discourse, tends to direct our

attention to that event. This tendency is so profound that most Preterists, at least at first, attempt to explain the second coming in terms confined to the end of the Jewish state. Verses (of which there are not a few) that do not fit neatly into this paradigm we tend to ignore (see for example Dan. 2 and 7). Although we see enough of the puzzle to recognize the picture and that the second coming was indeed fulfilled in the first century, we cannot figure out how those "other" verses fit it. Later, as we learn more about the history of the era, the year of four emperors, the Roman civil wars, the natural disasters, pestilences, famines, hurricanes, earthquakes, tidal waves, fires, and navel disasters that beset the empire in those days, our view of the eschaton broadens and we see that it was, in fact, world-wide. This pattern being everywhere so prevalent, it is very likely that Origen fell into the same error when he wrote. Had he lived long enough, we may well suspect that he would have come to a fuller understanding of those momentous days. Indeed, he mentions Christ's defeat of the Romans and *the whole world*, suggesting he may have been already on his way.

"But in the case of the Christians, the Roman Senate, and the princes of the time, and the soldiery, and the people, and the relatives of those who had become converts to the faith, made war upon their doctrine, and would have prevented (its progress), overcoming it by a confederacy of so powerful a nature, had it not, by the help of God, escaped the danger, and risen above it, so as to defeat the whole world in its conspiracy against it."²¹

Conclusion

The evidence of Origen's Preterism is irrefutable. He interpreted the "coming down" of God, his bodily descent, the fire of his wrath in terms exactly as Preterists do today, and he expressly states that Christ came to destroy the Jewish nation, styling this event the destruction of the world and its purification by "purgatorial fire." Preterists may thus rest easy knowing their convictions in fulfilled eschatology are within the pale of the historic faith of the early church.

²¹ *Contra Celsus*, I, v; Ante-Nicene-Fathers, pg 398.

Catalogue of World Disasters Demonstrating Christ's Kingdom and Coming in Vengeance upon the Roman World

Year	Event in Roman Empire
AD 60	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revolt of Britons under Queen Boudicca; one hundred sixty-thousand Romans and Britons slain: <p style="margin-left: 40px;">“They hung up naked the noblest and most distinguished women and then cut off their breasts and sewed them to their mouths, in order to make the victims appear to be eating them; afterwards they impaled the women on sharp skewers lengthwise through the entire body. All this they did to the accompaniment of sacrifices, banquets and wanton behavior, not only in all their other sacred places, but particularly in the grove of Andate. This was their name for Victory, and they regarded her with most exceptional reverence.” Dio Cassius, LXII, vii</p> • The Lycus valley and cities of Pergamum, Laodicea, and Colosse destroyed by earthquakes. Tacitus, <i>Annals</i>, XIV, xxvii
AD 61	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pestilence in Asia and Ephesus. R.H. Charles, <i>Revelation, New International Critical Commentary</i>, Vol. I, 155
AD 62	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Romans defeated by Volageses, king of the Parthians; temporarily lose Armenia. Tacitus, <i>Annals</i>, XV, xvii. • Two hundred grain-ships destroyed by storm in the harbor at Ostia; one hundred more destroyed by fire while navigating the Tiber bringing grain to Rome. Tacitus, <i>Annals</i>, XV, xviii • The gymnasium in Rome was struck by lightning and burned to the ground, reducing a statute of Nero which it contained to a shapeless lump of bronze. Tacitus, <i>Annals</i>, XV, xxii • A Great famine in Armenia and Palestine. R.H. Charles, <i>Revelation, New International Critical Commentary</i>, Vol. I, 155 • Plautius Silvanus quells uprisings among the Sarmatae. Henderson, Bernard W., <i>The Life and Principate of the Emperor Nero</i>, p. 225
AD 63	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nero's wife, Poppaea, gives birth to a daughter, who died in less than four months. This child represented the last of Caesarean blood. With the death of Nero, the blood of the Caesars would thus perish from earth. Tacitus, <i>Annals</i>, XV, xxiii • On the 5th of February, 63, the city of Pompeii was nearly engulfed by an earthquake. In 79 it would be completely buried by Vesuvius. Tacitus, <i>Annals</i>, XV,

	<p>xxii; Josephus, <i>Ant.</i>, XX, vii, 2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resumption of war with Parthians. Tacitus, <i>Annals</i>, XV, xxiv
AD 64	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The burning of Rome and almost the complete destruction of the city. Rome was divided into 14 regions, of which four remained intact, three were leveled to the ground; in the other seven nothing survived but a few dilapidated houses. Tacitus, <i>Annals</i>, XV, xl • Revolt of the gladiators in the town of Praeneste; Tacitus, <i>Annals</i>, XV, xlvi. • A huge naval disaster. Nero ordered the fleet to return to Campania by a given date, with no allowance for hazards of the sea. The helmsmen therefore, in spite of a raging storm, put out from port and were destroyed. Tacitus, <i>Annals</i>, XV, xlvi • Conspiracy to assassinate Nero and place Piso upon the throne is discovered; Nero begins a reign of terror – Lucan, Seneca, and many of Rome’s leading citizens suffer death over several years in a general political purge. Tacitus, <i>Annals</i>, XV, lxxviii-lxxii
AD 65	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A fire at Lyons, France, destroyed most of the colony; the disaster was so pronounced, Seneca devoted a letter to the fire, declaiming the fickleness of fortune and the transitory nature of life. <i>Epistle XCI</i> • Pestilence decimates Rome; Suetonius gives the number of those cut down by the plague at thirty-thousand. The pestilence was followed by a hurricane in Campania: <p style="margin-left: 40px;">“Upon this year, disgraced by so many deeds of shame, Heaven also set its mark by tempest and by disease. Campania was wasted by a whirlwind [hurricane], which far and wide wrecked the farms, the fruit trees, and the crops, and carried its fury to the neighbourhood of the capital, where all classes of men were being decimated by a deadly epidemic. No outward sign of a distempered air was visible. Yet the houses were filled with lifeless bodies, the streets with funerals. Neither sex nor age gave immunity from danger; slaves and the free-born populace alike were summarily cut down, amid the laments of their wives and children, who, themselves infected while tending or mourning the victims, were often thrown upon the same pyre.” Tacitus, <i>Annals</i>, XVI, xiii.</p>
AD 66	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vinician conspiracy to assassinate Nero discovered at Breventium; Corbulo and the brothers Scribonius compelled to commit suicide for doubtful participation in the plot. Tacitus, <i>Annals</i>, Dio Cassius, LXIII, xvii; Suetonius, <i>Nero</i>, xxxvi • Revolt of Jews; destruction of fifth legion under Cestius. Josephus, <i>War</i>. II, vii-xx • Fifty-thousand Jews slain in Alexandria; twenty-thousand Jews slain in Caesarea. Syria turned into an armed camp,

	<p>and Jews and Greeks slaughter one another, giving vent to long standing hatred between them. Josephus describes Syria as being filled with heaps of dead bodies. Josephus, <i>War</i>, II, xviii</p>
AD 68	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beginning this year, the world saw five emperors in the space of one year and twenty-two days – Nero, Galba, Otho, Vitellius, Vespasian. Dio Cassius, LXVI, xvii • Grain shortage caused panic in Rome, aggravated by Nero's use of grain ships to import sand for his arena. Suetonius, <i>Nero</i>, XLV • A sudden eruption of the sea inundated Lycia, a port city in Turkey. Dio Cassius, LXIII, xvii; Renen, <i>Le Antichrist</i>, IV, clxv • Julius Vindex, leads revolt against Nero; 20,000 slain at Vesontio, Gaul. Vindex commits suicide. Dio Cassius, LXIII, xxiv • Galba declared emperor by Roman senate; Nero decreed a public enemy; commits suicide (June 9). Dio Cassius, LXIII, 29; Suetonius, <i>Nero</i>, VI, lxvii-ix • Galba sentences seven thousand soldiers to death for their part in a mutiny under Nymphidius, who attempted to persuade the praetorians to proclaim him Caesar in place of Galba; rest of mutinous troops decimated (every tenth man beaten to death with rods). Dio Cassius, LXIII, iii; Tacitus, <i>Histories</i>, I vi
AD 69	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Otho declared emperor by praetorian guard; Galba assassinated (Jan. 15); troops loot, and plunder city, murdering and killing at will; Otho was described as being carried to the capital over heaps of dead bodies while the forum still reeked with blood. Tacitus, <i>Histories</i>, I, xlvi • Vitellius declared emperor in Germany; forces under Valens march from Germany to Italy, looting and extorting money as they go. Massacre of four thousand citizens at Divodurum. Tacitus, <i>Histories</i>, I, lxiii, lxvi • Vitellius' forces under Caecina in route to Italy plunder the Helvetii, destroying towns, and butchering thousands. Tacitus, <i>Histories</i>, I, lxviii • Rhoxolani (Sarmatians) invade province of Moesia. Tacitus, <i>Histories</i>, I, lxxix • Tiber floods; men are swept to death; tenements collapse, killing occupants; famine ensues due to general conditions and inability of grain ships to navigate Tiber. Tacitus, <i>Histories</i>, I, lxxxvi • Otho's fleet sailed up the north-west coast like a pirate fleet, ravaging and murdering, burning, wasting, and spoiling cities. Tacitus, <i>Histories</i>, II, xii • The Riviera town of Albintimulium (Ventimiglia), on the frontier between France and Italy, was sacked; citizens tortured. Tacitus, <i>Histories</i>, II, xiii • Forty-thousand die in battles between Vitellius and Otho near Bedriacum; dead left unburied, were viewed almost forty days later by Vitellius who took joy at the ghastly sight. Dio Cassius, LXIV, x

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Otho commits suicide (April 16); Vitellius declared emperor by Roman senate. The victorious troops of Vitellius plunder Italy: “But the distress of Italy was now heavier and more terrible than that inflicted by war. The troops of Vitellius, scattering among the municipalities and colonies, indulged in every kind of robbery, theft, violence and debauchery. Their greed and venality knew no distinction between right and wrong; they respected nothing, whether sacred or profane. There were cases too where, under the disguise of soldiers, men murdered their personal enemies; and the soldiers in their turn, being acquainted with the country, marked out the best-stocked farms and the richest owners for booty or destruction, in case any resistance was made. The generals were subject to their troops and did not dare to forbid them.” Tacitus, <i>Histories</i>, II, lvi; Loeb. ed. • Revolt to liberate Gallic provinces; Aeduan cantons plundered. Tacitus, <i>Histories</i>, II, lxi • Leading citizens ruined; whole communities devastated, providing for Vitellius’ banquets and sixty thousand soldiers in route to Rome. Tacitus, <i>Histories</i>, II, lxii; lxxxvii • Colony of Taurini burned by mutinous soldiers. Tacitus, <i>Histories</i>, II, lxvi. • Vespasian declared emperor in Syria (July) while making war against Jews. Josephus, <i>Wars</i>, IV, x • Vitellius’ soldiers massacre unarmed civilians seven miles outside of Rome. Tacitus, <i>Histories</i>, II, lxxxiii • Upon entering Rome, all military discipline is abandoned; Vitellius’ troops spread over the city, lodging wherever they liked and doing whatever mischief they pleased; inactivity, debauchery and unhealthy conditions result in disease and many deaths. Tacitus, <i>Histories</i>, II, lxxxviii, xciii
AD 70	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vespasian’s forces invade Italy; Vicetia, birthplace of Caecina taken; Verona occupied. Antonius gives troops license to plunder civilians in the district around Cremona. Tacitus, <i>Histories</i>, III, xv • City of Cremona surrenders; burned; fifty-thousand perished. The soil was so infected by blood of slain, army forced to move three miles away to avoid danger of pestilence. Dio Cassius, LXIV, xv; Tacitus, <i>Histories</i>, III, xxxiv-v • Venutius, the king consort, leads British to depose Queen Cartimandua for adultery and attempting to install her lover in the throne; the throne was left to Venutius; the war to the Romans. Tacitus, <i>Histories</i>, III, xlv • Germans, Gauls, and Celts revolt; Dio Casius mentions one battle where the river was dammed with the bodies of the fallen. Dio Cassius LXV, iii; Tacitus, <i>Histories</i>, III, xlvi; Josephus, <i>Wars</i>, Preface, ii; VII, iv • Dacians (Sythians) invade Mysia. Josephus, <i>Wars</i>,

	<p>Preface, ii; VII, iv; Tacitus, <i>Histories</i>, III, xlvi</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vespasian suppresses revolt in Pontus. Tacitus, <i>Histories</i>, III, xlvi-iii • Vespasian's brother, Flavius Sabinus, besieged in temple of Jupiter Capitolinus by soldiers of Vitellus; capital burned and Sabinus murdered. A.D. 70 thus saw the destruction of the two greatest temples in the world – Jerusalem and Rome. Tacitus, <i>Histories</i>, III lxxi-ii • Civil war reaches city of Rome; fifty-thousand slain in siege; city taken; Vitellius murdered (Dec. 22). Dio Cassius, LXIV, xix; Tacitus, <i>Histories</i>, III, lxxxxv • Cologne and Mainz fall to German rebels. Tacitus, <i>Histories</i>, lix • Fort at Vetera besieged; four thousand slaughtered by the barbarians after surrendering under promises of security; those who escaped back to the camp were burned alive by Germans. Tacitus, <i>Histories</i>, IV, lx • Germany was lost; all Roman forts burned, saved Mainz and Vindonissa. Tacitus, <i>Histories</i>, IV, lxi • Spring AD 70 – Eight legions march into Germany and Gaul from Italy, one more from Britain and two from Spain, to retake for the empire. Tacitus, <i>Histories</i>, IV, lxxviii • Citizens of Cologne, loyal to Rome, massacre German soldiers quartered among them. The famous cohort at Zulpich was invited to a banquet where wine flowed freely; while buried in slumber in their cups, the doors of the banquet house were barred fast and burned to the ground upon them. Tacitus, <i>Histories</i>, IV, lxxix • Jerusalem destroyed; its temple burned to the ground; city's foundations dug up. Josephus, <i>Wars</i>, VI, ix
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The Destruction of Jerusalem

What is the "Gathering" of the Elect in Matt. 24:29-31?

Matt. 24:29-31 describes the coming of Christ in the events culminating in the destruction of Jerusalem, AD 70. Verse 31 says *"And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other."* What is this "gathering"? There are several views, but the one that we have settled upon at this time is that this is Christ's gathering the saints unto rest by *martyrdom*.

New Testament Imagery and Sources

The term "gather" is used in several parables to describe agricultural activity associated with harvest. John the Baptist thus opened his ministry saying that the Messiah would "gather" the wheat into his garner, but the chaff he would burn up with unquenchable fire (Matt. 3:12). The imagery of gathering and sorting the wicked from the just is tied to the end of the world/age, and the second coming of Christ. We see this, for example, in the parable of the net and fishes:

"Again the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind: Which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away. So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth" (Matt. 13:47-50).

The word "gather" in these passages is from the same Greek word in Matt. 24:31 (Grk. **ἐπισυναξουσιν**). Another passage setting forth this same lesson is the parable of the wheat and tares (Matt. 13:24-32). In that case, both are allowed to "grow together until harvest" (v.30). At harvest, the tares are gathered and burned, while the wheat is gathered into the barn. How was the burning up of the wicked accomplished in all these cases? Answer: by the cataclysmic judgments that overtook the Jews and witnessed the nation's destruction. Since the harvest of the wicked contemplates the DEATH of the unbelieving Jews (and Romans), it follows that the harvest of the wheat was also accomplished by death; *viz.*, MARTYDOM.

That the gathering of the saints involves their martyrdom is reasonably clear from the context of II Thess. 2:1-9. There the church in Thessalonica was frightened and unsettled, supposing the end time was upon them. Paul told them the time was not yet at hand, and would arrive only after the "man of sin" and "son of perdition" was revealed. Most Preterists recognize that the revealing of the man of sin describes the persecution under Nero. Notice, however, that Paul describes the crisis that would overtake the saints as a "gathering":

"Now we beseech you, brethren by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, that ye be not soon shaken in mind...for that day shall not come except...that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition" etc. (II Thess. 2:1-3).

Thus, the gathering unto Christ is clearly connected with the revealing of the man of sin. The argument may be stated thus: The saints would be gathered at the revelation of the man of sin (Nero). The revelation of the man of sin was the persecution under Nero. Therefore, the saints would be gathered in the persecution under Nero. This is confirmed by Rev. 14:9-16.

Rev. 14 describes the persecution under the beast, and warns believers against yielding to the pressure to obey the civil authority by denying Christ:

"And the third angel followed them, saying, with a loud voice, If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, the same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb" (vv. 9-10).

The passage then promises the saints rest if they abide faithful, dying for their Lord:

"Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus. And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, 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" (vv. 12,13).

We believe the "rest" promised here is depicted by the martyrs reigning with Christ a thousand years in Hades Paradise in Rev. 20:4-6. But in any event, immediately following the assurance of reward if they abide faithful unto death, Jesus is portrayed seated upon a cloud, harvesting the wheat of the earth. The implication is that the harvest is accomplished by martyrdom under the beast:

"And I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and upon the cloud one sat like unto the Son of man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle. And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to him that sat on the cloud, Thrust in thy sickle, and reap: for the time is come for thee to reap; for the harvest of the earth is ripe. And he that sat on the cloud thrust in his sickle on the earth: and the earth was reaped" (vv. 14-16).

Here then is the eschatological harvest of the saints: The parables in the gospel foretold the harvest, but did not explain how it would be accomplished. Here, however the answer is provided. The closing verses of the chapter portray the harvest of the grapes of wrath (Jews) tread "without the city" (vv. 17-20). It is interesting that wheat harvest occurs about June, but the vintage is not ripe until fall. Thus, chapter fourteen follows established agricultural facts. The symbolism also follows the history of the persecution and the Jews war with Rome. The persecution under Nero lasted from AD 64-68; the Jewish war lasted from AD 66-70. Thus the two overlapped for a time, with the war beginning and ending later. More to the point, however, the imagery is identical with the parables of the end time, when the righteous would be gathered home, but the wicked burned up like chaff. The imagery of Rev. 14: 14-16 is identical with Matt. 24:29-31. Both portray the Lord coming in the clouds, exacting vengeance upon his enemies, but gathering the saints into the eternal kingdom.

Old Testament Sources - Jubilee Trumpet

Matt. 24:29-31 and Isa. 27:13 are very similar, and many commentators believe that both speak to the

same event. However, this is wrong. Here is the text of Isa. 27:13:

"And it shall come to pass in that day, that the great trumpet shall be blown, and they shall come which were ready to perish in the land of Assyria, and the outcasts in the land of Egypt, and shall worship the Lord n the holy mount at Jerusalem."

The passage in Matthew also mentions a trumpet, and on this basis the it is supposed the same events in view. We agree that Jesus appropriates the language of Isaiah, but this is because the theme is the same, not the subject matter. Isaiah is talking about the return of the captivity out of Assyria and Egypt. The imagery of the trumpet is from Jubilee, when the law required the Jews to announce the release of the 50th year by trumpet blast, and everyman was loosed from his debts and bondage and returned to his paternity:

"In the day of atonement shall ye make the trumpet sound throughout all your land. And ye shall hallow the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof: it shall be a jubilee unto you: and ye shall return every man unto his possession, and ye shall return every man unto his family" (Lev. 25:9, 10).

This is clearly the source of Isaiah's imagery, when the Jewish captives in Assyria and Babylon, and the exiles in Egypt would "return every man unto his possession." Jesus employs the like language to describe the gathering home of his saints at the eschaton by death under Nero.

After the Tribulation of those Days

Here is the whole text of Matt. 24:29-31; notice when the gathering would occur:

"Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other."

The tribulation here is not talking about the tribulation that would overtake the Christians in the persecution under Nero or the Jews in the war with Rome. Rather, the tribulation here is talking about the intermediate troubles that would precede Christ's return and the events of the end-time. All sorts of famines, wars, and troubles led up to the fall of Jerusalem and the Roman civil wars that marked the coming of Christ. Jesus thus told the disciples

"And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places, all these are the beginning of sorrows" (Matt. 24:6-8).

When Jesus says "immediately after the tribulation of those days" it is to these events, preceding his return and the fall of Jerusalem, that he refers. We see this in Revelation where there were intermediate judgments in the form of seals and trumpets that preceded the final cataclysm that saw the destruction of Christ's enemies. It should also be borne in mind that Jesus' coming was not a one day or even one year event: Jesus' return stretched over the whole period of the Jewish war with Rome (AD 66-70), and the Roman civil wars that broke out at the death of Nero (AD 68-70). When a kingdom comes in power, it comes *in force* to make war and assert its right and dominion. This obviously entails a sufficient time to subdue the enemy. The same is true here: the day of the Lord and coming of Christ was fulfilled in the world events culminating in the Roman civil wars and destruction of Jerusalem. His coming would avenge the saints, who were gathered home in martyrdom where they received the crown of life.

Conclusion

The gathering of Matt. 24:29-31 refers to the end-time harvest of the saints, when they were gathered home to Christ in death under the Nero and the Jews.

"And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me the sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted." Luke 18:13, 14

Letters from our Readers

Question: Thanks!!! I've really used Kurt's books in my studies of Daniel and Revelation!! Studying about The Lake of Fire now.....I do think Satan , is an actual being that God created. so I guess Kurt and I defer on that point . My studies on this subject , have really confirmed this viewpoint to me . Anyway Kurt is a wonderful Bible man who is also excellent on his historical facts; which has been very helpful to my studies!!! Thanks Again!!! Isn't God's TRUE WORD'S wonderful!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! Sincerely: Frank

Question: Hi Kurt. Thanks for your reply. I guess the way I see the matter temptation in that the flesh is one of three levels humans receive it. The lust of the eyes and the pride of life are two other areas that I don't see as being related to our physical flesh, especially the pride of life. I see the Scriptures speaking of sin also in the terms of rebellion and disobedience, which to me both have the root of pride. So I guess I would have to say that pride is essentially the root of all sin. This seems to be something that angels definitely could partake of, which would allow for a natural interpretation of 2 Peter 2:4. I'm going to guess that you don't think too much of the book of Enoch, but it does to me correlate well with several otherwise seemingly out of place or difficult passages in our Canonical Scriptures.

Again, thank you so much for your web site and writings which I am finding tremendously helpful. I am very grateful for the obvious large amount of time in research you have put in to it. I'm sure your work is a labor of love of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Answer: This is a huge topic, and one that I usually avoid, but since it has come up, perhaps it won't hurt to toss it around a bit.

I am not convinced that "pride" is something spiritual (heavenly) beings are susceptible of. The whole concept of our salvation is that we will not be susceptible of falling/sin/ temptation in heaven. If angels can fall, and if we are to be as angels in the resurrection, it then follows that we can fall and our salvation is not eternal or sure. In fact, there would then be nothing we escape in heaven that we are not susceptible to here on earth, for the same basic temptation of pride may still beset us and make us subject to yet another fall. (This also raises questions about blood atonement for sin. Why are angels exempted from salvation? If man can be reclaimed,

why not angels? Does not the fact that blood is the price of atonement show that sin is uniquely human?)

The narrative of II Pet. 2, matches the chronology in Genesis (angels/flood/Sodom/Lot). The fallen angels in II Pet. 2:4 are generally equated with the "sons of God" in Gen. 6 who married the daughters of unbelieving men. There is a long tradition in some quarters that these "sons of God" were angels. Of course, angels cannot marry or copulate with mankind, so this is clearly a wrong assumption. The better view is that these "sons of God" were the faithful or sons of Seth, who left their first estate (birthright) in a manner similar to Esau, choosing to marry unbelieving women to the destruction of their faith and apostasy from God. This is the interpretation generally placed upon the passage by Jews and many others.

Similar interpretative issues exist with Lucifer (the king of Babylon (Isa 14) and the "anointed cherub" in Ezek. 28 (the King of Tyre). These passages are frequently appropriated to prove a fallen angel, but the texts clearly show them to be human actors upon the stage of life who lift themselves up in pride against God. As we thus begin our survey of passages used to prove the fall of angels and a rebellion in heaven, we find that many of the proof texts do not mean what they are alleged to say. When we add to this the fact that words like "satan" (adversary) "angel" (messenger) and "diabolos/devil" (slanderer/gossip) are applied in many instances to men (Paul says an elder's wife must not be a "diabolos" slanderer - I Tim.3:11), we are compelled to take a fresh look at the whole topic of "demonic beings."

Many of the NT examples are easily explained by madness or insanity, or by epilepsy, or other organic diseases. We certainly do not see anything today that people of normal intelligence would attribute to demonic possession, which is not better explained as mental disease. If there were ever demons, where did they go? Why do they not exist today? Or is it that they never really existed at all?

During the inter-testamental period, Palestine was totally dominated by Greeks. Matthew even calls Galilee "Galilee of the Gentiles," signifying that they were the dominate ethnic group in the region. It seems plain that many of the superstitions and terminology of the Greeks were appropriated by the Jews of the region during our Lord's time. Thus, where a superstitious Greek would describe an epileptic as being possessed by a demon, Jews came to use similar terminology and embrace similar views. This explains why there is almost a total absence of demonic possession in the OT, with the exception of King Saul, whose fits of rage

and melancholy are also easily explained in terms of emotional instability and an evil conscience. In short, the NT opens with a historical situation where the people of God are living in a culture immersed with Gentile superstitions and ideas and therefore the language of the NT reflects that difference. This difference is testified to by Bishop Lightfoot, who says the Jews described physical and mental ailments in terms of being possessed by an "unclean spirit":

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

Thus, according to Bishop Lightfoot, the common vernacular of the time attributed to demons what we generally associate with physical or mental illness today. We are generally unfamiliar with the extra-biblical writings of the era, so we are unaware of this fact and thus assume that the usage is God's endorsement of this view, when in fact it is simply the terminology of the time and not intended to affirm the actual existence of devils.

Anyway, it is definitely a topic that reasonable minds can differ and where we need to afford each other the grace to make up his or her own mind. "In all things love."