



The Sword & The Plow

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Commentary on Matthew

Chapter Five

(vv. 12-26)

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(Editor's note: I get a lot of questions about when my commentary on Matthew will be published. I have been finishing a new book: a commentary on the books of Joel, II Peter, and Isaiah's prophecy of the New Heavens and Earth that has prevented me from giving attention to Matthew. Lord willing, I will be able to turn attention to it again soon. Meanwhile, I will try to publish parts of it here from time to time.)

12 - Rejoice, and be exceeding glad:

The phrase, “rejoice and be exceeding glad” (χαίrete και αγαλλιασθε), 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, 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, and 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 and the Roman civil wars, 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.

“So that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure: Which is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer: Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day.” II Thess. 1:4-10

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; others to the end and consummation. 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). Yet, mistaking the figurative and poetic nature of the language, men have supposed the very creation itself is to be marvelously reordered. Lactantius (A.D. 260-330) could thus write:

“But He, when He shall have destroyed unrighteousness, and executed His great judgment, and shall have recalled to life the righteous, who have lived from the beginning, will be engaged among men a thousand years, and will rule them with most just command...Then they who shall be alive in their bodies shall not die, but during those thousand years shall produce an infinite multitude, and their offspring shall be holy, and beloved by God; but they who shall be raised from the dead shall preside over the living as judges...About the same time also the prince of the devils, who is the contriver of all evils, shall be bound with chains, and shall be imprisoned during the thousand years of the heavenly rule in which righteousness shall reign in the world, so that he may contrive no evil against the people of God...Throughout this time beasts shall not be nourished by blood, nor birds by prey; but all things shall be peaceful and tranquil. Lions and calves shall stand together at the manger, the wolf shall not carry off the sheep, the hound shall not hunt for prey; hawks and eagles shall not injure; the infant shall play with serpents.”¹

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.

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.

13 - Ye are the salt of the earth:

The properties of salt are such that it serves both as a seasoning and preservative. The saints make the world palatable to God and lend it savor in his mouth. Though proportionately few, they serve to preserve the world similar to Sodom and Gomorrah, which God would have spared if but ten righteous had been found in them (Gen. 18:32).

but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted?

¹ Lactantius, *Divine Institutes*, XXIV; Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. VII, p. 219

Salt is a mineral and will retain its savor indefinitely unless exposed to contamination or impurities. In Palestine at the time of our Lord, salt was not mined or obtained by evaporating clean salt water, but from marshes (Ezk. 47:11), and from salt lakes that dried up in summer, and from the south end of the Dead Sea. The manner of gathering salt meant that it sometimes contained impurities, which caused it to lose its savor. Once its savor is lost, there was no process by which it could be restored.

it is thenceforth good for nothing,

This is similar to the warning to the church of Laodicea, in which the Lord said he would that they were hot or cold, but because they were luke-warm, would spew them from his mouth (Rev. 3:15, 16). Hot water has therapeutic value; cold water will quench thirst. But tepid water is suitable for nothing and men spew it from their mouths. So with salt: Salt that has lost its savor is useless. However, it is not entirely inert, but will render sterile any land that it is cast upon. Hence, Luke reports the Lord's saying with the addition "It is neither fit for the land, nor yet for the dunghill" (Lk. 14:35).

but to be cast out,

Although not spoken as a prophecy or prediction of the destruction of the Jewish nation in A.D. 70, yet, it is impossible to ignore this aspect of Christ's speech. At a time when the leaders of the Jews were lying in wait for his words to accuse him, the centurion showed great faith, causing Jesus to remark

"Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel. And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Matt. 8:10-12

Unbelieving Jews (ethnic Israel) would be cast out, but believing Gentiles would be grafted in among God's people, and so "all Israel" (true Israel) would be saved (Rom. 11:13-26). Similarly, in his allegory of Abraham's two wives, Paul equated Sarah and Hagar with the two covenants; believers born after the Spirit he equated with Isaac; unbelieving Jews born after the flesh he equated with Ishmael: As Ishmael had persecuted Isaac, so unbelieving Jews were persecuting Christians. However, Paul concluded with the words of Sarah, saying, "cast out the bond woman and her son" (Gal. 4:21-31; cf. Gen. 2:10). The Jews' possession of the land was conditional and provisional: it was conditioned upon obedience to the law and the word of

the Lord; it was provisional as a measure to preserve a righteous seed in the earth until Christ could come into the world and the gospel go forth to all nations. The Jews rejected Christ and were thus rejected themselves and suffered divine vengeance and wrath.

and to be trodden under foot of men.

Unfit for any other use, salt that has lost its savor was cast into the street, where it was trodden under foot by man. This was the predicted end of Jerusalem and the Jewish nation:

"And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof nigh...and they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled." Lk. 21:20, 24; cf. Rev. 11:2

14 - Ye are the light of the world.

Light is a metaphor for knowledge, understanding, and truth. But as all true knowledge leads to goodness, light is also a metaphor for righteousness and holiness. Thus, sin bespeaks spiritual ignorance, wickedness, and darkness, but light bespeaks holiness and truth. Hence, John says "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all" (1 Jn. 1:5; cf. 1 Tim. 6:16). But as regards men, Paul says "For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light" (Eph. 5:8; cf. Phil. 2:14, 15). Jesus is the true light that came into the world (Jn. 1:4-9; 8:12). Disciples are but reflections of the light that emanates from Christ. The faith and moral qualities of the disciples pronounced by the beatitudes—the poor in spirit, those who mourn for sin, the meek, and those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, etc.—are derived from God and shine like light in the world of men, showing them the way to live and to walk. If this light is repressed or removed, the world quickly devolves into all manner of sin and darkness until the light of the gospel rises again upon the land.

A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid.

The image of a city set atop a hillside would have been familiar to Jesus' audience. Anciently, cities were built on hills because high ground is more easily defended, giving them a necessary advantage against attack. The association of nations and cities with mountains and hills led the prophets to use the one to refer to the other. "For the day of the Lord of hosts shall be upon...all the high mountains, and upon all the hills that are lifted up, and upon every high tower and upon every fenced wall" (Isa. 2:12-15). God's people are a

spiritual city. The church, the bride of Christ, is the new Jerusalem, the covenantal habitation of the saints, which came down out of heaven from God (Rev. 2, 9, 10). It is founded upon spiritual Zion, the New Testament, where all the world may see it, and all whomsoever will may flow into its gates (Rev. 22:25, 26; Isa. 2:1-5). Christ's point here is that as light shines for men to see, and as a city on a hill is visible a great way off, so his disciples ought to be clearly visible to the world, set apart by the testimony of their lives and their word.

15 - Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house.

This was a common saying of the Lord, and occurs several times in other contexts (Mk. 4:21; Lk. 8:16; 11:33). Men do not light a candle or lamp, only to cover or conceal it, for this would defeat its very purpose. In Revelation, the churches are called candlesticks or lampstands (Rev. 1:20); Christ threatened to take away the candlestick of the church at Ephesus for having grown complacent and having left its first love and good works (Rev. 2:5). Thus, like salt that has lost its savor, light that does not shine has no purpose and will be extinguished. The disciples are to be lamps, kindled by the word and Spirit in their hearts, shining knowledge of Christ and of God in the world.

16 - Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

As parents are glorified by their children, so God is glorified by men and women whose lives and conduct make them lights in the world. Light dispels darkness. Christians are called to *separation and non-conformity*. Where Christians become too acculturated to the world around them, blending imperceptibly with unbelievers, assuming the same habits of fashion and dress, pursuing the same goals and objects, their light is concealed and will go out. Christ thus urges disciples to so trim their lamps that they may brightly shine, and God may receive glory because of them.

17 - Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill.

Jesus' ministry was marked by confrontation with the religious leaders of the day: by overthrowing the tables of the money-changers and those that sold in the temple (Jn. 2:13-17), by accusations that he broke the law by healing on the Sabbath and failed to keep the tradition of the elders (Jn. 5:16; cf. Matt. 12:2, 10, 14; 15:1-9). Moreover, it was popularly believed that the

coming of the Messiah would signify profound changes in the covenantal institutions of God's people. God told Moses

"I will raise them up a Prophet, from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth: and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him. And it shall come to pass that whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him." Deut. 18:18, 19

That the Prophet would be like Moses implied that he would be a *law-giver* who would initiate new political and religious institutions. Thus, Jeremiah foretold the time when God would make a *new covenant* with the house of Israel and Judah (Jer. 31:31-34). Jesus' disciples must have been concerned regarding his attitude toward the law, which he therefore now addresses.

The "law," refers to the Pentateuch, or the five books of Moses; the "prophets," refers to the balance of the Old Testament canon, including the books of history, wisdom, poetry, and Psalms. Jesus tells the disciples he has not come to *destroy* the law and the prophets. The Greek word translated "destroy" here is *καταλυσαι*, and carries the idea of *wrecking*. The same word occurred at Jesus' trial, when false witnesses accused Jesus of saying he would destroy (*καταλυσω*) the temple, and rebuild it in three days (Mk. 14:58). This word occurs again regarding the charge against Stephen for teaching that Jesus would destroy (*καταλυσει*) the temple and Jerusalem and change the customs delivered to the Jews by Moses (Acts 6:14, 15). This should be compared to the Greek term *καταργεω*, which means to annul or bring to naught (I Cor. 15:24, 26; II Tim. 1:10). The law and the prophets, including especially the priesthood and temple service, were provisional and could make nothing salvationally perfect (Heb. 7:19); they were prophetic types and foreshadows pointing to the cross of Calvary (Col. 2:16, 17; Heb. 10:1); a schoolmaster to lead us to Christ (Gal. 3:24). Jesus came to fulfill the law's demand by his substitutionary death and atoning sacrifice. The debt of sin thus paid, the mortgage and evidence of our debt was "blotted out" (Col. 2:13, 14), and the law annulled (Eph. 2:15), not wrecked or destroyed. It is the difference between destroying what has not yet met its purpose, and cancelling or retiring that which has.

18 - For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.

The prophets often use the “heavens and earth” figuratively to refer to nations and peoples, thrones and dominions. The epistle to the Hebrews quotes Haggai regarding the time of world-judgment that witnessed the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 66-70, saying,

“Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land; and I will shake all nations...and I will overthrow the throne of kingdoms, and I will destroy the strength of the kingdoms of the heathen.” Hag. 2:6, 7, 22; cf. Joel 2:10,28-32; Acts 2:17-21)

On this basis, some have inferred that the “heavens and earth” in Matthew here are a cryptic reference to the fall of Jerusalem. However, this is clearly wrong. Jesus does not use the “heavens and earth” cryptically or eschatologically. Rather, he uses them *emphatically* and *parabolically*. The heavens and earth are the most enduring and unalterable of all physical creation. Stars fall from the sky; seasons change; a generation comes and goes, but *“the earth abideth forever” (Ecc. 1:4)*. An example of affirming the immutability of one thing by comparing it to the heavens occurs in Jeremiah. Just before the Jews were carried into Babylonian captivity, God promised he would not abandon his people forever, and underscored the reliability of this promise by evoking the ordinances of the sun, moon, and stars:

“Thus saith the Lord, which giveth the sun for a light by day, and the ordinances of the moon and of the stars for a light by night, which divideth the sea when the waves thereof roar; the Lord of hosts is his name. If those ordinances depart from before me, saith the Lord, then the seed of Israel also shall cease from being a nation before me forever.” Jer. 31:35, 36

But if the heavens and earth are faithful and enduring, God’s word is more certain and abiding still: *“Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away” (Matt. 24:35; cf. I Pet. 1:24, 25)*. Thus, when Jesus says “till heaven and earth pass” he is affirming the immutability of the law and prophets, saying, not the least tittle—the stroke that crosses a “t”—or one jot—the dot above the “i”—would pass from the law except it first be fulfilled. That this is the meaning is made clear from the parallel saying in Luke: *“And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than one tittle of the law to fail” (Lk. 16:17)*. The law was fulfilled and taken out of the way *at the cross* (Col. 2:14, 15; Eph. 2:15; Rom. 7:1-4; Heb. 7:12). Prophecies regarding Christ’s resurrection, the out-pouring of the Holy Ghost, the spread of the gospel, the destruction of Jerusalem, and heaven’s wrath upon the Roman Empire, were of an independent vitality and province, and were fulfilled in their own time.

19 - Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

The law was of such importance that a man’s relationship to it would affect the esteem in which he would be held in heaven. Those who were scrupulous to obey the smallest commandment of the law, and who taught others to do likewise by their example, would be had in great estimation; those who abrogated even the smallest commandment, and taught others by word or deed to do the same, would be held in small esteem. That men guilty of breaking the law would be in heaven, shows that grace, not merit, governs their salvation. Salvation might be affected by wanton or intentional violations of commands great and small, but small departures made unwittingly in good-faith most often would not. Man can serve God with a perfect heart but be mistaken in many points of practice and doctrine and still be saved. St. Paul says the same when he wrote:

“Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; 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. If any man’s work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man’s work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.” I Cor. 5:12-15

20 - For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.

The term “scribe” was originally given to court officials during the monarchy who served as secretaries of state (II Sam. 8:17; II Kng. 12:19; 18:18). Following the captivity, the title was called upon men like Ezra, who were teachers of the law (Ezra 7:6; Neh. 8:1). In the New Testament, scribes were also called lawyers, or rabbi, and were almost invariably of the sect of the Pharisees. The Pharisees grew up in the inter-testamental period, during Greek dominion of Palestine. Josephus first mentions them in the time of Jonathan Maccabeus.² Josephus differentiates them from the Sadducees chiefly by their insistence upon keeping the oral tradition of the elders:

“The Pharisees have delivered to the people a great many observations by succession from their fathers,

² Josephus, *Ant.* 13.5.9

which are not written in the law of Moses; and for that reason it is that the Sadducees reject them, and say that we are to esteem those observances to be obligatory which are in the written word, but are not to observe what are derived from the tradition of our forefathers.”³

Jesus denounced the scribes and Pharisees, calling them hypocrites, the offspring of vipers, and sons of Gehenna, who devoured widows’ houses, and for pretense made long prayers and loved to pray standing on street corners where they might be seen of men. They were Jesus’ greatest opponents and orchestrated his death, and became the chief persecutors of the saints. Jesus therefore pronounced seven “woes” upon them and Jerusalem, saying that the blood of all the martyrs, from Abel unto Zachariah the son of Barachiah, would be required of that generation in the wrath that was poured out upon Jerusalem and the Jews. To avoid their fate, the disciples were called to serve God with a pure heart, fervently.

21 - Ye have heard that it was said of them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill

The term translated “kill” here is from the Greek φόνεω, *to murder*, but must be construed to include all lesser forms of criminal homicide; deaths resulting from warfare, execution, or self-defense are not contemplated by the commandment (cf. Ex. 20:13). Murder is defined as the unlawful killing of another human being with malice aforethought. Malice is either express or implied. It is *express* where there is an intent to kill; it is *implied* where one acts in wonton or reckless disregard of a known likelihood of death or serious bodily injury. If a man owned an ox known to gore and failed to keep it penned and it killed a man, this was murder: failure to restrain an animal known to be dangerous evidences an wanton or intentional disregard for the life of one’s fellow man, making him guilty of murder or a lesser included offense (Ex. 21:28-31). The law against murder was instituted from the beginning of creation, written in man’s mind and conscience. Cain’s slaying of Abel is characterized by John as murder (I Jn. 3:12); that it was to be capitally punished appears from Cain’s complaint that “*everyone that findeth me shall slay me*” (Gen. 4:9-13), albeit, the Lord commuted his sentence (vv. 14, 15).

shall be in danger of the judgment:

As man’s fallenness led to greater and more pervasive depravity, violence and murder filled the earth. God thus brought in the flood upon the world to sweep

³ Josephus, *Ant.* 13.10.6; Whiston ed.

away the wickedness of man (Gen. 6:11). Following the flood, capital punishment for murder was divinely impressed upon man as a civil institution, and not merely a law implied in nature.

“*And surely your blood of your lives will I require; at the hand of every beast will I require it, and at the hand of man; at the hand of every man’s brother will I require the life of man. Whoso sheddeth man’s blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man.*” Gen. 9:4-6

What is “the judgment”? The epistle to the Hebrews says that it is given unto man once to die, and after that “the judgment” (Heb. 9:27). However, as this judgment is universal, embracing all men, and the judgment referred to by our Lord here is confined to the murderer, it is best understood as the verdict of a civil court, adjudging a man guilty of murder.

22 - But I say unto you,

“Them of old” (v. 21) refers to the elders and scribes of Israel who expounded the law of Moses. Their conception of the law was one-dimensional, looking no deeper than its letter, failing to discern the spirit and mind of God therein. As a code of civil conduct, the law established the *minimum acceptable standard* of behavior for members of society; it imposed a *duty of reasonable care* for those within the foreseeable scope of harm; any negligent, wanton, or intentional act injuring another could bring a man before the civil magistrate. However, imagining or planning evil in one’s heart was not sufficient standing alone to render a man liable to the civil authority; in all cases of criminal or civil offense, there also had to be an *overt act*. But if human tribunals take cognizance of a man’s intent only where it is joined to an overt act, heaven judges by a separate and higher standard, which Jesus here announces by the words “but I say unto you.”

Three grades of anger are set forth, answering to three grades of punishment (or three examples of anger resulting in the same punishment, for this is unclear). The “judgment” may contemplate a local tribunal, perhaps the synagogue, where a man might suffer censor, including punishment by a fine, beating with rods or scourge, and excommunication; the “council” likely refers to the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem, which alone tried capital cases;⁴ “hell fire” (literally, the “Gehenna of fire”) describes Tophet, or the Valley of Hinnom, which historically was associated with the destruction of the wicked (see below). Jesus does not intend by his

⁴ Josephus, *Antiquities*, 14.9.3; cf. Num. 35:12 where “congregation” seems to contemplate the Sanhedrin, or high national court.

saying to teach that men are subject to earthly tribunals for anger, but to Divine vengeance, which the earthly tribunals symbolize.

That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment:

Anger in the heart of man is akin to hatred, which heaven views as equal to murder. Thus, I John 3:15: “*Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.*” Paul says “*Be angry and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath*” (Eph. 4:26). Thus, anger is not sinful in itself, but where it is kept and nourished and takes the form of personal enmity, we are in danger of harboring malice. The phrase “without cause” (Gk. *εικη*) was omitted by Westcott and Hort in the Revised Version on the strength of the Sinaiticus and Alexandrian manuscripts, but Dean John W. Burgon marshals no fewer than thirty ancient witnesses from the fathers, and many versions, in support of the traditional reading, and pronounces the phrase unquestionably authentic:

“Our present contention however is but this,—that a Reading which is attested by *every uncial Copy of the Gospels except B and Aleph*; by a whole torrent of *Fathers*; by *every known copy* of the old Latin, by *all* the Syriac (for the Peschito inserts [not translates] the word *εικη*),—by the Coptic,—as well as by the Gothic—and Armenia versions—that such a reading is not to be set aside by the stupid dictum ‘*Western and Syrian.*’ By no such methods will the study of Textual Criticism be promoted or progress made in determining the truth of Scripture. There really can be no doubt whatever,—(that is to say if we are to be guided by *ancient Evidence*),—that *εικη* (‘without a cause’) was our SAVIOUR’S actual word.”⁵

and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council:

It is thought that “raca” is from the Aramaic “reka” (“empty”) (compare the Hebrew plural “rekim” (“vain fellows” – Jud. 9:4, 11:3). The Greek equivalent is used by James “O vain man” (Jm. 2:20). The term signifies a person of *empty of moral virtue*, which spoken abusively in anger, stems from the malevolence of our carnal nature, and not the Spirit of God, and thus renders us accountable to divine judgment. Jesus said “for of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaketh” (Lk. 6:45). James said the tongue is full of malignancy and poison: “But the tongue can no man tame, it is an

unruly evil, full of deadly poison. Therewith we bless God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God” (Jm. 3:8, 9). Though perhaps not uttered aloud, who can claim in times of anger, aggravation, or irritation never to have thought and felt such things? Thus, does the Lord turn back upon us a mirror of our fallenness and dire need of mercy and grace. And if for mere thoughts and words we are so close to damnation, should we not readily forgive our brother’s offending deeds?

but whosoever shall say, Thou fool,

The Greek here is *μωρε*; the Hebrew equivalent is probably “*nabel*,” which occurs in union with “man of Belial” (I Sam. 25:25; cf. Deut. 13:13) and signifies a reprobate person of positive wickedness, such as the Sodomites that beset the house of the old man from Bethlehem-Judah, and raped and killed his guest’s concubine (Jud. 19:22). Jesus used the term of the Pharisees in his great denunciation (Matt. 23:17, 19); hence, the term itself is not wrong. Rather, it is its wrongfully being called upon another from anger that is at issue. “*The wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God*” (Jm. 1:19).

shall be in danger of hell fire.

“Hell fire” is literally the “Gehenna of fire” (*την γενναν του πυρος*), and signifies the “Valley of Hinnom,” or the “Valley of the son of Hinnom” (Josh. 15:8; 18:16; Neh. 11:30). Also called Tophet (II Kng. 23:10), the Valley of Hinnom lies on the southwest of Jerusalem and is the place where the Jews made their children pass through the fire to Molech (II Chron. 28:3; Jer. 7:31); it was defiled by Josiah to stop its use for human sacrifice (II Kng. 23:10). It thus came to be used as the city dump, whose continual fires and maggots apparently gave rise to the expression “where their worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched” (Mk. 9:44, 46). It may be to Tophet that Proverbs refers, when it says “*They eye that mocketh at his father, and despiseth to obey his mother, the ravens of the valley shall pick it out, and the young eagles shall eat it*” (Prov. 30:17). Tophet was historically associated with the destruction of the wicked. It is the place where the carcasses of 185,000 Assyrians were buried and burned after they were smitten by the angel of the Lord (Isa. 30:31-33; 37:36-38), and it would have been here that the Jews cast over 600,000 dead who perished in the siege of Jerusalem during the war with Rome (cf. Isa. 66:24). Gehenna thus became synonymous with the final punishment of the lost (Matt. 25:41, 46; Mk. 9:44, 46; Rev. 20:14, 15), to which it refers here.

⁵ Dean John Willam Burgon, *The Revision Revised* (Centennial Edition 1883-1983; A.G. Hobbs Publications, Fort Worth, TX), pp. 358-361

23 - Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee;

The word “therefore” connects the thoughts here with what precedes and seems to teach thus: *“Therefore if it is the case that anger and hatred will render one liable to judgment of God, how can a gift be acceptable if your brother has a complaint against you for wrong?”* The first great commandment is to love God with all your (?) heart, soul, mind, and strength. The second is to love your neighbor as yourselves (Mk. 12:29-31). Indeed, the two are so intimately connected that it is quite impossible to love God and despise our neighbor. *“If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath no seen? And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also”* (I Jn. 4:20, 21). Since love of God requires that we love our fellow man, our gifts to God may be rendered unacceptable where angry words or deeds have caused our estrangement. Therefore, if we are offering a gift, and there remember that we are guilty of sinning against our brother, the Lord instructs:

24 - Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.

God is an impartial judge; we cannot sin against men and be acceptable to God. The Lord thus charges us to postpone our gift or devotion until we have first made amends to those we have wronged, so that the slate thus wiped clean of offenses against men, we may find grace and favor with God.

25 - Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer,

In keeping with the parable above, where earthly tribunals symbolize heavens judgment, the judge here is none other than God. As it is wise to avail oneself of an opportunity to escape the judgment of an earthly judge by appeasing a plaintiff whom we have wronged, so we should satisfy our brother’s complaint while as yet there is opportunity before the chance to obtain grace and pardon have passed and the matter comes before God, who is no respecter of persons, but will condemn the guilty for his wrong.

and thou be cast into prison.

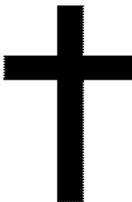
Peter describes the wicked lost who perished in the deluge as being in prison (I Pet. 3:19, 20), and says that

the “angels” who sinned (probably the sons of Seth who apostatized by marrying unbelieving women before the flood – Gen. 6:1-3) were delivered into chains in Tartarus there to be reserved unto the time of judgment (II Pet. 2:4). It is probable that these refer to the same events, and that “prison” in fact refers to Hades Tartarus, the interim place of the lost dead. While “prison” in the present passage may certainly include Tartarus or even Gehenna (see v. 22, above), it need not signify heaven’s ultimate vengeance of death, but may include any lessor punishment commiserate with our offense.

26 - Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing.

The Catholic Church has ever been fond of citing this passage as proof of purgatory. But certainly it is a very great stretch to find in this parable evidence of something nowhere else so much as hinted of. Purgatory was a doctrine of the Greeks and Romans, and is nowhere directly taught or alluded to in scripture. If man could atone for sin by suffering, what need was there for Christ to die upon the cross? And if Christ’s atonement is complete and sufficient to make man salvationally perfect before God, what purpose can purgatory serve? Surely the teaching of scripture is that God chastens men during life, but once having suffered physical death, his fate is forever sealed, condemned or acquitted based upon what he did during life (II Cor. 5:10; Heb. 9:27). The “uttermost farthing” is equivalent to the “least sin or offense,” so that the meaning is not that we will pay for our sins by suffering in purgatory, but that God will exact vengeance for every sin of man, no matter how slight, such that it behooves us to tremble before him and always labor to have conscience void of offense.

The Shadow Ends where the Body Begins

Shadow	The Shadow Ended at the Cross	Body & Substance
First covenant Worldly sanctuary Priestly service Appointed days and feasts Animal sacrifices Diverse washings Dietary restrictions Miscellaneous carnal ordinances		New Covenant Heavenly Sanctuary High Priesthood of Christ His own Blood Atonement Eternal Redemption Perfected Forever

Col. 2:6, 17: Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the Sabbath days: which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ.

New Jerusalem

Covenantal Habitation of the Saints

Kurt M. Simmons

Covenantal Habitation of the Saints

The images of the new heavens, new earth, and new Jerusalem in Revelation chapters twenty-one and twenty-two are believed by many to represent man's heavenly home or the eternal state upon a new material creation. A variation in Preterist circles has it that these images indicate that man is somehow mystically in "heaven now." However, the better view is that the new Jerusalem symbolically describes the covenantal habitation of the saints under the gospel of Jesus Christ, and the new heavens and earth are the world beneath Jesus' righteous dominion.

Literalist Conceptions

Most of us have encountered various literalist conceptions of Rev. 21 and 22 at some time or other. Indeed, it would be strange if we had not; the church abounds in them. If nothing else, we have probably been confronted with literalist notions of the new Jerusalem in a song or hymn which mentions "streets of gold," or heard the saying about St. Peter and the "pearly gates." These and similar allusions are based upon the assumption that the imagery of Rev. 21 and 22 should be understood literally - that it describes things as they actually are or will be, rather than merely providing a symbolic description of spiritual truths. Typically, it is assumed that Revelation's imagery of the new Jerusalem portrays heaven. Plummer's interpretation is typical of this school:

*"Having described the origin and progress of evil in the world, the final overthrow of Satan and his adherents, and the judgment when every man is rewarded according to his works, the seer now completes the whole by portraying the eternal bliss of the redeemed in heaven."*⁶

⁶ A. Plummer, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine*, Pulpit Commentary (Hendrickson, Peabody, MS), Vol. XXII, p. 509.

The weakness of this view is obvious: John specifically states that the new Jerusalem comes down *out of* heaven from God (Rev. 21:2, 10). If it comes down *out of* heaven, clearly the imagery cannot portray heaven itself.⁷ This has caused others to see the imagery as referring to a material, new creation. Among the "church fathers" that saw these images as portraying a new physical creation and city, Irenaeus thought there would be three levels of resurrection corresponding to individual worthiness:

*"Then those who are deemed worthy of an abode in heaven shall go there, others shall enjoy the delights of paradise, and others shall possess the splendour of the city...For the first will be taken up into the heavens, the second will dwell in paradise, the last will inhabit the city."*⁸

Tertullian thought the images portrayed an earthly city during the "millennium":

*"But we do confess that a kingdom is promised to us upon the earth, although before heaven, only in another state of existence; inasmuch as it will be after the resurrection of a thousand years in the divinely built city of Jerusalem."*⁹

Modern expositors falling into the error of a literalist interpretation of John's vision include Mathison and Gentry:

"His elect people will inherit the eternal estate in resurrected, physical bodies (Jno. 5:28-29; 1 Cor.

⁷ It comes down out of heaven, not because it was first "raptured" there, but because the New Testament originates with God; he is the architect of our salvation; the saints, though on earth, have citizenship in heaven.

⁸ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, V, xxxvi, 1, 2; Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. I, p. 567.

⁹ Tertullian, *Against Marcion*, III, xxv; Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. III, p. 342.

15:20-28) so that we might dwell in a material New Creation order (II Pet. 3:8-13).¹⁰

The assertion that man will live forever in physical bodies in a material “new creation” betrays a fundamental misunderstanding of God’s redemptive purpose. It is the stuff of Jehovah’s Witnesses and other cultic sects inhabiting the fringes of Christendom. It stems from Gentry’s belief in Postmillennialism which holds that God’s redemptive purpose culminates in a redeemed, material creation.¹¹ Never mind the many statements in scripture plainly pointing to the fact that the saints inheritance is in heaven (Phil. 3:20; Col. 3:1-3; I Thess. 4:17; I Tim. 6:7; II Tim. 2:11; Heb. 11:13, 16; I Pet. 1:4). They would have us believe that our eternal state is upon earth, that having begun in the spirit, we are to be made perfect in the flesh! (Cf. Gal. 3:3) Discerning students will reject these literalistic approaches, opting instead for the view that John symbolically describes the present, legal, and covenantal condition of the church under the New Testament in which the saints are *redeemed* from sin, *justified* in law, and *restored* to the communion and presence of God.

Old Testament Origins of Revelation’s Imagery

Perhaps the simplest way to demonstrate the proper interpretation of Revelation’s new heavens, new earth, and new Jerusalem, is to examine how Old Testament writers employed the imagery. Study of the prophets shows that three themes dominated their writings: 1) Prophecies of the coming captivity in Assyria and Babylon, 2) the restoration of Israel and Judah to their land, and 3) the coming Messiah. The method of the prophets was such that prophecies about the captivity and restoration were often couched in poetic language that defied fulfillment in those events, and looked instead unto Christ. So much so in fact that the captivity and restoration became types of events bound up in the coming Messiah, similar to the way Israel’s deliverance from Egypt and entrance into Canaan became types for God’s larger redemptive purpose, anticipating man’s inheritance in heaven. Thus, the destruction of Israel and Jerusalem by the Assyrians

¹⁰ Kenneth L. Gentry Jr., *Christ’s Resurrection and Ours*, (Chalcedon, April 2003).

¹¹ “God seeks the redemption of the world as a created system of men and things...Christ’s labors will eventually effect the redemption of the created system of humanity and things.” Kenneth L. Gentry Jr, *Three Views of the Millennium and Beyond* (Zondervan, 1999), p. 43. Cf. Keith A. Mathison, *Postmillennialism, An Eschatology of Hope* (P&R Publishing, Phillipsburg NJ, 1999), p. 107: “Christ’s atonement lays the foundation for the work of restoring all of man and all of creation.”

and Babylonians served as types of the coming destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 by Rome, Josephus even reporting that the second temple was burned on the very day and month observed by the Jews to commemorate its burning by the Babylonians.¹² Likewise, the return of the captivity was a type of mankind’s redemption and restoration in Christ.

Understanding the poetic and typological nature of the prophets’ writings is particularly important in the study of eschatology where the language is couched in apocalyptic imagery and symbolism derived from Old Testament sources. For example, the new heavens and earth of Revelation find their source in the prophet Isaiah, who seems to have used the imagery to describe the captivity’s return from Babylon. Thus, in chapters 63, 64, Isaiah prophesies the burning of the temple in 586 B.C. by the Babylonians:

“Our adversaries have trodden down thy sanctuary...Thy holy cities are a wilderness, Zion is a wilderness, Jerusalem a desolation. Our holy and our beautiful house, where our fathers praised thee, is burned up with fire: and all our pleasant things are laid waste” (Isa. 63:18; 64:10, 11).

However, in Isa. 65, a remnant is promised:

“Thus saith the Lord, As the new wine is found in the cluster, and one saith, Destroy it not; for a blessing is in it: so will I do for my servants’ sakes, that I may not destroy them all. And I will bring forth a seed out of Jacob, and out of Judah an inheritor of my mountains: and mine elect shall inherit it, and my servants shall dwell there.” (Isa. 65:8, 9)

The remnant would return and inherit a “new” heavens and earth. The old heavens and earth, marked by the nation’s apostasy, bringing clouds and storms of destruction and wrath, would be replaced by a heavens and earth where God’s people would be blessed with peace and joy:

“For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come to mind. But be glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create: for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy.” (Isa. 65:17, 18; cf. 66:22)

¹² Josephus, *Wars*, VI, iv, 5, 8.

The immediate application of this prophecy may have looked to the return from captivity, but the poetic nature of the language describing the new heaven and earth of restored Israel betrays the fact that the prophecy is pregnant with anticipation of the Messiah and looked beyond unto Jesus Christ. Indeed, a study of things prophesied about the Messiah and the return of the captivity from Babylon show that common language and metaphors are employed to describe both: cities that were laid waste and desolate would be rebuilt; the wilderness would be like Eden, and the desert like a garden (Isa. 51:3), and blossom as the rose (Isa. 35:1); the Lord would open rivers in high places, and fountains in the midst of the valleys: the wilderness would become a pool, and the dry places springs of waters (Isa. 41:18; cf 35:6, 7); the lame would leap like the hart and the tongue of the dumb would sing (Isa. 35:6); the wolf and the lamb would feed together and the lion eat straw like the bullock (Isa. 11:1-9; 65:25); the abundance of the Gentiles would be converted (Isa. 60:5), and all nations would flow together to worship the Lord in Zion (Isa. 2:1-5; 66:23).

What New Testament Writers Say

New Testament writers make it clear that Mt. Zion and the new Jerusalem answer to the new covenant. Consider what the apostle Paul says in his letter to the Galatians:

"Tell me, ye that desire to be under the law, do ye not hear the law? For it is written, that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a freewoman. But he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman was by promise. Which things are an allegory: for these are the two covenants; the one from the mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar. For this Agar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children. But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all...But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now. Nevertheless what saith the scripture? Cast out the bondwoman and her son: for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman. Gal. 4:21-31

In this passage, Paul indicates that Mt. Sinai and old earthly Jerusalem answered to the old covenant, but that Mt. Zion and the heavenly Jerusalem corresponds to the new covenant. It is understood, of course, that the Jerusalem which "now is" must be understood to refer to the writer's time, not our own. Unbelieving Jews were persecuting the church, just as Ishmael had persecuted Isaac. But the Jews would be cast out and

their city and temple destroyed (Matt. 23, 24; Lk. 19:41-44; 23:27-31), and the new spiritual Jerusalem replace the old. The writer of Hebrews sets forth a similar dichotomy.

The book of Hebrews was written during a crisis of the last days when Christian Jews were under persecution and pressured to forsake Christ and turn back to Judaism. The writer's main argument is to show that the law of Moses was merely provisional and the remnant of its outward trappings would shortly pass away. Christian Jews therefore should not be deceived into thinking they could find security or salvation in the temple cultus. Much to the contrary, the on-going temple cultus was an implicit denial of Christ's atoning sacrifice and sonship and marked the Jews as his enemies to be destroyed. The writer quotes the prophet Haggai and the "shaking" of the heavens and earth, signifying the removal of thrones and dominions dominating the pre-Christian world (Heb. 12:26-28; Hag. 2:6, 7, 21, 22). Twice the writer mentions a "world to come" in connection with the dawning kingdom and dominion of Christ that would replace the world framed by the Gentile world-powers, including unbelieving Jews (Heb. 2:5; 6:5). The writer also makes equally plain that Zion and new Jerusalem are the new covenant.

"For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest, and the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words; which voice they that heard intreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more...But ye are come unto mount Sion [e.g., Zion], and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first born, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, , and to the blood of sprinkling that speaketh better things that that of Abel. Heb. 12:18-24

Here, the writer compares the tangible nature of things pertaining to the old covenant to the intangible things of the new, indicating the superiority of the latter. Notice that the new covenant answers to Zion and the new, heavenly Jerusalem, and these in turn to the church and the spirits of just men made perfect (cleansed from sin) by sprinkling with Christ's blood. This is why John, in Revelation, describes the new Jerusalem as the bride of Christ; viz., the new Jerusalem is Christ's church under the New Testament, just as Israel had been God's bride under the Old Testament (Jer. 2:2, 3; Ezek. 16:6-8; Rev. 21:2, 9).

Timing of the New Jerusalem

The discussion above demonstrates the substance of the new heavens and earth, and shows that it answers the world-dominion of Christ. What about the timing? When would these things come to be? Stephen, when tried for preaching Christ would come and destroy the city and temple and change the customs embodied in the Mosaic law (Acts 7:13, 14), cited the sixty-sixth chapter of Isaiah as proof that he was preaching nothing that had not been prophesied long before. Before the Sanhedrin he quotes Isaiah, saying, "Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool: what house will ye build me? saith the Lord: or what is the place of my rest? Hath not my hand made all these things?" (Acts 7:49, 50; cf. Isa. 66:1, 2). Stephen thus indicated the imminent fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy. The timing of the new heavens and earth, therefore, is not left in doubt, but was clearly tied to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. We need only peruse the rest of Isaiah's prophecy to see that this is so.

First, Isaiah makes clear that national Israel would reject Christ and cling to the temple ritual instead:

"He that killeth an ox is as if he slew a man; he that sacrificeth a lamb, as if he cut off a dog's neck; he that offereth an oblation, as if he offered swine's blood; he that burneth incense, as if he blessed an idol. Yea, they have chosen their own ways, and their soul delighteth in their abominations. I also will choose their delusions, and will bring their fears upon them; because when I called, none did answer; when I spake, they did not hear: but they did evil before mine eyes, and chose that in which I delighted not. (Isa. 66:3, 4)

Next, he indicates the Jews would persecute their believing brethren and cast them out of the synagogue:

"Hear the word of the Lord, ye that tremble at his word; Your brethren that hated you, that cast you out for my name's sake, said, Let the Lord be glorified: but he shall appear to your joy, and they shall be ashamed. (Isa. 66:5)

Then, Isaiah prophesies the destruction of the city and temple alluded to by Stephen and foretold by Christ:

"A voice of noise from the city, a voice from the temple, as voice of the Lord that rendereth recompence to his enemies...For, behold, the Lord will come with fire, and with his chariots like a whirlwind, to render his anger with fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire." (Isa. 66:6, 15)

The prophet then states that those who escaped the siege – Christians who obeyed Jesus' warning to flee when they saw the city compassed about with armies (Lk. 21:20, 21) – would declare God's glory (preach the gospel) among the Gentiles (Isa. 66:19). Isaiah states that these would become the spiritual "priests and Levites" (cf. I Pet. 2:5) of the New Testament temple - the church - in the new heavens and earth:

"And I will also take of them for priests and for Levites, saith the Lord. For as the new heavens and the new earth, which I make, shall remain before me, saith the Lord, so shall your seed and your name remain. And it shall come to pass, that from one new moon to another, and from one Sabbath to another, shall all flesh come and worship before me, saith the Lord. And they shall go forth, and look upon the carcasses of the men that have transgressed against me: for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched; and they shall be an abhorring unto all flesh." (Isa. 66:21-24)

"All flesh" is equivalent to "every creature" and "all nations" of the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20; Mk. 16:15, 16). "Worshipping before the Lord" points to the assimilation of the Gentiles into the kingdom (church). The carcasses of those eaten of fire and worms has in view the bodies of the Jews who perished in the ravages of war, famine, and pestilence during the siege. Josephus reports that eleven-hundred-thousand Jews were slain in the siege of Jerusalem.¹³ These were cast out of the city into the valley of Hinnom during the siege, where they lay swollen and putrefied, eaten of fire, maggots, and worms.¹⁴ The testimony of Stephen, Christ, and Isaiah thus combine to make clear that the new Jerusalem would follow the destruction of the old, earthly Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

Heaven Now?

At the beginning of this article we indicated that, given the fulfilled nature of biblical eschatology, some Preterists feel they were somehow mystically in "heaven now." Is there any validity to this interpretation?

No. The heavenly city that God has prepared for his people (Heb. 11:10, 16) is a place men go to upon the body's death. Hear Paul:

¹³ Josephus, Wars of the Jews, VI, ix, 3. This figure does not include those who perished in foreign cities or died in battles throughout the rest of Judah and Galilee.

¹⁴ Josephus, Wars of the Jews, V, xii, 3, 4.

“Therefore we are always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord: (for we walk by faith not by sight:) We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.” (II Cor. 5:6-8)

“For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better: Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you.” (Phil. 1:23, 24)

These passages make plain that there was a place Paul desired to go; there is not the least indication that he in any sense felt he had already gone to it or that it had, or ever would, come to him. The essential barrier to enjoyment of that place was his fleshly body. Not until the body was put off in death could his hope be realized.

Is there a sense in which saints this side of eternity share in that heavenly kingdom?

Yes, indeed there is. The new covenant is a legal arrangement between two parties: God on the one side and ransomed sinners on the other. Under the new covenant, those who obey the gospel by repentance and baptism are acquitted from sin and made sons of God through Christ. As sons, we have citizenship and inheritance in heaven (Eph. 2:19; Col. 3:20). We have been translated in contemplation of law from the dominion of sin to the kingdom of God’s dear son (Col. 1:13). We enjoy the legal benefits of adoption and sonship now and are presented legally justified before the throne by and through the agency of Christ (Eph. 2:5, 6; cf. Heb. 9:24). If we recall the erection of the tabernacle in the wilderness and how God’s glory filled the tabernacle, signifying his dwelling among his people, that pretty much sums up the meaning of the imagery of Rev. 21, 22: The church is the tabernacle and God dwells with man through it. However, we are not actually in heaven, nor has heaven come down to earth. The whole arrangement is legal and contractual, awaiting ultimate fulfillment at the body’s death.

Conclusion

The new Jerusalem describes the covenantal habitation of the saints, the New Testament church.

Excerpts from Great Preterist Books

The Life and Principate of the Emperor Nero

Bernard W. Henderson

(Oxford, 1902)

“War was declared between the Empire and the Church...yet the defeat is the first victory in this warfare, and the Roman dimly apprehends it. ‘You slay us, and we conquer by your slaying,’ cried the fierce African [Tertullian]. ‘The cloak of suffering is our robe of victory, the axle, stake, and faggots form our triumphal car.’ The first page of the ‘epic of Christian martyrdom’ is written at Rome. The epic shall embrace the warfare of more than two hundred and fifty years. Rome shall become the ‘second holy city’ of the new religion. But now on this summer night Christ’s Advent of a surety seems sore delayed. Rome and her Empire are powerful and endure. The Christians have joined battle, but their leader tarries. And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and ever free man, these wage the war, and fear not the coming of the great day of His wrath, which shall destroy them which corrupt the earth. ‘And I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God; and he cried with a loud voice...saying, ‘Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads.’” Henderson, Bernard W., *The Life and Principate of the Emperor Nero* (Oxford, 1902), p. 253.

“The theory of an extensive Domitianic persecution has rested chiefly on a late date for the Apocalypse; modern criticism now prefers a date about A.D. 70.” Henderson, Bernard W., *The Life and Principate of the Emperor Nero* (Oxford, 1902), p. 304.

Excerpts from Thomas Hobbes

Leviathan 1660

Are the Souls of the Lost Tormented for all Eternity?

As the kingdom of God, and eternal life, so also God's enemies, and their torments after judgement, appear by the Scripture to have their place on earth. The name of the place where all men remain till the resurrection, that were either buried or swallowed up of the earth, is usually called in Scripture by words that signify under ground; which the Latins read generally *infernus* and *inferi*, and the Greeks *ades*; that is to say, a place where men cannot see; and containeth as well the grave as any other deeper place. But for the place of the damned after the resurrection, it is not determined, neither in the Old nor New Testament, by any note of situation, but only by the company: as that it shall be where such wicked men were, as God in former times in extraordinary and miraculous manner had destroyed from off the face of the earth: as for example, that they are in *Inferno*, in *Tartarus*, or in the bottomless pit; because *Corah*, *Dathan*, and *Abiram* were swallowed up alive into the earth. Not that the writers of the Scripture would have us believe there could be in the globe of the earth, which is not only finite, but also, compared to the height of the stars, of no considerable magnitude, a pit without a bottom; that is, a hole of infinite depth, such as the Greeks in their demonology (that is to say in their doctrine concerning demons), and after them the Romans, called *Tartarus*; of which for that is a thing the proportion of earth to heaven cannot bear: but that we should believe them there, indefinitely, where those men are, on whom God inflicted that exemplary punishment.

Again, because those mighty men of the earth that lived in the time of Noah, before the flood (which the Greeks called heroes, and the Scripture giants, and both say were begotten by copulation of the children of God with the children of men), were for their wicked life destroyed by the general deluge, the place of the damned is therefore also sometimes marked out by the company of those deceased giants; as *Proverbs*, 21. 16, "The man that wandereth out of the way of understanding shall remain in the congregation of the giants," and *Job*, 26. 5, "Behold the giants groan under water, and they that dwell with them." Here the place of the damned is under the

water. And *Isaiah*, 14. 9, "Hell is troubled how to meet thee" (that is, the King of Babylon) "and will displace the giants for thee": and here again the place of the damned, if the sense be literal, is to be under water.

Thirdly, because the cities of *Sodom* and *Gomorrah*, by the extraordinary wrath of God, were consumed for their wickedness with fire and brimstone, and together with them the country about made a stinking bituminous lake, the place of the damned is sometimes expressed by fire, and a fiery lake: as in the *Apocalypse*, 21. 8, "But the timorous, incredulous, and abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone; which is the second death." So that it is manifest that hell fire, which is here expressed by metaphor, from the real fire of *Sodom*, signifieth not any certain kind or place of torment, but is to be taken indefinitely for destruction, as it is in *Revelation*, 20, at the fourteenth verse, where it is said that "Death and hell were cast into the lake of fire"; that is to say, were abolished and destroyed; as if after the day of judgement there shall be no more dying, nor no more going into hell; that is, no more going to *Hades* (from which word perhaps our word hell is derived), which is the same with no more dying.

Fourthly, from the plague of darkness inflicted on the Egyptians, of which it is written, "They saw not one another, neither rose any man from his place for three days; but all the children of Israel had light in their dwellings"; [*Exodus*, 10. 23] the place of the wicked after judgment is called utter darkness, or, as it is in the original, darkness without. And so it is expressed where the king commandeth his servants, "to bind hand and foot the man that had not on his wedding garment and to cast him into," eis to skotos to exoteron "external darkness," [*Matthew*, 22. 13] or "darkness without": which, though translated "utter darkness," does not signify how great, but where that darkness is to be; namely, without the habitation of God's elect.

Lastly, whereas there was a place near Jerusalem called the Valley of the Children of *Hinnon* in a part whereof called *Tophet* the Jews had committed most grievous idolatry, sacrificing their children to the idol *Moloch*; and wherein also God had afflicted His enemies with most grievous punishments; and wherein *Josiah* had burnt the priests of *Moloch* upon their own altars, as appeareth at large in *II Kings*, Chapter 23; the place served afterwards to receive the

filth and garbage which was carried thither out of the city; and there used to be fires made, from time to time, to purify the air and take away the stench of carrion. From this abominable place, the Jews used ever after to call the place of the damned by the name of Gehenna, or Valley of Hinnon. And this Gehenna is that word which is usually now translated hell; and from the fires from time to time there burning, we have the notion of everlasting and unquenchable fire.

Seeing now there is none that so interprets the Scripture as that after the day of judgment the wicked are all eternally to be punished in the Valley of Hinnon; or that they shall so rise again as to be ever after underground or underwater; or that after the resurrection they shall no more see one another, nor stir from one place to another; it followeth, methinks, very necessarily, that which is thus said concerning hell fire is spoken metaphorically; and that therefore there is a proper sense to be enquired after (for of all metaphors there is some real ground, that may be expressed in proper words), both of the place of hell, and the nature of hellish torments and tormenters.

And first for the tormenters, we have their nature and properties exactly and properly delivered by the names of the enemy, or Satan; the Accuser, or Diabolus; the Destroyer, or Abaddon. Which significant names, Satan, Devil, Abaddon, set not forth to us any individual person, as proper names use to do, but only an office or quality; and are therefore appellatives; which ought not to have been left untranslated, as they are in the Latin and modern Bibles, because thereby they seem to be the proper names of demons; and men are more easily seduced to believe the doctrine of devils, which at that time was the religion of the Gentiles, and contrary to that of Moses and of Christ.

And because by the Enemy, the Accuser, and Destroyer is meant the enemy of them that shall be in the kingdom of God; therefore if the kingdom of God after the resurrection be upon the earth (as in the former chapter I have shown by Scripture it seems to be), the enemy and his kingdom must be on earth also. For so also was it in the time before the Jews had deposed God. For God's kingdom was in Palestine; and the nations roundabout were the kingdoms of the Enemy; and consequently by Satan is meant any earthly enemy of the Church.

The torments of hell are expressed sometimes by "weeping, and gnashing of teeth," as Matthew, 8. 12; sometimes, by "the worm of conscience," as Isaiah, 66. 24, and Mark, 9. 44, 46, 48; sometimes, by fire,

as in the place now quoted, "where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched," and many places besides: sometimes, by "shame, and contempt," as, "And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake; some to everlasting life; and some to shame, and everlasting contempt." [Daniel, 12. 2] All which places design metaphorically a grief and discontent of mind from the sight of that eternal felicity in others which they themselves through their own incredulity and disobedience have lost. And because such felicity in others is not sensible but by comparison with their own actual miseries, it followeth that they are to suffer such bodily pains and calamities as are incident to those who not only live under evil and cruel governors, but have also for enemy the eternal king of the saints, God Almighty. And amongst these bodily pains is to be reckoned also to every one of the wicked a second death. For though the Scripture be clear for a universal resurrection, yet we do not read that to any of the reprobate is promised an eternal life. For whereas St. Paul, to the question concerning what bodies men shall rise with again, saith that "the body is sown in corruption, and is raised in incorruption; it is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power"; [I Corinthians, 15. 42, 43] glory and power cannot be applied to the bodies of the wicked: nor can the name of second death be applied to those that can never die but once. And although in metaphorical speech a calamitous life everlasting may be called an everlasting death, yet it cannot well be understood of a second death. The fire prepared for the wicked is an everlasting fire: that is to say, the estate wherein no man can be without torture, both of body and mind, after the resurrection, shall endure forever; and in that sense the fire shall be unquenchable, and the torments everlasting; but it cannot thence be inferred that he who shall be cast into that fire, or be tormented with those torments, shall endure and resist them so as be eternally burnt and tortured, and yet never be destroyed nor die. And though there be many places that affirm everlasting fire and torments, into which men may be cast successively one after another forever, yet I find none that affirm there shall be an eternal life therein of any individual person; but to the contrary, an everlasting death, which is the second death: "For after death and the grave shall have delivered up the dead which were in them, and every man be judged according to his works; death and the grave shall also be cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death." [Revelation, 20. 13, 14] Whereby it is evident that there is to be a second death of every one that shall be condemned at the day judgment, after which he shall die no more.