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The Coming of Christ and the Restitution of All Things

Introduction

Acts 3:19-26 is among the more difficult passages regarding Christ's second coming. Peter mentions the "times of refreshing" and the "restitution of all things" associated with the coming of the Lord. What do these phrases mean and when were they fulfilled?

*"Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the **times of refreshing** shall come from the presence of the Lord; and he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: whom the heaven must receive until the **times of restitution of all things**, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began."*
Acts 3:19-21

John the Baptist and the Restoration of all Things

The term rendered "restitution" in Acts 3:21 is from the Greek verb *apokathistēmai*, Strong's #600: to reconstitute (in health, home, or organization): - restore

(again). The verb occurs in Matt. 17:11 in connection with John the Baptist:

"And Jesus answered and said unto them, Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things. But I say unto you, That Elias is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed. Likewise shall also the Son of man suffer of them. Then the disciples understood that he spoke to them of John the Baptist."

Here we find that John was to "restore all things," terminology almost identical with Peter's. The phrase harkens back to Malachi's prophecy that "Elijah" (John) would turn "the hearts of the fathers to the children, and hearts of the children to the fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse" (Mal. 4:6). It describes in poetic terms the spiritual reformation of the people, calling them to repentance and faith in Christ, in which the estrangement between the children of Israel and the fathers of the faith would be restored. The prophecy does not imply that all men would receive John's message, for clearly they did not, but

rather killed him and the Jewish nation at length fell under the curse pronounced by Malachi. This is clearly seen in Matthew's account of John's preaching:

"But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance: and think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stone to raise up children unto Abraham. And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire: whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." Matt. 3:7-12

John warned his countrymen that the coming of Christ would entail a time of sifting the wheat from the chaff, gathering the righteous into the kingdom of heaven—we believe by martyrdom under Nero and the Jews (II Thess. 2:1; Rev. 14:9-16)—but the wicked and disobedient to everlasting destruction in the wars and calamities that overtook the Jews and Romans in A.D. 66-70 (Lk. 21:21-24; I Thess. 5:1, 2; II Thess. 7-10; Rev. 11:1,2; 14:17-20). They were not to trust in their lineal descent from Abraham for salvation, but were warned that true repentance and faith alone make men acceptable. Since Messiah was to burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire, it is clear that not all received either John or Christ; otherwise there would be nothing to burn up. Hence, "restoring all things" does not mean all men would receive either John or Christ, or that the earth and the material creation would undergo wondrous regeneration as is sometimes supposed. Rather, it means only that John was to be a restorer of *right paths* for the people to walk in, so that they would be prepared to receive Christ when he appeared. In fact, this is precisely how Isaiah described the work of John:

"The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God." Isa. 40:3

From what we have learned about John's work of "restoring all things" we may conclude similar things about the identical phrase as used by Peter. When Peter said heaven must receive Christ until the *times of the restitution of all things*, it would thus seem that he points to the *period* during which the gospel message was *fully revealed and announced*, following which

Jesus would come in wrath upon his enemies. This is confirmed in Jesus' Olivet Discourse, when he said that the gospel must first be preached in all the world, then the end would come (Matt. 24:14). And that the gospel was preached in the habitable earth within the apostles' life times, we have their own statements as proof (Rom. 10:18; Col. 1:5, 6). Indeed, Jesus said his generation would not pass away until he returned again in judgment upon Jerusalem and the Jews (Matt. 23:34-39; 24:29-34), and told his disciples there would not be time to preach in every city of Israel before he had come (Matt. 10:23). Peter likewise set his own generation as the time in which Christ would return, saying "save yourselves from this untoward generation" (Acts 2:40). Peter's message in Acts 3:19-26, which we have been studying here, repeats the warning, evoking Moses:

"For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you. And it shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people." Acts 3:22, 23; cf. Deut. 18:15, 19

The "prophet" here, of course, is Christ. "Hearing that prophet" meant obeying the message of Christ by the mouth of his apostles. Since Moses' warning of destruction for those who failed to obey Christ was specifically addressed to the Jews, we are able to identify the terminus of the prophecy by the destruction of the Jewish state in A.D. 66-70. Therefore, the period leading up the "the restitution of all things" began with out-pouring of the Holy Ghost upon the apostles until the *complete revelation of the New Testament*. This brings us to the second occurrence of the term *apokathistamai*.

Restoring the Dominion to Israel

Just before Jesus' ascension, the disciples asked him, "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" The word "restore" here is the same verb that occurs in Matt. 17:11, and which serves for the noun "restitution" in Acts 3:21. We believe restoring the kingdom to Israel refers to the glory days of Solomon, when he ruled over all the neighboring nations and Israel had *world dominion*.

"And Solomon reigned over all kingdoms from the river unto the land of the Philistines, and unto the border of Egypt: they brought presents, and served Solomon all the days of his life." I Kings 4:21

The glory and power of Solomon was typical of the dominion of Christ who was to reign over earth's

nations. It was this dominion that the disciples had in mind when they asked Christ if he would then restore the kingdom (dominion) to Israel:

"Ask of me and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession. Thou shalt rule them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them to pieces like a potter's vessel." Ps. 2:8, 9

Naturally, many (including especially the Essenes) supposed this would entail political and military dominion of national Israel over the Gentiles. However, Christ's kingdom was not of this world (Jn. 18:36). Christ would exercise his dominion from the right hand of God in heaven, not from earth:

"The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool. The Lord shall send the rod of thy strength out of Zion: rule thou in the midst of thine enemies." Ps. 110:1, 2

"Zion" here, as in Ps. 2:6 where it describes the resurrection and ascension of Christ (*cf.* Acts 13:33), is heaven. Christ would reign from heaven. Daniel prophesied of the dominion of the saints on earth, placing it at the coming of Christ following the persecution under Nero (the "little horn"):

"And I beheld, and the same horn made war against the saints, and prevailed against them; until the Ancient of days came, and judgment was given to the saints of the most High; and the time came that the saints possessed the kingdom...and the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him." Dan. 7:21, 22, 27

Jesus placed the coming of his kingdom "in power"—the time when he put his enemies (the Jews and Romans) beneath his feet and established his dominion over earth—within the disciples' lifetimes:

"Verily I say unto you, That there be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power." Mk. 9:1; cf. Matt. 16:27, 28

Since this dominion would result from Christ's coming, and since he came in wrath upon the Jews and Romans in A.D. 66-70, restoring the kingdom/dominion to Israel naturally occurred at this same time. Restoring the kingdom/dominion therefore was consequent upon the restitution of all things; the one presupposes the other.

The relief Christ would bring to his persecuted church at his coming brings us to the next phrase in Peter's sermon, the "times of refreshing."

Times of Refreshing

Peter told the Jews: *"repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; and he shall send Jesus Christ" (Acts 3:19)*. This does not mean that justification from sin was held in abeyance or that atonement somehow was incomplete until the second coming. The New Testament is unanimous that the atonement was complete and justification from sins a present reality from and after the cross (Rom. 5:1, 11; 8:1, 30; I Cor. 6:11; II Cor. 5:17, 18). Rather, the righteous were justified by obedience to the gospel upon repentance and baptism (Col. 2:13, 14; Eph. 2:1, 6), so that at Christ's coming they might find grace rather than the wrath appointed for their unbelieving countrymen. "Times of refreshing" points to the *relief from the persecution* of their enemies the saints found at Christ's providential appearing:

"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. 1:6-10; cf. Acts 3:26

This is the meaning of Jesus' statement in the Olivet Discourse, saying the saints' "redemption" was near at hand:

"But before all these, they shall lay their hands on you, and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues, and into prisons, being brought before kings and rulers for my name's sake...And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh." Lk. 21:12, 28

Redemption here does not mean from sin, for Jesus purchased our redemption at the cross. Rather redemption here has the meaning of being saved from tribulation and persecution, when Christ came in vengeance upon his enemies. Compare Zechariah's statements:

"As he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began: that we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us." Lk. 1:70, 71

Zechariah mentions the word in the mouth of the prophets since the world began, just like Peter. Both are describing the same events. The salvation mentioned by Zechariah here had nothing to do with sin, but salvation from the saints' oppressors (Jews and Romans). The "times of refreshing" would follow Christ's coming to put his enemies beneath his feet, and therefore answers the basic imagery of the "new heavens and new earth" where the saints have dominion and reign with Christ:

"And when ye see this, your heart shall rejoice, and your bones shall flourish like an herb: and the hand of the Lord shall be known toward his servants, and his indignation toward his enemies." Isa. 66:14; cf. 66:22

From what we have surveyed thus far, we may sum up Peter's sermon in Acts 3:19-26, thus:

- The "times of the restitution of all things" describes the period *following* the full revelation, recording, and open declaration of the gospel.
- Once the gospel had been fully revealed and proclaimed, Christ would *come in wrath* upon the Jews and nations of the Roman Empire.
- Christ's coming against the persecutors of the church would bring "times of refreshing" to the beleaguered saints.

Let us now compare Acts 3:19-26 with similar passages and see if this is not correct and help make the whole lesson clear.

Peter's Sermon on Pentecost

We have been studying Peter's second gospel message following Christ's ascension. We now turn to his first gospel sermon, given on Pentecost.

Just before his ascension, Jesus told the apostles to wait in Jerusalem until they were endued with power from on high: *"For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence" (Acts 1:5)*. The apostles were immersed (baptized) with the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost (*"it filled all the house where they were sitting"* immersing them -- Acts 2:1, 2). When this miracle was known to the multitude of strangers and foreigners

visiting Jerusalem for the feast, they came together and were astonished that each heard the apostles speaking to them in their native tongues. (Thus, God began uniting the nations he had divided at the tower of Babel in Christ.) Peter explained that the miracle the multitude witnessed was evidence they were living in the last days, as testified by the prophet Joel, whom Peter quotes:

"But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; 'And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: and on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy: and I will shew wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke: the sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come: and it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'" Acts 2:16-21; cf. Joel 2:28-32

Joel's prophecy was expressly tied to the destruction of Jerusalem and the cataclysmic judgments that overtook the Roman world in A.D. 66-70.

"Blow the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in my holy mountain: let all the inhabitants of the land tremble: for the day of the Lord cometh, for it is nigh at hand." Joel 2:1

The prophet Malachi said that God would send "Elijah" (John the Baptist) before the day of the Lord:

"Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord: and he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to the fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse." Mal. 4:5, 6

Thus, two signs that the time of the end was fast overtaking the Jewish nation were now fulfilled: John the Baptist and the outpouring of the Holy Ghost. The remaining signs of "blood, fire, and vapor of smoke and the darkening of the sun and moon turning to blood" describe the civil disturbances that preceded the nation's end. First, however, the Spirit would accomplish its work of leading the apostles into all truth (Jn. 16:13; 20:22), "restoring all things." This is implied by the visions and dreams the Spirit would give, and the miracle of speaking in tongues. Hence, first there would be revelation; then would follow consummation. Those who obeyed the gospel would be saved (Acts 2:21); those did not, would be destroyed.

Thus, we find the same pattern and message here as in Peter's second sermon (Acts 3:19-26):

- Christ's ascension to heaven, where he was to remain until the full revelation and proclamation of the gospel,
- Followed by his coming in wrath, and
- The salvation of those who obeyed him.

Next, let's turn to Hebrews chapter nine.

The Time of Reformation and the Coming of Christ

The book of Hebrews is devoted to the theme of the obsolete nature of the Old Testament ritual which was replaced by the priesthood and sacrifice of Christ. Believing Jews were under pressure and persecution to forsake Christ and return to the law. The writer warns his readers against this, saying it is equal to crucifying Christ anew (Heb. 10:26-29). In building his case to abide faithful to the gospel, the writer refers to the two tents of the Tabernacle: The first tabernacle, or "Holy Place," he says **corresponds** to the *Old Testament*, which stood in carnal ordinances "imposed until the time of reformation." The second tabernacle, or "Holy of Holies," **corresponds** to the *New Testament*. Under the Old Testament, the worshipper was legally excluded from God's presence because the blood of bulls and goats could not take away sins. But under the New Testament, the worshipper, justified from sin by the sacrifice of Christ, is brought into the legal and covenantal presence of God.

"But into the second went the high priest alone once every year, not without blood, which he offered for himself, and for the errors of the people: the Holy Ghost this signifying, that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest, while as the first tabernacle was yet standing: which was a figure for the time then present, in which were offered both gifts and sacrifices, that could not make him that did the service perfect, as pertaining to the conscience; which stood only in meats and drinks, and diverse washings, and carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation." Heb. 9:7-10

The "time of reformation" began at the cross. The priestly office and blood sacrifices of the old law were shadows, pointing to the work of Jesus upon the cross. Shadows end where the body begins. The body (substance of our redemption) is of Christ (Col. 2:17; Heb. 10:1). The atonement was complete by the time Christ entered heaven; he therefore sat down at the right hand of God, showing his work had been fulfilled (Heb. 10:11, 12). The Spirit was sent in Jesus' absence

to lead the apostles into all truth by the revelation of the gospel. When the Spirit's work was done, Christ would return to save his people from their persecutors:

"So Christ was offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation." Heb. 9:27

The context of this coming to save his people is made clear in chapter ten:

"For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise. For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him." Heb. 10:36-38

The saints needed patience precisely because they were under mounting pressure and persecution. However, the soon coming of Christ would bring times of refreshing when Jesus put his enemies beneath his feet.

This brief survey of Hebrews shows that it, too, mirrors the pattern and message of Peter's second gospel sermon:

- Christ had gone into heaven as our High Priest where he sat down at God's right hand, having accomplished our salvation;
- The time of reformation began at the cross and Pentecost in which the Spirit proclaimed the gospel of our salvation, proved the authority of the Apostles through signs and wonders, and grew the Kingdom.
- At the conclusion of the Spirit's work, Christ would return in wrath upon the Jews, giving relief to his beleaguered saints.

A last passage and then we conclude.

I Cor. 13 and that which is "Perfect"

"For we know in part and prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see through a glass darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known. And now abideth faith, hope, and charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity." I Cor. 13:10-13

This passage describes the temporary nature of the prophetic spirit and miraculous gifts. The age of the prophetic Spirit and miraculous gifts *dawned* with the patriarchs, *climbed* under Moses and the law, reached its *zenith* in Christ and the apostles, and *set* by the time the canon of the New Testament was perfect or complete. The Old Testament is the New Testament *concealed*; the New Testament is the Old Testament *revealed*. Under Moses, mankind was in the childhood and adolescence of its salvation; man saw God's redemptive purpose mirrored in a glass darkly. Although the law pointed to the work of Christ upon the cross, Moses put a "veil" upon his face, concealing the gospel beneath the types and shadows (II Cor. 3:12, 13). Not coincidentally, during the period of the law, the worshipper was banished -- excluded from the presence of God without veil while the guilt of sin remained. However, the veils separating man from God and concealing the mystery of the gospel are both taken away in Christ. We all with "open" unveiled face have now been legally and covenantally admitted into the presence of God within the veil (Holy of Holies) (II Cor. 3:18; Heb. 10:19, 20). Even so, when Paul wrote, the mystery was still as yet being revealed. Hence, the prophetic spirit and gifts remained, and Paul could say they still saw God's redemptive purpose in Christ through a glass darkly.

When we consider that when I Corinthians was written, very few other New Testament books and epistles existed, we can better appreciate what Paul meant. When Paul wrote I Corinthians, probably only Matthew, Mark, and Luke among the gospels existed; and among the epistles only Galatians, Ephesians, and I & II Thessalonians existed, and perhaps also I Timothy and Titus. Acts, Romans, Philippians, Colossians, II Timothy, Philemon, Hebrews, James, I & II Peter, I, II & III John, Jude and Revelation did not exist. When

that which is complete or perfect was come, Paul says he would then see "face to face" and "know even as I am also known" (I Cor. 13:12). A man is "known" (recognized) by his face and appearance. Once the Spirit's work of revelation was accomplished, the types and shadows of the law would be perfectly understood and the veil upon Moses' face thus stripped away, allowing men to behold the mystery of the gospel "face to face."

The point we want to come away with from this is that the "restitution (reconstitution) of all things" and the "time of reformation" have the same thing in view as "that which is perfect;" viz., the full revelation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. John "restored all things" by preaching repentance and baptism, establishing the *right way* for the people to walk. The Spirit reformed and reconstituted all things by the preaching of the apostles and revelation of the mystery of the gospel. According to Peter's sermon in Acts 3:19-26, once this was accomplished, Christ would return in wrath, bringing times of refreshing to the saints.

Acts 2	Acts 3	Hebrews 9	I Cor. 13
<p>Latter Days</p> <p>Outpouring of the Holy Ghost</p> <p>Day of the Lord (Acts 2:20)</p> <p>All that call upon the Lord shall be saved</p>	<p>"All the prophets...foretold these days" v. 24</p> <p>Times of the Restitution of all things</p> <p>Coming of Christ (Acts 3:21)</p> <p>Times of Refreshing</p>	<p>Time of Reformation</p> <p>Coming of Christ (Heb. 9:28)</p> <p>Will save those that look for him</p>	<p>"Now we see through a glass darkly"</p> <p>That which is perfect/complete</p>

If it's not in the Bible, it's not doctrine

My father's family were not church goers, but my mother's family emigrated from England and were Anglican (Episcopalian). Consequently, as a baby I underwent a form of ritual in the Episcopal Church in which a man in silken robes or vestments poured water on my forehead, recited words, and initiated me into the Episcopal Church. In theory, the ritual was supposedly Christian baptism, washing me from hereditary, imputed Adamic guilt (original sin), and granting me entrance into heaven if I died of a childhood disease.

Later, when I was perhaps 10 or 12, I went through the process of "confirmation" with a group of other children my age. As I recall, the process took several weeks or months, during which we had classes and watched movies about the life of Christ. Apparently, the movies and classes were intended to make sure we were properly instructed in the Faith.

Then came the big day when my class-mates and I were allowed to have our "first communion." I seem to recall receiving a gift Bible in token of the occasion. However, I don't recall ever reading it. Other than being able to take communion (the "Eucharist" as it is called in that church), and to become an acolyte (altar boy), nothing was different or had changed. I didn't feel different, act different, or believe different. Nothing was different.

How could it be otherwise? The whole process from infancy to confirmation was at the volition of someone else, not based upon personal conviction of my own. In a word, the whole thing was tragic farce. If baptism as a baby was effectual to make me a Christian, why did I need confirmation? If confirmation was necessary, wasn't this an admission my baptism as a baby accomplished nothing? Since the whole process had been at the volition and behest of my parents and the church machinery, how could it be said I was a true believer or had been converted at all? Certainly, these were troubling questions!

The truth of the matter is, well intended as it was, there was not one word about any of this in the Bible. Somewhere along the way it had been "made up" by men. History suggests the notion of infant baptism started with Augustine, who believed that "original sin" damned even babies. The famous quote often attributed to Calvin says "he doubted not there were infants a span long crawling about the floor of hell."

Of course, there is not a word about this in the Bible. Jesus and the apostles didn't baptize infants. Jesus said "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved" (Mk. 16:16). The first qualification for baptism is faith (Acts 8:37). Faith follows teaching and instruction (Matt. 28:19, 20). Babies do not have faith and cannot receive instruction, so they are not candidates for baptism.

More fundamentally, God does not impute sin to babies. "The soul that sinneth it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son; the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him" (Ezek. 18:20).

Proud parents like the fuss and attention given to their precious baby, so some churches, even though they do not believe babies need to be saved, have started to "dedicate" babies to God. That is, the parents pledge to raise them as Christians. Everyone feels good and the ritual is harmless, but, again, there is nothing of all this in the Bible.

That brings us full circle to the priest who poured water on my head when I was a baby. Since this ritual does not have the sanction of God, but was invented by men, it did nothing for me. If it did, then there should have been no need for my "confirmation." But as "confirmation" cannot take the place of individual conversion (faith and repentance), it fell to me when I came to an age of accountability to obey the gospel for myself by believing and being baptized (immersed).

Moral of the story: If it is not in the Bible, it is not doctrine.



Questions from our Readers

Question: Thanks Kurt for these articles. I thoroughly enjoy them. On one of your answers I do have a disagreement. You used Dan. 9:26 & 27 to state that Jesus (Messiah) was cut off in the middle of the week & stating that this meant his ministry was to be 3 1/2 years. From reading this passage I see this as stating that He would be cut off after 62 weeks. In verse 27, concerning the "midst of the week", it seems clear, to me anyway, that this is talking about the prince in verse 26 who would come to destroy the city and the temple and bring the abomination of desolation. This prince certainly cannot be Jesus. Just my thoughts on it.

Answer: Thanks for the kind and encouraging words. You certainly are not alone in understanding the pronoun "he" in v. 27 as referring to the "prince of the people to come" in v. 26. Whiston, who translated Josephus, was of that view, as are many others. I believe that the prince is Titus Caesar, who destroyed Jerusalem in AD 70 as Jesus prophesied in Matt. 23 & 24. However, I take the view, as my article shows, that in v. 27 the subject reverts to the Messiah again. This, too, is a well-attested view. The Pulpit Commentary (Henrickson) thus states:

"On the ordinary Christian interpretation, this applies to the crucifixion of our Lord, which took place, according to the received calculation, during the fourth year after his baptism by John, and the consequent opening of his ministry."

However, I do acknowledge that the point in Daniel can be taken either way.

Question: Do you hold to the belief that the Bible uses the "land" to represent the Hebrews and the "sea" to represent the Gentiles at times? I bring this up because in our Bible Study, in a discussion of sea in Revelation 21:1 (and I have your commentary "The Consummation of the Ages"), I stated that I thought it meant Gentiles and that there is no longer a divide between the Hebrew and the Gentiles.

Another person said that it represented death, and I never heard that before. Are there some more scriptures that identify the sea as gentiles or mass of people and the Hebrews as the land. Hope this makes sense and any help would be appreciated. Or just your thoughts on the subject of the sea referring to death.

Answer: Thanks for writing. I have never heard the "sea" described as a symbol for "death", but given the sea's appearance in chapter twenty as the place where certain of the dead were found, it is not wholly unreasonable. (Rev. 20:13). However, the idea that there is "new earth" but no sea (death) has serious problems to overcome. If there is no death in the new earth, then Universalism results. All men live forever, even the wicked, who are portrayed as part of the new earth (Rev. 21:27; 22:15).

The idea that the "sea" is a symbol for the Gentiles goes back to Daniel 7, where the prophet saw four Gentile world powers rise from the "Great Sea" (Mediterranean). Isaiah also speaks about the "abundance of the sea" being converted (Isa. 60:5). This conversion of the sea clearly sets the Jews over against the Gentiles. The "land" has connections with the promise to Abraham. So the natural dichotomy is between Jew/Gentiles and earth/sea. The sea beast in Rev. 13 is pagan Rome, and land beast is the Jewish power in Palestine. Or, so it seems to me.

Question: I hope this gets to you...you once invited me to ask questions and make comments. I have been a Preterist from the first time I heard that there was even such a thing!!!! I have been reading and reading. Came through Russell, Chilton, Preston, Stevens, and a few more, both full and partial. I have homed in on you as the most logical student of the Word. (Love the art of syllogisms). Of course, I haven't completed my vision of all the info, too much. But I want it yesterday...if you would be so kind as to direct me to articles and/or newsletters, etc., it would save me some time anyway.

I have been putting this inquiry off until I got some of my ducks in a row...but, the little dickens keep slipping out of line. "The Question" Who are the "they" that sit on the thrones, in the first line of Rev 20:4? I see the "they" and also (in some trans.) the use of, "and I saw those beheaded..." This would lead one to think that there are others included in the ruling and reigning with Christ, other than the beheaded, would it not? If "they" are the ones given authority to judge...that still implies two groups to me.

Answer: I agree that there are two groups in Rev. 20:4. The first group seated upon thrones seems to refer simply to the righteous dead in general. Men

who died in a saved condition from the garden forward, who were waiting the general resurrection. They are in Hades Paradise. I think the same group is potentially alluded to in chapter 5 as the 24 elders seated upon thrones. The other group are martyrs who died (were beheaded) during the persecution under Nero for not receiving the mark or worshipping his name, etc. They too are in Hades Paradise and live and reign with Christ pending the general resurrection, when they would be taken eternally to heaven. The souls under the altar in chapter six present a similar message, but seem to be those that died as martyrs in earlier ages and in the persecution that arose over Stephen.

Hope that helps. Write back if you want further clarification.

Question: Hey Kurt, hope this finds you well. Can you explain two words for me. They are found in 1st. Thessalonians 5:17, and they are clouds and air. Did Paul use aer #5594, instead of ouranos #3772, which means to breathe unconsciously. Does this mean doing things that are pleasing or displeasing to God, and he is talking about the spiritual realm as he was in Ephesians 2:2?

Also, on the word clouds. Could one compare these clouds (1st.Thess.5) with the cloud mentioned in Hebrews 12:1? Thanks

Answer: I don't think there is any mystical sense attached to the word "air" or "clouds." His only point, in my estimation, is that Christians are gathered unto the Lord one-by-one as they die. The Lord meets them in the air (spiritual realm) where they are unseen to eye of man (beyond the cloudy veil of this material realm), and are thus reunited with their loved ones that have gone on before. That's all I think he intends by the passage and words! Blessings.

Question: I know you are very busy and I thank you for your info. I'm just trying to learn the preterist view in order to share it with others when they question me, because this school makes more sense than any other that I have studied.

Why is it that when some things are fulfilled they are no longer valid... example: old covenant customs, statutes, etc., yet Jesus gave the apostles the Great Commission in the last days of the old covenant and said he would be with them until the end of the old covenant, and Paul says it was fulfilled in the last days of the old covenant. Why would this still be valid to us today if it was fulfilled in the last days?

(mission accomplished) How can we continue to fulfill the commission when it was already fulfilled? When did Jer.31:31-34 come into effect? It says that God would put His law **within** them and they shall **not** teach again each man his neighbor or his brother, saying, know the Lord, for they shall all know Him. I can't see this being fulfilled after we get to heaven. Thanks and have patience with me. Ha.

I know Jesus fulfilled the law, and it became obsolete. I was wondering why when some things are fulfilled they are no longer valid, yet, when other things were fulfilled they are still valid. I hope you can understand what I am trying to ask.

Answer: I suppose the answer lies in the intent with which things are instituted. The Old Testament laws and rituals were provisional in nature and were intended to point out our fallenness, our need for a blood sacrifice to obtain atonement, and thus prepare us to receive Christ. On the other hand, the charge to share the gospel with our fellow man will last as long as earth and mankind remain. Paul told Timothy to teach others who were capable of teaching others (II Tim. 2:2). The charge to appoint elders has the like object in view; viz, to instruct men in righteousness and salvation. So, some things pass because they were intended only to serve a provisional need or purpose; others remain because they are timeless. Blessings.

Question: Dear Kurt, Several years ago I read a lesson in a Bible study that I would like a Preterist's comment on. I posted this lesson on a couple of discussion boards but never got a response. I will present it below in an abbreviated form. Thanks,

1. Why did God create the earth? Isaiah 45:18
"...He formed it to be inhabited..."

2. With what type of people did He want the earth to be inhabited? Genesis 1:27, 28 "God created man in his own image" and said to Adam and Eve "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth." Also Proverbs 2:21 and Psalm 37:29

3. Does God change His stated purpose? Isaiah 55:11 Gist of verse, 'No, it shall be accomplished.'

4. Did Jesus indicate that the earth would continue to be inhabited? Matthew 5:5: Jesus said, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." Matthew 6:9-10: "Our Father, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Comment: Have these words at any time come true since Jesus said them? Would Jesus

instruct us to pray for God's will to be done on earth if there were no expectation that this prayer would be answered?

When will the meek inherit the earth? Psalm 37:9-11: "For the wicked shall be cut off; but those who wait for Yahweh shall possess the land [earth, KJV]. Yet a little while, and the wicked will be no more; though you look well at his place, he will not be there. But the meek shall possess the land [earth, KJV], and delight themselves in abundant prosperity." Comment: Has there ever been a time since these words were recorded that no wicked people were alive on earth? So these words must still have a future application.

Answer: You seem to be asking when, if ever, will the meek inherit the earth so as to be the *only* people in it. I do not feel that that is the intent of the saying or passage. Rather, I see it as a general principle, active at all times and in all generations. The wicked and lawless flourish briefly then die suddenly and their children after them similarly take no root, but the righteous and meek obtain the blessing of God and their seed after them. Thus, the wicked are cut off, but the meek inherit the land. There is no suggestion that there will ever be a time when the earth is free of evil, since man's fallen nature means that we are naturally alienated from God and disposed to evil. Hope that helps.

Question: Kurt, in your view, what is the "beloved city" of Rev 20:9? Thinking. Thx.

Answer: The "beloved city" is the church. The battle of God & Magog is the persecution under Nero and the Jews. The Jews and Romans, including others nations of the Roman Empire, lay siege to the church ("surround the beloved city") in the persecution under Nero, but God delivers them in the judgments of AD 66-70, including the destruction of Jerusalem and Roman civil wars.

Question: Who are the Martyrs of vs 4? Still thinking. Thx.

Answer: The martyrs are those who died under Nero. That is one of the oddities of the way the chapter is composed. The martyrs are displayed even before the persecution that causes their deaths is even described. Chronologically, the beast/dragon are loosed first, then the martyrs die, go to

Paradise/heaven, the beast/dragon are then destroyed, followed, finally, by the general resurrection.

Most people assume that the binding of the dragon and reign of the saints are simultaneous, but I think this wrong. The binding of the dragon precedes the reign of the martyrs. The dragon/beast is mentioned as being bound in the bottomless pit in chapter 11 and 17. But the loosing is in chapter 13 when the persecution under Nero begins. This is what John portrays in Rev. 20 by the battle of God & Magog. Thus, the 1000-year binding precedes the saints 1000-year reign. The dragon/beast is loosed; the martyrs die and go to Hades where they reign 1000 years, pending the resurrection from Hades in AD 70.

Question: OK. Or another way, there was a space of relative quiet (thousand year binding of Satan) between the persecution and the second coming. When I think of binding Satan I think of Job and the permission God gave. The binding is like preventing. Did the persecution subside following Nero's suicide? Do you see the fire coming down coordinate with the second coming? Still thinking. Thx.

Answer: Actually, the binding followed the persecution under Stephen (AD 34-38). The "1000-years" thus ran from AD 38 to AD 64 when Nero began his persecution. The dragon/beast went down to the pit/Tartarus in defeat when the persecution over Stephen collapsed. Similar language occurs in Ezekiel where various nations are described as going down to the pit at God's judgment by the Babylonians, Persians, etc. The dragon/beast received a mortal wound to the head when the persecution collapsed. It "healed" when Nero renewed the persecution 26 years later. Two 1000-year periods therefore emerge from the text; both symbols for Hades. The dragon went there (symbolically) in defeat when the persecution over Stephen fell apart; the martyrs went there actually when Nero put them to death. See Rev. 17 where the beast is described as "about to" ascend out of the pit. This signified the persecution was about to begin and marks the point when the dragon was also loosed.



Hormone Therapy and Women's Underwear Can't Change Wrong to Right

The minions of moral and intellectual bankruptcy and political correctness reached a new low this past week. Bradley Manning, the U.S. Army private convicted of leaking more than 700,000 military and State department documents to WikiLeaks, is giving army prison officials fits because they are not equipped to "treat" Manning's physiological illness. The day after sentencing, Manning announced that he felt female since childhood and wanted to live the rest of his life as a woman, undergo hormone treatment, and be called "Chelsea Elizabeth." Manning has been diagnosed with "gender identity disorder" or "gender dysphoria" (discontent).

There is no evidence that Manning's problems stem from a genetic or biological disorder. Most homosexuals suffer psychological problems relating to members of the same sex in a healthy manner. The average homosexual had a father who was actually or emotionally absent or abusive.

Since their problems are psychological and their behavior is learned, it follows that they can unlearn homosexual orientation and learn to relate in a healthy way to members of their sex. Thousands of homosexuals have left the homosexual lifestyle, married, and begun families. Many Christian ministries offer assistance to homosexuals attempting to leave the homosexual community and life.

Unfortunately, the atheistic mental health community does not attempt to lead homosexuals out of their unhealthy lifestyle, but to confirm them in it. Having diagnosed a psychological disorder, they proceed to "normalize" the disorder. Rather than "fix" the mind by teaching it to relate in a healthy way to members of their own sex, they change the body with hormones and surgery.

And the liberal media is only too eager to help out. Rather than refer to Manning by his biological identity as a male, the media has begun referring to Manning as a "she"—as if pretending Manning is a woman makes it so!

And what about the American taxpayer? We are expected to pay for Manning's sex change therapy. The Associated Press reports, "According to a complaint filed by Manning, she asked that a

treatment plan consider three types of measures: "real life experience," a regimen in which the person tries dressing and living in the new gender; hormone therapy, which changes some physical traits such as breast and hair growth; and sex reassignment surgery."

Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel has approved the Army's recommendation to keep the Army private in military custody and start a rudimentary level of gender treatment, including allowing Manning to wear woman's underwear. Presumably, at some point Manning would be transferred to a woman's prison facility.

In other words, Manning is a victim, and society has a duty to accommodate and confer affirmations upon him in his choice of moral abandonment.

In a world where there is no God, where men are merely the product of evolutionary chance, the sort of insanity we have been describing might be expected. After all, who is to say what is right and what is wrong? The fact that physical anatomy teaches us that male is not made to copulate with male is an inconvenient fact easily ignored in the name of moral self-determination.

But in a world made by the hand of a loving Creator, who created them male and female and ordained marriage for the propagation of the human race, homosexuality would be seen for what it is: a perversion of nature—a moral and psychological disorder to be repressed and repented of. Jesus speaks very clearly to this in the New Testament by his inspired word through the apostle Paul:

"For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompense of their error which was meet. And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient" (Rom. 1:26-28).

One can feel compassion for Manning, but cross-dressing and hormone treatment will only further his confusion and unhappiness. Healing comes through faith and repentance.

Will Christians Soon Seek Asylum in Russia?

I sometimes watch with interest in the on-line news show “RT” or “Russia Today.” After generations of peddling socialism and communist economic theory, Russia has become an evangelist of the classical libertarianism of the Founding Fathers, and now preaches free markets, private property, and limited government. Indeed, based upon the opinions and perspectives presented on RT, one gets the impression that the former evil empire of Communist Russia today is more open and American than America is, and that the U.S. is on the road to totalitarianism!

Whether Russia’s conversion to liberty and limited government is genuine, or simply a new propaganda line it believes will gain traction with the growing number of Tea Party Constitutionals in the U.S., is hard to say. However, there is no denying that freedom in the U.S. is in sharp decline: Homeland Security, TSA, NSA, Real ID, militarization of local police forces, repeal of Posse Comitatus forbidding use of military for civilian law enforcement, drone strikes, secret kill lists, NDAA and Indefinite Detention all point to a growing police state.

The reality is we have been building total government (the definition of totalitarianism) in the U.S. for almost 100 years. Several of the key planks of Karl Marx’s Communist Manifesto have become permanent and accepted part of American government and culture: The graduated income tax (second plank); inheritance taxes (third plank); central banking with fiat currency (fifth plank); government control of communications (sixth plank); equal obligation of women to work (eighth plank); government school systems and control of education (tenth plank).

America’s venture into “progressive” socialist economic theory began with the passage of the Federal Reserve Act, which created the Federal Reserve System, and passage of the Sixteenth Amendment authorizing the income tax, both in 1913. These are two of the most important planks in the communist manifesto, as they give government total control of the economy and individual earnings. These items of communist economic theory have been a part of the U.S. for so long, people don’t even question them. Yet, they are among the most

destructive powers government can possess, as the current state of the economy and national deficit bear witness. If you want to destroy a country, just create big government!

More ominous still is the government’s hostility toward conservative and liberty oriented groups, and characterization of them as potential terrorists. A 2009 Department of Homeland Security report entitled “Right-wing Extremism: Current Economic and Political Climate Fueling Resurgence in Radicalization and Recruitment” names those opposed to abortion, illegal immigration, increase in federal power, fire arms restrictions, and loss of American sovereignty as potential “right-wing” terrorists. Similarly, a 2009 report by the Missouri Information Analysis Center labeled those who have bumper stickers for third party candidates such as Ron Paul, Bob Barr, and Chuck Baldwin as suspicious individuals. Law enforcement officers were warned to be wary of individuals with “radical” ideologies based on Christianity, including illegal immigration, abortions, and federal taxes.

More recently, a 2012 Department of Homeland Security study says right-wing terrorists include those who “revere liberty” and are suspicious of centralized government (men like Thomas Jefferson and Samuel Adams!). In other words, anyone who is critical of government growth and ambition, or who insists that government obey the law, including the Constitution, is marked by the thought police as a potential opponent and terrorist.

Scripture says “where the Spirit of the Lord is there is liberty” (II Cor. 3:17). America’s loss of freedoms testifies to the nation’s moral decay. Government oppression and tyranny increase in direct proportion as Christianity declines. The Founding Fathers knew this lesson well and therefore sought to protect and encourage religion. In 1778, Congress passed the following resolution:

“Whereas true religion and good morals are the only solid foundations of public liberty and happiness: Resolved, that it be and is hereby earnestly recommended to the several States to take the most effectual measures for the encouragement thereof.”
The opposite spirit pervades our land and rulers today. Let us work and pray to restore godliness to government. Only then will America be blessed, and the home of the free and land of the brave.

A look at the mysterious Antichrist

The “antichrist” is a name many have heard, but few know the identity of. Let’s take a look at who this individual was.

The term “antichrist” comes from the book of 1st John, where the apostle states: “Little children, it is the last hour: and as ye have herd that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know it is the last hour” (1 Jn. 2:18).

The first thing we notice is that the 1st century church had been taught to expect a world figure whose animus toward Christ and the gospel merited the name “antichrist.” That the first generation of believers was taught to look for the antichrist is a pretty good indication he is a historical figure of the past, not present or future. John said it was the “last hour” (Gk. hora) two thousand years ago: common sense should tell us that this “hour” ran out long, long ago.

The first allusion to this individual is in the Old Testament book of Daniel, where the prophet saw in vision the succession of four world empires (Babylon, Mede-Persia, Greece, Rome) depicted as preternatural beasts, followed by the kingdom and reign of Christ. Shortly after the ascension of Christ (Dan. 7:13, 14), a “little horn” rose out of the fourth world empire (Rome) (Dan. 7:8). This world figure made war against the saints (persecuted them) for three and a half years (Dan. 7:21, 25), but was destroyed by the coming of Christ (Dan. 7:22). Following this, the church gained the ascendancy and the gospel conquered the known world (Dan. 7:27).

During the Reformation, this “little horn” was commonly thought to be the Papacy and Roman Catholic Church, but this view has been long discredited, and no serious scholars can be found who espouse it today. The better view is that the world figure Daniel foresaw was Nero Caesar. Nero was the first Roman Emperor to persecute the church; his persecution lasted three and a half years, or from approximately November A.D. 64 until his death June A.D. 68.

To help identify this world figure, Daniel provided certain clues: The little horn came up in the midst of ten other horns (Dan. 7:7, 8). These ten horns answer the ten toes of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream in Daniel two.

They are best understood as the ten senatorial provinces started by Augustus Caesar in A.D. 27, which became an identifying feature of the empire thereafter.

Daniel tells us further that there were three horns “plucked up” before the little horn, and that the little horn subdued three kings (Dan. 7:8, 24). “Plucking up” refers to the revolt of three provinces during the reign of Nero: Britain, Armenia, and Syria. “Subduing” three kings, refers to restoring these provinces to the empire (all three revolts were put down). These conclusions are confirmed by Jerome, who translated the Hebrew scripture into Latin about A.D. 390-405:

“These events were typically prefigured under Antiochus Epiphanes, so that this abominable king who persecuted God’s people foreshadows the Antichrist, who is to persecute the people of Christ. And so there are many of our viewpoint who think that Domitius Nero was the Antichrist because of his outstanding savagery and depravity” (Jerome, Commentary on Daniel at 11:30).

Additional facts pointing to Nero include the “number of the beast” (666) given by John in Revelation. The name of Nero in Hebrew is NRWN QSR. These figures equal 666: N = 50, R = 200, W = 6, N = 50, / Q = 100, S = 60, R = 200 = 666. But just to make sure his identity was not mistaken, John identifies him further, saying “there are seven kings: five are fallen, and one is, and the other is not yet come; and when he cometh, he must continue a short space” (Rev. 17:10). Five are fallen: Julius, Augustus, Tiberius, Claudius, and Caligula. One is Nero. The other is not yet come, and when he comes he will continue a short space: Galba, who reigned only seven months.

Before his crucifixion, Jesus told the disciples he would return in judgment upon that generation (Matt. 24:34; 27:64). This is the “coming” foretold by Daniel, which would witness the destruction of Nero Caesar, and was fulfilled in the world events of A.D. 68-70 in the destruction of Jerusalem by Rome and the “year of four emperors,” the series of civil wars that beset the Roman Empire following the death of Nero.

The next time someone tells you the antichrist is the Pope or an Islamic Imam, you can politely chuckle under your breath.

Origen was a Preterist

Kurt Simmons

In this article, we show that the earliest and greatest of the early Christian writers 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 of Clement, then Origen.¹

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

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

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 persons, then, refusing the labor 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 should be deemed for his

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

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 maintain, the former that there has already descended, the latter there will descend, upon the earth a certain God, or Son of God, who

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.

*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:

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

*“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, 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 unseasonably 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, anyone 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 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.”*

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.

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

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

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 style="text-align: center;"><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 style="text-align: center;"><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>

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

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

*“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 anyone 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 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

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.

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><i>“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 everyone 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.”</i></p>	<p><i>“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.”</i></p> <p><i>“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 anyone 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.”</i></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 naval 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.

Questions from our Readers

Q: couple of questions have come to mind that I was hoping you could help me with. I know God destroyed National Israel and the Jews back in 70AD.

What is your view on the current state of Israel and the existence of Jews? Is it just men attempting to create something that is named Israel? I know it has no significance to God as far as his "chosen people" but I can see people trying to use this as an argument of sorts.

A: The current state of Israel has no Biblical or prophetic significance. The whole thing grew out of the Balfour Declaration at the close of the First World War. The Ottoman Turks controlled Arabia and Palestine and Egypt at the outset of WWI. The British interest in the area was the Suez canal that gave them direct route to India, which was part of their empire. When Turkey took the side of Germany in that war, Britain felt it was advantageous to back independent Arab states and also an independent Jewish state on the boarder of Egypt, where the canal was. There is no Biblical significance to the nation of Jews today. They are antichrist and one must expect that heaven's divine wrath will overtake them again someday.

Secondly, the Kingdom of God is said to be a place where "neither do they learn war" and where peace reigns. Is it a spiritual context? We are at peace with people of other nations who claim Christ? And we do war within the spiritual kingdom? I'm struggling to understand how that is. Especially when people say "why then is there still war and hardships and hurting people, and Christians being oppressed?"

The prophecy about the mountain of the Lord's house being exalted above the hills and its members not learning war any more points is about the spiritual kingdom, the church. When the Jews settled Canaan, "learning war" was a punishment for sin and rebellion. "Only that the generations of the children of Israel might know, to teach them war, at the least such as before knew nothing thereof" Judges 3:2. Read, the passage in whole, and I think you'll see that "learning war" was a penalty of sin and disobedience. The prophecy of Isaiah (and Micah) seems to be that the history of successive invasion by neighboring nations would no longer be true. The church would enjoy unprecedented security as Christ guides history for the benefit of the gospel. This does not mean that we are immune to chastisement or that nations can apostatize and not suffer wrath. To the contrary. Even so, the general course of history from the gospel announcement until now is the advancement of the kingdom and dominion of the saints in earth.

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