

God's Gracious Covenant With Israel: The Foundation For Worldwide National Covenanting #19 (Pt. 7)

Revelation 20:4-6; Isaiah 2:2-4

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This Lord's Day we continue our examination of the Partial Preterist interpretive system as we consider Revelation 20:4-6. Partial Preterism (as already noted) is not a monolithic system (that has no diversity of interpretation by those who identify themselves as Partial Preterists). In examining the Partial Preterist interpretive system, I have sought to take elements of the system that seem most popularly to be held by those presently embracing this position.

By way of review, Partial Preterism may generally be identified as that eschatological system that views Revelation (especially chapters 6-19) as already fulfilled (in the first century around 70 a.d.). What distinguishes Partial Preterism from Full Preterism (which we shall consider in another sermon) is that Partial Preterism also teaches that there are elements of the book of Revelation that are yet future (especially portions of Revelation 20-22), while the Full Preterist teaches that there are no prophetic statements in Revelation (or in all of Scripture for that matter) that were not fulfilled around 70 a.d. In other words, the Partial Preterist yet awaits the loosing of Satan to deceive the nations of the world after the millennium, the Second Coming of Christ, the final resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked, the final judgment of both the righteous and the wicked, and the eternal state. Having already examined Partial Preterism and Romans 11, and Partial Preterism and Revelation 20:1-3, it remains for us today to examine Partial Preterism and Revelation 20:4-6.

I. Partial Preterism and Revelation 20:4-6. We will be considering two questions today.

A. First, who lives and reigns with Christ during the figurative millennium?

1. Partial Preterists begin the figurative millennium in the first century (whether in the ministry of Christ, at the ascension of Christ, or after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 a.d.) and understand “the first resurrection” (Revelation 20:5,6) to be a spiritual resurrection wherein the souls of those who were dead in their trespasses and sins come to life by the grace and power of God’s Spirit so that all those who are spiritually raised by Christ to embrace Him by faith alone live and reign spiritually with Christ in enjoying the benefits He has purchased for them both in heaven and on earth. Partial Preterists appeal to New Testament texts such as these: John 5:24-25; Ephesians 2:5-6. What all of these passages (and others like them) teach is that there is a real and present sense in which all who have trusted alone in Christ for their salvation do share in Christ’s resurrection life (whether in heaven or on earth, as the case may be). Through their covenantal union with Christ, all of Christ’s people who were given by the Father to Christ to save have died with Christ, have been raised with Christ, have ascended with Christ, and are seated in heaven with Christ. For Christ is their covenantal Head and Mediator. Christ accomplished everything for His elect so that what is His becomes theirs. I fully embrace this present aspect of our spiritual living and reigning with Christ. This is a glorious truth and blessing in which all justified believers share. I would not want to diminish or minimize that truth in the least. We do live and reign with Christ spiritually now by means of the Covenant of Grace secured for us by our Covenant Mediator, Christ.

2. However, is that the aspect of living and reigning with Christ that the Holy Spirit has in view in Revelation 20:4-6? I do not believe so for the following reasons.

a. First, note who the Holy Spirit states are raised to live and reign with Christ for a figurative thousand years: those who were martyred and persecuted for standing for the truth of Christ (Revelation 20:4). In other words, those in Revelation 20:4 who are raised in “the first resurrection” were already raised from spiritual death due to their transgressions and sins to spiritual life due to the regenerating power of God’s Spirit when they are viewed by John as having been martyred and persecuted for the Cause of Christ. It is AFTER they are martyred and persecuted and are already enjoying the blessings of heaven that they are said to be raised in “the first resurrection” (and not immediately after they are regenerated, believe in Christ, and pass from death into life). As we consider these martyrs who come to life in “the first resurrection” (in Revelation 20:4-6), we note that they are previously viewed as being in heaven (in Revelation 6:9-11), yet awaiting that time in which they would receive judgment from God. It is these very same martyrs who are in view in Revelation 6:9-11 that are said to come to life and to live and reign with Christ for a figurative thousand years (in Revelation 20:4). Obviously, since these martyrs were already enjoying the spiritual blessings in heaven (in Revelation 6:9-11), their coming to life and reigning with Christ for a figurative millennium of years (in Revelation 20:4) could not mean their spiritual regeneration or their beginning to enjoy the spiritual blessings in heaven, for they had already begun to enjoy all those spiritual blessings when they were regenerated on earth and when they entered into the glories of heaven. Thus, I submit that when we read that those who were martyred and persecuted for the Cause of Christ came to life to reign with Christ for a figurative thousand years, we are compelled to understand this as a resurrection that is yet future after the full number of martyrs and sufferers for Christ have been realized who will

figuratively come to life in future generations of believers (who as nations will come into the Visible Church of Christ) to victoriously reign upon earth over all their enemies that have sought to deceive and mislead the nations of the world from following Christ. Just as John the Baptist came in the spirit and power of Elijah, so generations of believers will come in the spirit and power of the martyrs to live and reign victoriously with Christ over their enemies for a figurative thousand years (note in each of the following passages how a figurative resurrection conveys the truth of a nation or nations that were viewed as dead and conquered by their enemies figuratively coming to life by the power of God to show forth God's victory over their enemies: Isaiah 26:15-19; Ezekiel 37:12-14; Hosea 6:1-3; Romans 11:15; Revelation 11:11-12,15). So the first reason why Revelation 20:4-6 cannot be a spiritual resurrection of regeneration or the present enjoying of spiritual blessings in heaven or on earth (as taught by Partial Preterists) is because these martyrs that are figuratively raised to live and reign with Christ have previously been regenerated and have already entered into the blessings of heaven before they are said to be raised in "the first resurrection" to live and reign with Christ for a figurative thousand years.

b. A second reason why Revelation 20:4-6 cannot be a spiritual resurrection of regeneration or the present enjoyment of spiritual blessings in heaven or on earth (as taught by Partial Preterists) is because the living and reigning with Christ here in Revelation 20:4-6 only continues for a figurative thousand years and will then end when the thousand years have expired. Just as Satan is bound so as to deceive the nations no more for a figurative thousand years (Revelation 20:3) and is loosed when the figurative thousand years have expired (Revelation 20:3,7), so likewise the figurative living and reigning of the martyrs is said to last for precisely the same period of time in which Satan is bound, namely, a thousand years (Revelation 20:4,6). I submit that this inspired language is not carelessly or casually used, but rather it is the intention of

the Holy Spirit to convey the period of time in which both simultaneously upon earth Satan is bound and in which the martyrs live and reign with Christ: a thousand years and no more. The very purpose for which Satan is bound is so that he cannot deceive the nations for a thousand years which simultaneously paves the way for “the first resurrection” which lasts for the same thousand years and no longer. Although there is a temporal limitation clearly stated in our text as to how long this living and reigning with Christ lasts (namely, a thousand years), the Partial Preterist exceeds this temporal boundary and states that those living and reigning with Christ continue to live and reign with Christ even after the thousand years have expired into “the little season” when Satan is loosed to deceive the nations of the world once again (Revelation 20:7-9). However, I submit that Revelation 20:4-6 cannot be used by the Partial Preterist to prove a living and reigning with Christ after the thousand years have expired. If the living and reigning with Christ in view here in Revelation 20:4-6 was in reality (as the Partial Preterists teaches) a spiritual resurrection of regeneration or the present enjoyment of spiritual blessings purchased by Christ in heaven or on earth, then I agree that such a living and reigning with Christ could not be limited to a thousand years. But that is the very reason why we must view the living and reigning with Christ here in Revelation 20:4-6 as something different from spiritual regeneration or the present enjoyment of spiritual blessing in Christ. Dear ones, this living and reigning with Christ only continues for a thousand years (according to the inspired text), and then like the binding of Satan, it comes to an end when the thousand years have expired. Dear ones, if this “first resurrection” in Revelation 20:4-6 lasts longer than a thousand years (as is taught by Partial Preterists), then I ask for evidence from the text itself to demonstrate that such is the case. For the text is clear that they live and reign with Christ “a thousand years” and no longer (Revelation 20:4,6). Thus, the second reason why Revelation 20:4-6 cannot be a spiritual regeneration or the present

enjoyment of spiritual blessings in heaven or on earth (as taught by Partial Preterists) is because the living and reigning with Christ here in Revelation 20:4-6 only continues for a figurative thousand years and will then end when the thousand years have expired.

c. A third reason why Revelation 20:4-6 cannot be a spiritual regeneration or the present enjoyment of spiritual blessings in heaven or on earth (as taught by Partial Preterists) is because the millennium (according to Revelation 20:4-6) sets Christians and Christ's beloved Church free for a figurative thousand years from state-sponsored and ecclesiastical-sponsored persecution of their enemies who would seek to slay them, persecute them, and destroy them. For the civil beast that sought to destroy the faithful witnesses of Jesus Christ, as well as the false prophet (i.e. the ecclesiastical beast) are cast into hell before the millennium begins (Revelation 19:20), and Satan is Divinely restrained from deceiving and misleading the nations into false religion and Divinely restrained from gathering the nations to come against Christ's beloved Church in order to destroy her for a thousand years, for it is only AFTER (and not during) the thousand years that Satan is released and permitted to raise up again the nations of the world against Christ's beloved Church in order to destroy her (Revelation 20:3,7-9). And yet Partial Preterists maintain (according to their interpretation of the millennium) that state-sponsored and ecclesiastical-sponsored persecution of Christ's faithful Church after the first century to the present time continue just as they did in the first century (and even increase in subsequent centuries). According to the Partial Preterist, it was the state-sponsored persecution of Nero and the ecclesiastical-sponsored persecution of the Jews that was dealt a deathly blow in Revelation 19:20. And then after that comes the Divine restraint of Satan for a figurative thousand years and the living and reigning of the faithful witnesses of Christ for a figurative thousand years, during which time (according to the Partial Preterist) the faithful Church of Christ endures more intensive and more extensive

persecution from the nations of the world and from the false religions of the world than it ever did in the first century. Dear ones, after the first century, there were several persecutions by Pagan Rome in seeking to eradicate the faithful Church of Christ (and that was the millennium according to the Partial Preterist), there were the persecutions of the faithful Church by Papal Rome, by Islam, and by other false religions (and that was the millennium according to the Partial Preterist). Dear ones, according to the Historic Postmillennial interpretation of Revelation chapters 19-20, it is that very state-sponsored and ecclesiastical-sponsored persecution of Christ's faithful Church that is destroyed in hell (in Revelation 19:20) and which Satan is Divinely restrained from perpetrating by deception for a figurative thousand years (in Revelation 20:1-3) and which he perpetrates in the nations by his deception once again when he is released after the thousand years have expired (Revelation 20:7-10). I submit, therefore, that the millennium proposed by the Partial Preterist is not the millennium of Revelation 20. It is not during the present age that Christ's faithful witnesses have been raised up to live and reign with Christ (as is taught in Revelation 20:4-6), but rather that millennium that is revealed in Revelation 20:4-6 will be characterized by peace, safety, and prosperity for the faithful Church of Christ from state-sponsored and ecclesiastical-sponsored persecution (Psalm 72:8-12; Isaiah 2:2-4 etc.)

B. The second question related to Partial Preterism and Revelation 20:4-6: Is the millennial reign in heaven or on earth?

1. Partial Preterists understand the living and reigning with Christ for a thousand years in Revelation 20:4 to be both in heaven (as exemplified by the those who were beheaded for the witness of Jesus) and on earth (as exemplified by those who refused to worship the beast or his image). Since those who are regenerated by the power of Christ and believe on Christ pass from condemnation into eternal life, whether

these live on earth or live in heaven, they enjoy the spiritual blessings of Christ's redemption. Again, I have no disagreement with these truths in and of themselves. As we have previously noted, many passages of Scripture could be cited to support the truth that whether in heaven or on earth, the redeemed of the Lord Jesus Christ have "all spiritual blessings in heavenly places" (Ephesians 1:3), and in that sense, we do presently live and reign with Christ, whether in heaven or on earth.

2. However, does Revelation 20:4 teach that "the first resurrection" in which the saints live and reign with Christ for a figurative thousand years occurs in both heaven and on earth? I certainly agree (with the Partial Preterist) that the living and reigning with Christ for a thousand years (which is "the first resurrection") occurs upon earth, but I disagree (with the Partial Preterist) that "the first resurrection" and the living and reigning with Christ for a thousand years (as taught in Revelation 20:4) occurs in heaven. Although our text states in Revelation 20:4 that John saw "**the souls** of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God", this does not imply (as we shall see) that "the first resurrection" occurs in heaven as well as on earth for a thousand years. Why?

a. First, because the very fact that the Divine restraint of Satan occurs on the earth (and not in heaven) for a thousand years, implies that "the first resurrection" and the living and reigning with Christ for a thousand years is also on the earth (and not in heaven). For it is while Satan is Divinely restrained from deceiving the nations for a thousand years (which clearly must occur on earth and not in heaven) that God prepares the way for the living and reigning with Christ for the same thousand years on earth (i.e. a CAUSE AND EFFECT RELATIONSHIP exists between the restraint of Satan for a thousand years on earth and the living and reigning with Christ for a thousand years on earth).

b. Second, because there is no recorded resurrection in Scripture ever occurring in heaven around the throne of God. Those in

heaven have already been spiritually resurrected by the power of God in their regeneration while they lived upon the earth. How can there be a resurrection in heaven of those who are already martyred for the Cause of Christ? How after already being in heaven and entering into the joy of heavenly blessings can martyrs be in any sense raised from the dead to live and reign with Christ in heaven for a thousand years? Revelation 20:4-6 makes it clear that that it is AFTER they are martyred and are already enjoying the blessings of heaven (and not before, cf. also Revelation 6:9-11) that they are raised from the dead in “the first resurrection” to live and reign with Christ for a thousand years. For John saw “the souls” of those who were martyred and persecuted and were already enjoying the blessings of heaven, and these who were martyred and persecuted came alive to live and reign with Christ for a thousand years (according to Revelation 20:4). I submit that such a resurrection in heaven (as is proposed by the Partial Preterist) cannot be supported Scripturally. However, this presents no problem to the Historic Postmillennialist who understands this to be a figurative resurrection of those who were martyred and persecuted for the Cause of Christ who will come alive in their spiritual descendants to live and reign victoriously for a figurative thousand years in the kingdoms of the world over their enemies who slew them and persecuted them. In such a case, this figurative resurrection (“the first resurrection”) occurs on the earth as the Gospel of Jesus Christ achieves an unparalleled success by the power of the Holy Spirit in bringing tribes, and peoples, and kingdoms and nations (and their political leaders) to Christ, and who will come alive in the spirit and power of the martyrs and faithful witnesses of Christ, and who will live and reign with Christ on earth for a figurative thousand years over their enemies (which enemies will be subdued for a figurative thousand years by the same Divine restraint that restrains Satan for a figurative thousand years).

As we conclude the sermon this Lord's Day, let us not forget the exhortation of Christ which He uttered to Christians that were faced with the temptation to take the easy road (the broad road) of compromise in order to avoid isolation, mockery, and persecution: "Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life" Revelation 2:10. The Lord does not say, "Be thou faithful only until it means you will lose family and friends because you will not celebrate Christmas, or only until it means you may suffer at work for keeping the Sabbath, or only until it means you will not be able to join with Churches that have backslidden from pure doctrine, worship and Church government. Dear ones, there will be many temptations in all of our lives to leave the narrow path of faithfulness to the truth of Christ to follow the broad path because it is easier and more comfortable to do so. We who struggle throughout our Christian life with various besetting sins are likewise tempted to take the path of least resistance in conforming to the standards of society around us that condones sexual immorality, sodomy, pornography, abortion, unfaithfulness to solemn covenants, disrespect and disobedience to parents, personal vengeance, greed, pride and conceit in exalting ourselves and trampling on others. Dear ones, whatever your battle, whatever the truths you are tempted to compromise, and whatever the love of this world you are tempted to embrace instead of loving Christ with all your heart, soul and mind, whatever the physical afflictions you may now suffer, endure them faithfully and remember those who faithfully endure suffering now will be rewarded later. You will have no regrets when you receive the crown of life. Beloved, "Be thou faithful unto death, and thou shalt receive the crown of life." The "well done" from the Lord will cause all the pain and suffering in this life to vanish forever. Amen.

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