

Focus on the Kingdom

Vol. 22 No. 8

Anthony Buzzard, editor

May, 2020

29th Theological Conference

A Gathering of Truth Seekers, A Forum for Truth Finders

RESCHEDULED to July 30-August 2, 2020

Calvin Center, Hampton, GA

Please see theologicalconference.org

The Pre-Tribulation Rapture: Truth or Trap?

None of us can claim to have escaped all of the many doctrinal traps which Satan lays for the unwary or uninstructed. I was for many years a “sincere” believer in the Trinity, but prolonged study changed everything. I was also a “sincere” Sabbath-keeper until I realized that Paul taught otherwise (Col. 2:16-17).

Many a sincere preacher has been trapped by the remarkable notion, now being widely preached in the United States, that seven years before Jesus comes to establish the Kingdom of God on earth, he will arrive silently and secretly to snatch away the faithful to heaven. This “pre-tribulation rapture” will leave airplanes pilotless and cause driverless cars to lurch off the highway.

Few know that leading theologians, amongst them leading exponents of pre-millennialism, have felt the need to write whole books in refutation of the fantastic theory of a second and third coming of Jesus. George Ladd’s *The Blessed Hope*, Alexander Reese’s *The Approaching Advent of Christ*, and Robert Gundry’s *The Church and the Tribulation* are classics in the field of eschatology (study of the end times) and should be examined by those seeking the truth of the Bible.

There is no text in the New Testament to support the idea that Jesus will come back in two stages separated by seven years. This teaching is unknown in theology before the 1830s, where it was launched by members of a small denomination called the Brethren, in England. Note carefully, however, that many leading Brethren disagreed with the new discovery and denounced the doctrine as unbiblical.

The verdict of Dr. Campbell Morgan, a leading London evangelical preacher, is significant. He had been taught to believe in a double second coming, once *for* the Church and then *with* the Church, but later examination of the theory changed his mind. A letter published in *Christianity Today* (Aug. 31st, 1959) tells the story:

“During a Boston pastorate, I was privileged to attend a course of lectures given by Dr. Morgan at Gordon College...At the end of one session, I ventured to ask:

‘After your long study and extensive exposition of the Bible, Dr. Morgan, do you find any scriptural warrant for the distinction which many Bible teachers draw between the second coming of the Lord *for* his own (the rapture), and the coming of the Lord *with* his own (the revelation) with a time period of 3½ or 7 years between these two events?’ ‘Emphatically not!’ Dr. Morgan replied. ‘I know that view well, for in the earlier years of my ministry I taught it and incorporated it in one of my books entitled *God’s Method with Man*. But further study so convinced me of the error of this teaching that I actually went to the personal expense of buying the plates of that book from my own publisher and destroying them. The idea of a separate and secret coming of Christ to remove the church prior to his coming in power and glory is a vagary of prophetic interpretation without any Biblical basis whatsoever.’”

Preachers of Campbell Morgan’s reputation are not prone to making such forceful statements unless there is massive evidence for doing so. The convictions of Alexander Reese in *The Approaching Advent of Christ* are no less clear. Both men felt the need to speak out against what they saw as a trick being played with the Bible, by which the resurrection of the dead and their transformation to immortality, along with the living Christians, was being moved to a point of time separate and distinct from the one second coming of Jesus in glory. Such a radical interference with the biblical program should not be allowed to gain ground amongst Bible students without a strong protest.

The carelessness of popular handling of the Bible is shown by the fact that many will quote the verse in 1 Thessalonians 5:2 about “a thief in the night” almost as if they have never bothered to look it up in its context. Inspection of the context will reveal immediately that this text says nothing about a secret coming of Jesus seven years before his public manifestation. The verse carries in fact the very opposite sense from the one given it by the pre-tribulation theory: The coming like a thief is supposed, according to pre-tribulationism, to affect the Church only and not the unbelieving world. But let us see what 1 Thessalonians 5:1-2 actually says: “Now brothers and sisters, about times and dates you have no need of anything to be written to you, for you know very well that the Day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While **people** are saying ‘Peace and safety!’ destruction will come upon **them** suddenly...and **they** will not escape.”

The coming of Christ like a thief, Paul says, will take the unbelieving world by surprise. It will not be a secret

event affecting the Church only: “But you, brothers and sisters, are not in darkness so that the day would surprise you like a thief” (1 Thess. 5:4). It is all perfectly straightforward. The thief-like coming will affect the non-Christians adversely because they will be unprepared. It is amazing that these simple verses have been used to invent a prior event — a secret coming 7 years earlier.

Equally remarkable is the fact that Paul had just previously described the catching up of the saints to meet Jesus in the sky, an event accompanied by a “loud command, with the voice of the archangel and the trumpet of God” (1 Thess. 4:16). It is in connection with this event that Paul goes on to explain that the world will be overtaken as by a thief. One has only to read the biblical text as one unit from 1 Thessalonians 4:13 to 5:6 to grasp Paul’s message. A person coming new to the Scriptures has no difficulty understanding it. Sadly, those who should be more experienced isolate verses to support the “two-stage coming.”

Pre-tribs are fond of quoting 1 Thessalonians 4:14 as a text to support a prior coming for the Church. The text however says that “God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep.” Jesus, in other words, is seen here coming with the Church, having raised the dead and assembled them with the surviving Christians, who go out to meet him at his coming. This will be at the seventh trumpet (Rev. 11:15-18).

Pre-tribs have invented the theory which divides the second coming (as well as churches). They speak of the “rapture” as an event not to be confused with the “revelation.” The latter, they say, is the public revelation of Jesus, but they expect to be raptured seven years earlier. What they are waiting for in hopeful anticipation is the rapture, not the revelation. But the New Testament Church was expecting the revelation. Once again the theory puts its adherents on a collision course with the Bible: “Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for the revelation of our lord Jesus Messiah” (1 Cor. 1:7).

The theory proposes that Christians will find relief from the tribulations of this life when Jesus comes secretly to take away his church 7 years before his arrival to punish the world. Paul taught nothing of the sort. He tells us when the Church will be relieved from tribulation: God will “give relief to you who are troubled and to us as well. This will happen **when** the lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in blazing fire, taking vengeance on those who do not know God” (2 Thess. 1:7-8). That is the one great future second coming of Jesus.

Just as Paul described the gathering of the faithful and associated this event with the glorious public arrival of Jesus (2 Thess. 2:1-2), so Jesus also gives us a simple outline of God’s program for the end of the present age:

“When you see the abomination which causes desolation, spoken of through the prophet Daniel,

standing in the holy place [“where **he** ought not to,” Mark 13:14] — let the reader understand — then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains...for then will be a great tribulation unequaled from the beginning of the world until now, and never to be equaled...Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened...And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory, and he will send his angels with a loud trumpet [cp. “the lord will come down from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and the trumpet of God,” 1 Thess. 4:16], and they will gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other” (Matt. 24:15-31).

Perhaps the most daring of all attempts to divide the Second Coming into two events separated by 7 years is the use of Matthew 24:40: “Then there will be two men in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one will be left.” But when is this? The previous verse (39) explains: it is when the Son of Man comes to a heedless world just as the flood overwhelmed the unbelieving civilization in Noah’s day. It is when Jesus comes to punish the world that “one is taken and one left.”

The separate “second coming” seven years early is revealed as an illusion. As Campbell Morgan said: “It is without any Biblical basis whatsoever.”

What else have you accepted as truth from the Bible without examining it carefully? The Scriptures warn us that belief in what is false will lead to our ruin (2 Thess. 2:11). A love of the truth in order to be saved is an essential Christian quality (2:10). We become alienated from God by ignorance (Eph. 4:18). Make Bible study your first priority. You cannot afford not to. ✧

A Word on Christian Pacifism from a Man Serving in the Military by Aaron Flahaut

Then David said to the Philistine, “You come to me with a sword, a spear, and a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have taunted” (1 Sam. 17:45).

Then Jesus said to him, “Put your sword back into its place; for all those who take up the sword will perish by the sword” (Matt. 26:52).

It was a hot August night in 2016, and I was on my first deployment in Turkey. I remember it was a Friday, and I had just taken some melatonin to help me drift off to sleep. I had been working a day shift for the previous week, but was more accustomed to working at night, yet as I lay my head on the pillow, I could feel that I would get a good night’s rest. As I drifted off, I could hear a faint sound in the distance. It was a whistle, soft but growling

louder. “WooOOO!” it went, and I thought to myself in my dozing state, “Hey, that kind of sounds like a mortar!” Then “CRASH! BOOM!” as the first launched rocket landed in our aircraft parking area. Then more whistles, followed by a succession of six or seven booms. What followed was loud gunfire in the distance and I was out of my bed, sheets thrown back, putting my shoes on.

I made my way out of my tent in a daze and went to our little bomb shelter outside the tent. As one of the few combatants in the camp, I would not normally take cover, but I hardly knew what I was doing. A friend of mine ran past me saying, “Hey Flahaut! Come check this out!” as he made his way to the gunfire.

I was still in a daze, but it dawned on me that I needed to get to our defense center, where all our guns were. I ran there as fast as I could. I remember at the time, as I became fully awake, that I felt calm, collected, and my thoughts came to me with a certain clarity. I was ready for this. I was ready to be attacked. I was ready for war. I was ready to kill.

I was a young Security Forces member in the United States Air Force, and as I had served in the military, what I had encountered of the world had chipped away at my more peaceful, spiritual side. Before I joined the Air Force, I was a pacifist. This was not only because some in the biblical unitarian movement that I am part of are pacifist, but because I truly believed that every person had goodness in them. And perhaps that is true, but being in the world, you realize there are truly evil people.

I think I began to realize the level of evil in the world on my first deployment. The enemy, ISIS, would frequently send us videos of them making little children murder car loads of people. This same group would attach bombs to balloons and send them throughout the region. I knew that they would behead Christians, and murder children in front of their families, or parents in front of their children. They were vile people. And seeing it firsthand made me feel more warlike. I felt that these men had to die, and why should it not be me?

The two verses at the beginning of this article are polar points to indicate how the people of God should be in their attitude to war — or what medieval theologians might have called “just war.” As Christians, it should be straightforward that we listen to Jesus, our King and ultimate example of how we should be as a people. Jesus told Peter to put away his sword, and that he should not live by the sword (Matt. 26:52). As ambassadors of God’s Kingdom, we are not to take part in worldly struggles and war, but rather in the war for the hearts and minds of men and women throughout the world (a cosmic battle: Eph. 6:12). If we die “by the sword,” this may tarnish our own testimony for the Kingdom that we seek to present to the world.

I myself knew all these things, and really struggled with them. But I also thought of David. David was essentially a warlord, yet he was called a man after God’s

own heart (see 1 Sam. 13:14). I felt it was okay to engage in war, and I viewed myself as a holy warrior who had the purpose of helping to exterminate evil men. Yet, over the years I have found a different path. I have returned more to my pacifistic roots, and this time with a deeper understanding of why we are to refrain from war, killing and bloodshed.

“But God said to me, ‘You shall not build a house for My name because you are a man of war and have shed blood’” (1 Chron. 28:3).

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the holy spirit” (Matt. 28:19).

“So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the holy spirit, it multiplied” (Acts 9:31).

It has always been striking that the Lord God would not allow David, a man He loved very much, to build His holy temple in Jerusalem. Why could he not do this? Because he was a “man of war” and had spilled blood. This verse echoed through my mind these past years, and I have repressed it in order to justify my service in the military as a combatant. I am armed with a gun, and thankfully the Lord has kept me from killing anyone, but I am most certainly in a position to do so.

That the Lord would not allow David to build His temple because of his history of violence is important for us as a church. Our mission is to spread the Gospel of the Kingdom and build up the spirit of the Kingdom of God, as it was being built up in “all Judea and Galilee and Samaria” (Acts 9:31). Yet, if David could not build the temple due to his warlike past, how can Christians engage in war and bloodshed, and at the same time build up the church?

None of this is to punish myself, or to condemn any Christian now serving as an armed member of the military. But it is something to consider. If we are to fulfill the commandments given by Jesus to build the church and “make disciples of all nations” (Matt. 28:19), as well as at the same time loving our neighbor and our enemies (see Mark 12:31 and Matt. 5:44), then we should do our best to refrain from any kind of violence as much as possible. This is something I have had to digest during my time in the military.

“You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’ But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, ‘Raca,’ is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell” (Matt. 5:21-22).

As Christians we must not only keep ourselves from the wars of this world and physical violence towards others, but also we must refrain from violence in thoughts

and words. This is harder, of course, but our stance of pacifism should carry over into our demeanor in every circumstance, especially with our brothers and sisters in the church. I will try not to veer too far from my original points, nor will I try to sound too “preachy,” but we, as loving Christians, should be careful with our words towards others, because a wrongly placed word or attitude can destroy another person, and can hinder our mission to build up the church.

Books can be written — and have been — about this subject, but I just want to pass this message along with the insight I have been allowed by the Lord through my time in the military. Violence is not a good foundation upon which to build our church or follow Jesus’ commandments of spreading the Gospel.

A final point, and that is that it does not matter what anyone has done in the past, because through Jesus we can find forgiveness and cancellation of our sins and transgressions, and through the Lord we can find healing. I have a non-Christian co-worker and friend who has been deployed numerous times and has admitted to me how he had to kick in doors in Afghanistan and Iraq. He has killed people and also had to watch his own friend get gunned down next to him. My friend has struggled with alcoholism for years, and many of the times I have gone to visit him, he was belligerently drunk. There was one time, however, when we were able to find a moment of clarity and healing for him. It was one night a couple years ago, and we were talking about the Gospel. He was very intoxicated, but in the midst of our discussion he stumbled out of the room and returned with an unopened Bible. He demanded I read it to him, and I did as he asked. After some time, I stopped reading and told him that Jesus loved him. My friend shook his head, but after a moment he began to cry, and we prayed together as I held him. He did not “convert” that night, but I know a seed was planted in his heart, and there are times when I can see it growing.

Needless to say, I will be leaving my combatant role in the military as soon as possible. For David, war and bloodshed kept him from being able to build the temple. But for us, through Jesus, our sins are forgiven, and we can accomplish any work that he gives us.¹ ✧

Satan, the Personal Devil

A contemporary of John Thomas, the founder of Christadelphianism, produced a controversial work in 1842 entitled *The Devil: A Biblical Exposition of the Truth Concerning That Old Serpent, the Devil and Satan, and a Refutation of the Beliefs Obtaining in the World Regarding Sin and its Source*. A critic of this book described it as “a labored attempt to dispose of the existence of the Devil, adding one more proof of the awful fact.”

Clearly there is a matter of the greatest importance at stake here. It is tragic that there should still be doubt and division amongst students of the Bible about what the Scriptures mean by *the Satan, the Adversary, the Devil, the Serpent, the Tempter*.

Alan Eyre’s informative book, *The Protesters*, traces the fascinating history of those who through the centuries have shared the “unorthodox” beliefs of the Christadelphians and groups such as the Church of God of the Abrahamic Faith. These tenets include the firm belief in the future millennial reign of Christ on earth, in the mortal soul, the sleep of the dead, in one God the Father, the rejection of the Trinity, and the refusal to take part in war. It is however very remarkable that Eyre was able to find only two references to the extraordinary belief that Satan in the Bible refers to the evil in human nature, and not to a personal being.

It is a fact that the believer in the non-personality of Satan must hold that belief against practically all of his brethren who share with him a rejection of traditional dogmas. The works of Justin Martyr and Irenaeus, spokesmen for the Church in the second century, show no Trinitarianism in the later, Chalcedonian sense (though they do not retain belief in the fully human Messiah of the New Testament); they contain no belief in the survival of the soul in heaven after death, nor in an eternal hell-fire of conscious suffering; they are also strongly pre-millenarian. The notion that Satan is not a personal being, however, is utterly foreign to their writings. This would mean that Irenaeus, the “grand pupil” of John the Apostle, through Polycarp, had gone badly astray on this major point: the proper understanding of Satan. Is such a proposition credible?

It will be our purpose to show that it is not only most unlikely on any reasonable view of the history of doctrine; but, more important, the non-personal Devil idea is based on an unjustifiable treatment of Scripture. It is a dangerous mistake, divisive in its effects, and liable to cast doubt on the credibility of its exponents as responsible teachers of the Bible. It is an error, however, which can be corrected, provided there is a willingness to lay aside tradition and examine the matter carefully, if necessary over an extended period of time.

There is no doubt that the popular medieval Devil, with pitchfork and stoking the fires of hell, is a caricature of the scriptural Devil. We must, however, guard against the natural tendency to jump from one extreme to another and attempt to do away with the personal Devil of the Bible. If that personal Devil exists, nothing will please him more than to have his existence denied by those exponents of Scripture who have seen through the mistaken teachings of “orthodoxy.”

¹ More on this subject in “Towards the Cessation of Church Suicide” at focusonthe kingdom.org

To say that the Trinity, in the popular sense, is not in the Bible is in fact only to say what numerous scholars admit. To proclaim the future millennial reign of Christ is to echo the opinions of the first 250 years of Christianity and of many noted theologians of all ages. To deny the immortality of the soul is to align oneself with scores of scriptural experts from all denominations. To deny that *the Satan* (i.e. Satan as a proper name) is an external being in Scripture, is, however, virtually unknown in the history of exegesis. Such a situation demands an explanation which will fit the facts of history as well as the facts of the Bible.

I have examined in detail scores of tracts written by Christadelphians and discussed the question at great length with their leading exponents. One very important fact emerges from these studies: the exponents of “non-personality” constantly blur the difference between *a satan* and *the Satan*. On this unfortunate blunder, the whole misunderstanding about the meaning of the word “Satan” is built. No one will deny that there are occurrences in the Old Testament of the term “satan” where a human adversary is intended, just as in the New Testament *diabolos* (devil) can occasionally refer to human accusers (1 Tim. 3:11). The question we are facing is what is meant by *the Satan* or *the Devil* in Job and Zechariah and some sixty times in the New Testament (not to mention numerous other references to the Satan under a different title: i.e. the Serpent, Rev. 12:9; 20:2, or Belial, 2 Cor. 6:15).

When Matthew introduces the terms “Kingdom of God” and “Kingdom of Heaven,” he assumes that his readers are familiar with these phrases. When he speaks of “**the Devil**” (Matt. 4:5) and “**the Tempter**” (v. 3), he uses a title well recognized by his readers. He nowhere speaks of *a tempter* or *an accuser*. If we realize the importance of the definite article “the” here, our subject can be clarified without further difficulty. The celebrated New Testament Greek authority, Dr. A.T. Robertson, states: “The [definite] article is never meaningless in Greek...The article is associated with gesture and aids in pointing out like an index finger...Whenever the Greek article occurs, the object is certainly definite.”² Thus “*a savior*” may be one of many saviors, but “*the Savior*” means the one and only Savior. An “*ecclesia*” is an assembly of people gathered for many different reasons (Acts 19:32, 39, 41). But no one would consider confusing this with *the Church*, meaning the totality of true believers. Similarly, *the Satan*, *the Devil*, *the Tempter* is that well-known Satan not requiring definition, because the writer knows that his readers understand who is meant. Will anyone deny that “*a book*” carries a very different meaning from “*the book*”?

It will be instructive to see how Christadelphian literature confuses the issue from the start: “The word Satan...simply means *an* adversary, as will be evident to the least instructed from the following instances of its use: ‘The Lord stirred up *an* adversary (a ‘satan’) unto Solomon, Hadad the Edomite’ (1 Kings 11:14). ‘Lest in battle he (David) be *an* adversary to us’ (1 Sam. 29:4)...There are New Testament instances, such as where Jesus addresses Peter as ‘Satan,’ when he opposes Christ’s submission to death (Matt. 16:23); where Pergamos, the headquarters of the enemies of truth is described as Satan’s seat (Rev. 2:13). Now if Satan means adversary we will read the Scriptures intelligently if we read adversary wherever we read Satan.”³

Unfortunately, however, Mr. Roberts has misled us by introducing the quotation from Revelation 2:13 without any indication of the fact that the text says that “**the Satan**” (not “*a satan*”) has his seat or throne there.⁴ *The Satan* is very different from the indefinite adversaries (“satans”) cited from the Old Testament.

The fundamental error is now established and the argument proceeds on the false premise: “The trial of Jesus is usually cited in opposition to our conclusions. The great feature of the narrative relied upon is the application of the word ‘devil’ to the tempter: but this proves nothing. If Judas could be *a* devil, and yet be a man, why may the tempter of Jesus not have been *a* man? His being called ‘devil’ proves nothing” (*Ibid.*, p. 19).

What we are not allowed to see is that the tempter of Jesus is not called *a* devil; he is called *the Devil* (Matt. 4:5, 8, etc.), that is, the one and only Devil we all know. The Christadelphian argument continues with the basic error entrenched: “‘Devil’ proves that it was one who busied himself to subvert Jesus from the path of obedience. *Who it was it is impossible to say because we are not informed*” (p. 19).

The average reader of the book of Job and of the temptation accounts in Matthew and Luke will find it very difficult to believe that the Satan who acted as the Tempter was an unknown *human being*, as Christadelphians propose. John Thomas and his followers, despite their invaluable work of biblical exposition on other subjects, have regrettably distorted the Scripture by doing away with the definite article. This we dare not do. *The Satan*, *the adversary*, is the external personality who tempted Jesus and Job. A tragic mistake was made by Roberts when he wrote, “Why may not the tempter of Jesus have been *a man*? His being called ‘devil’ proves nothing.” He was not, however, called ‘devil,’ but *the Devil*. Roberts has effaced the word “the” from the text, and by implication from the sixty or more occurrences of the Satan and the Devil throughout the New Testament.

² *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, p. 756.

³ Robert Roberts, *The Evil One*, p. 12.

⁴ In Greek “*tou satana*” and “*o satanas*”

When a group of Bible students arrive at the same conclusion but cannot agree amongst themselves on the arguments upon which the conclusion is built, there is usually cause for suspicion that the conclusion is faulty. They are accepting the creed because it has been dictated to them by their leader. They have very probably always believed the tenets of the group. They have not personally examined the arguments in detail, very often because they have had so little exposure to contrary points of view and have never been challenged. They may accept the excellent truths taught by their founder and in their enthusiasm swallow an error as part of “the package.” We are all prone to make this mistake. God requires of us a passionate desire to know the truth (2 Thess. 2:10); we must stand personally responsible before Him for everything we teach as “the oracles of God.”

The Christadelphians are unable to agree about the identity of the Tempter of Jesus. Most contemporary Christadelphians insist that Jesus was talking to himself in the wilderness. Apart from the difficulty which this raises about the sinlessness of our lord, it is arbitrary in the extreme to say that when Matthew reports that “the Tempter **came up to Jesus and spoke**” (Matt. 4:3), he meant that Jesus’ *own* mind produced twisted versions of the Scriptures. Matthew ends the description of the temptation by saying that “the Devil departed and angels **came up to him** to minister to him” (Matt. 4:11). On what principle of interpretation can we justify taking the words “came up to him” in two totally different senses in the same paragraph? Where in Scripture does human nature come up to a person and speak, and hold an extended conversation? It is most unnatural to think that Jesus invited himself to fall down before himself and worship himself! If the departure of Satan means the cessation of human nature’s temptation of Jesus, why may not the arrival of the angels be no more than the comfort of the spirit of God within him?! Can anyone fail to see that the treatment of Scripture which the Christadelphians propose in this passage involves the overthrow of the plain meaning of language?

Some Christadelphians in the past were rightly indignant that anyone could suggest that Jesus was tempted in the wilderness by his own mind. One Christadelphian wrote: “Some think that the devil in the case of the temptation was Christ’s own inclination; but this is untenable in view of the statement that ‘when the devil had ended all the temptations, he departed from him for a season.’ It is also untenable in view of the harmony that existed between the mind of Christ and the will of the Father (John 8:29). It might be added also that it is untenable because a tempter or devil, i.e. one who attempts to seduce to evil, is invariably a sinner (Matt. 18:7, RSV) whether it is oneself or another...[This is]

illustrated also in Mark 4:19: ‘The lusts of other things entering in choke the word.’ Lusts, then, that ‘enter in’ and ‘draw away’ (James 1:14), being not legitimate desires...are forbidden and therefore sin. Jesus was not thus ‘drawn away’ or inclined from the right and consequently *could not have been the devil or ‘satan’ in the case*. The devil was obviously a sinner who aimed to divert Jesus from the path of obedience and wrested the Scriptures (Ps. 91:11-12) in the attempt. So that those who believe that Jesus himself was the ‘devil’ and Satan [i.e. fellow Christadelphians] make him a sinner, their protestations notwithstanding.”⁵

It is remarkable that the numerous attempts of the Christadelphians to explain away the personal Devil nearly always avoid a detailed analysis of Matthew 4, the temptation story. It should be obvious to any reader of the passage (it has been clear to millions of readers over the ages!) that an external person tempted Jesus; and that external person was called the Tempter, the Devil, the Satan. The use of the article means only that it is “the Devil we all know about.” (To suggest, as some Christadelphians do, that it was the High Priest is a desperate evasion!) Scripture likewise speaks of “*the* Jesus” (with the definite article in Greek), that is, “the Jesus we all know.” If the Devil is well-known in Matthew’s mind, we must go to the Old Testament, the intertestamental Jewish literature, and to the rest of the early Christian literature of the New Testament to find out what was meant by the personal name “Satan.”

There is not a single reference in the Old Testament to Satan as an *internal* tempter. The Serpent in Genesis was clearly not Eve’s human nature! It was an *external* personality who spoke and reasoned with refined subtlety (cp. Rev. 12:9; 20:2). Likewise “satans” of the Old Testament (without the definite article “the”) who provided opposition were invariably *external* persons. It is therefore amazing that anyone would propose that the Devil of Matthew 4 (where the term occurs for the first time in the New Testament) is an *internal* “person,” i.e. Jesus’ human nature. The suggestion imposes an alien idea upon Scripture. Moreover, the “spiritualizing” method of exegesis necessary to obscure the fact that a *real person* came up to Jesus and spoke to him will, if applied elsewhere, render the whole biblical account meaningless. This very technique has been successfully used by the churches to do away with the millennial Kingdom of the Coming Age.

It is proper that we establish our understanding of biblical terms both from the evidence of Scripture as a whole and from sources current at the time of Jesus. We have ample evidence, for example, of “the Kingdom of God” referring to the future Messianic reign. We know from Matthew 4 that “*the* Devil” cannot be human nature;

⁵ *The “Devil” and “Satan” Scripturally Considered*, by E.J.R.M., p. 14-15.

no such idea is to be found in the Old Testament. Nor can the Devil be an unknown human being. The presence of the definite article, which the Christadelphians have been keen to drop, forbids us to understand the Satan as an *unknown* person. The fact that Matthew introduces the Satan as well known to his readers shows that we must connect him with the *external* Satan of Job, Zechariah 3, and 1 Chronicles 21:1 (where Hebrew scholars take the reference to be a proper name).

It would be hard indeed to think that the Satan who appears amongst the sons of God (whom the book of Job identifies as *angels*: Job 38:7) and can “walk around on the earth” (Job 1:7), call down fire from heaven, generate whirlwinds and inflict Job with boils, was a human being. Was *the* Satan appearing opposite the angel of the Lord a man? (Zech. 3). Where in these passages is there the faintest hint that the Satan means human nature? And in the New Testament, on what principle shall we say that the “prince of this world,” “the father of lies,” “the original Serpent,” “the god of this age,” “the roaring lion going around to destroy Christians,” “the one who shoots darts at us” is internal human nature? The idea that these are personifications and not a person is an invention created by liberal Protestants of the 19th century, who rejected the supernatural and whose philosophy did not allow them to admit a spiritual personality in opposition to God. But man is in opposition to God. Why not a fallen angel? It is the teaching of the New Testament that Satan is an angel of darkness. Paul describes him as transformed into an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14). A word study on the verb Paul used (“*metaschematizetai*”) will show that Satan changes his *outward* appearance to masquerade as an angel of light. He is by inward nature an angel, but he changes himself into an angel of light by an *external* transformation. Only an angel can become an angel of light by this means. Paul states the belief, common to his contemporaries, that Satan is an angel, albeit a fallen one. ✧

Comments

- “Wow! I just read the March newsletter. Matthew 19:23-29 — the interchangeable Kingdom of Heaven/Kingdom of God verses! I missed that so many times reading that text! Who can deny their similarities! That was eye-popping because how many believe they are different? Beautiful — Robin Todd’s article on the Gospel of Grace. It’s like Moses painting blood over our doorframes. Despite our shortcomings we are still saved by God’s grace. It is that grace also that allows us to enter the land. It is the same story and it is men speaking about this vision of that life inspired by the Holy Spirit. Thank you! I’ve told people it is the Gospel of Life!” — *Kansas*

- “After being a Jehovah’s Witness for decades and blinded to the truth about the Kingdom, I am feeling like the man who found a pearl of high value and rejoiced!

And sold everything to acquire it. I am indebted to the invaluable work that you are doing.” — *Australia*

- “I wanted to personally thank you for your years of dedication to the Gospel of the Kingdom of God. It’s because of your work that I am able to read the Scriptures with clarity. You are absolutely correct with the statement in your book, *The Coming Kingdom of the Messiah*: ‘The key to unlocking the Scriptures is to understand the prophecy and truth of the coming Kingdom.’ I stumbled across your teachings by looking at debates between Trinitarians and unitarians. So I have been reading your literature and comparing it with the Scripture and I’m absolutely amazed at the clarity of the truth of the Bible. You have challenged my understanding, and actually improved it. I also enjoy all of the videos on **21stcr.org**. They are a treasure trove of good information, which is rare in these precarious times. Your work is definitely not in vain for those who are truly seeking the true and Eternal Father and His Son Jesus Christ with perfect harmony of the holy Scripture. May His Kingdom come, on Earth as it is in Heaven! Amen!” — *Georgia*

- “I have not been to the Kingdom Hall since 2019. I’ve been meaning to write ever since. I was staying in a religion filled with fear that if I left, my friends and family who are inside will choose to shun me. The fact is I had been living like that for 3 years — sitting at meetings hearing doctrines that are unscriptural; finding no joy in the ministry because I felt guilty going out in the ministry. I could not go out any more so that stopped, but I was continuing to go to the meetings. It’s really sad that I allowed the fear of men to rule my life rather than trusting in Christ. I repented of that decision. Tonight is the annual memorial that Jehovah’s Witnesses celebrate. Of course there are no meetings being held currently, so they will be having it online. They have to make their own unleavened bread and provide wine only to PASS it and not to eat or drink of it. I cringe because I’ve done that my whole life. I repented of that too.” — *email*

- “I think that I am the ‘only’ (I’m sure I’m lonely) unitarian in Finland. I sure enjoy your writings and teachings and the others too, who teach about Biblical Unitarianism. It makes so much sense. I was born to a non-religious Lutheran family. The most in Finland are that way. I was later in a Pentecostal Church. During these years I’ve found Biblical unitarianism and been totally convinced about it. All I have is time and though it’s limited until the day I die, I try to absorb in this life as much as I can this first love to Christ that I had in the beginning and learn this wonderful new point of view that I now have to Him and to His and my Father God.” — *Finland*

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