

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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Who Now Rules?

For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit: By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison; Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water. The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ: Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him. (1 Peter 3:18–22, KJV 1900)

No doubt, based on both observation and the teaching of Scripture, Satan exercises certain influence and abilities in this present world. The extent to which he now rules is the central question of our study this week. The dominant populist view of our time among contemporary Christians holds that Jesus in some way is rather passive in terms of rulership over this world, and Satan is in charge. The idea seems to be that the outcome of the battle is uncertain, and Christians must fight long and hard to give Jesus the victory. This idea runs wholly contrary to the teachings of Scripture. In our study passage, Peter affirms that Jesus, now in heaven, "...is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him." Peter doesn't define "authorities and powers," but they are obviously in addition to angels. Given that Peter leads the list with angels, it seems logical to conclude that whatever he intended by these two terms, Peter has good, spiritual powers in mind. Other Scriptures refer to Satan and his various underlings, but Scripture never leaves us with the idea that Jesus is passive in His present rule, or that the outcome is in any way or any degree uncertain.

Which in his times he shall shew, who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords. (1 Timothy 6:15, KJV 1900)

Paul's language is as clear as Peter's. I love the simple clarity and precision of Scripture. False teachers must work hard to confuse such language. Paul makes clear that Jesus **is presently** "...the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords." He also indicates that this truth, though now ignored and contradicted by false teachers, shall at a future time be made obvious, "...in his times he shall shew." Paul does not put Jesus in passive terms for the present. He affirms that Jesus now is Potentate, King, and Lord, but he does teach that this rulership shall be fully manifest at some future time. Revelation 17:14 uses these

same terms for Jesus, and it also uses the present tense, "...for he is...."

So how do we explain the present evil in the world around us? While Scripture consistently teaches that Jesus presently rules, and that He has overcome Satan and his minions, it also teaches that Satan presently works long and hard to confuse and to deceive this world into believing his lie, that he, not God, is in charge. Two passages will suffice to show the predictable workings of Satan, the great deceiver.

In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them. (2 Corinthians 4:4 KJVP)

For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. (Ephesians 6:12, KJV 1900)

As you read these passages, do not overlook that Jesus taught that Satan is a liar from the beginning and the father of lies. Thus, when Satan promised Jesus all the kingdoms of the world if Jesus would fall down and worship him, he was lying. He didn't have those kingdoms to give, and Jesus knew the lie. In one of the wilderness temptation records, Satan even claims that these kingdoms had been given to him.

And the devil said unto him, All this power will I give thee, and the glory of them: for that is delivered unto me; and to whomsoever I will I give it. (Luke 4:6 KJVP)

This claim, too, was surely another lie. Thus, whenever we see Satan at work in this world, we should be on guard against his lies. He is most pleased when Christians give him credit for ruling in this present world. In some way, he does indeed

wield significant influence and pretend to be the "...god of this world," including his own array of "...rulers of the darkness of this world." A defeated foe may still work underground to create havoc against his adversary. For a number of years, I worked in an organization governed by an elected board. One of our board members was Dutch. During World War II, he was captured more than once by the Germans. Each time he escaped and returned to the Dutch underground, a group that rather effectively worked to weaken the Germans' rule over their country. Satan's role in this world is much like this underground disruption. Based on these two passages, Satan is capable of blinding and confusing God's children so as to hinder their belief in the Lord Jesus Christ. We also learn that the faithful believer is charged to fully equip himself so as to wage war against the evil one's influence. (Ephesians 6:10-20; Romans 6:12-16) God has provided His "Soldiers" with powerful weapons and effective defenses. We may engage the enemy with full assurance that our armor and weapons, as well as our Commander in Chief, shall not fail under the pressures of the battle.

Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. (John 12:31 KJVP; emphasis added)

Notice Jesus' words. "...now..." not at some distant future time, the prince of this world is brought down from his lofty position. His words should settle our questions. Contextually, Jesus spoke these words in the shadow of the cross, and made specific mention of His being lifted up in the next verse.

And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel. (Genesis 3:15, KJV 1900)

Here, in God's judgment against the serpent, the first prophecy in Scripture of Jesus' coming and victory over Satan puts two events together; 1) the serpent and his forces shall bruise the heel of the woman's seed, and 2) the woman's seed shall bruise the serpent's head. A bruised heel is quite painful, but not fatal. However, a blow to the head is fatal. The prophecy sets the stage for all future Bible prophecies of Jesus' coming and the outcome of His work. He wins, and He breaks the power of the serpent and shall eventually destroy him and his minions. In this prophecy, the two events are put in logical, if not chronological proximity, and, based on John 12:31, we may conclude that the two events occurred at Jesus' sufferings and death.

So how do we reconcile the passages that affirm Jesus' present and victorious rule with the passages that indicate Satan's influence at work? If Satan has been judged and cast out, and if Jesus presently rules, how do we explain the dark presence of sin and evil in this present world? The

"Problem of evil" presents a moral challenge to all world views. No doubt, we cannot answer the question fully, but we do have many Scriptures that give us more answers than we often acknowledge. Perhaps the deist view that God created the universe and walked away started, at least in part, as a way to explain this problem. On the opposite side of the philosophical dilemma, you have the occasional fatalist who in one way or another tries to defend the idea that God is in some way the cause, either actively and positively or passively and negatively, of everything that occurs. The deist view fails the Bible test in that God reveals Himself from the beginning as being actively involved and communicative with His people in this world. The fatalist view likewise fails the Bible test in that Scripture consistently teaches that God is not the cause of all things that occur.

For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints. (1 Corinthians 14:33 KJVP)

For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. (1 John 2:16 KJVP)

Regardless of the wresting of Scripture to give an appearance of support for the view, the fatalist view, in any of its subtle permutations, also requires that God contradict His moral character, effectively morphing Him into a diabolical and immoral cosmic puppeteer. The fact that Scripture teaches that God hears and answers the prayers of His people alone refutes the fatalist view, for, though Scripture does not teach that God answers every prayer or request from His people, it clearly does teach that He often does so, and in ways that would not have occurred had His people not prayed. The presence of "...give us this day our daily bread..." in the model prayer makes the point. We receive that bread only as we pray for it, and, if we fail to pray for it, we shall end that day spiritually hungry for what we failed to request and receive on that day. (2 Chronicles 7:14; Matthew 6:11; Luke 11:3)

Once we exclude these two extreme and opposite errant views of God's governance, we still face the question of evil. If we accept Scripture's consistent revelation of God as the Moral Governor of the universe that He created, a universe in which He created man, also a moral creature with the ability to know the difference between right and wrong, and a moral creature charged by God with the responsibility for his actions, we at least begin to address the question. The presence of sin in this world does not begin with God; it begins with sinful man and his wrong choices and actions. Although God created man upright and morally in harmony with Himself, He also created man with a will that had the ability to choose either right or wrong, though charged by God in every era of human existence, to obey that divine law. At each point of

decision along the history of humanity, man most often chooses the sinful path—and often resorts to one of the above extreme views in his attempt to blame God for his own sinful actions, beginning with the very first sinful choice.

And the man said, The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat. (Genesis 3:12 KJVP)

Years ago, I ran across a brief quip that sums up the twisted and abominable inclination of humanity to attempt to blame God for every sinful action that man commits, especially the undesired consequences that God in righteous judgment imposes upon man for those sinful actions.

I've sure learned a lot from ole Adam.
Concerning transgressions, he had 'em.
But instead of repenting,
He kept right on sinning,
And blamed it all on the madam.

At times, God intervenes in righteous judgment almost immediately at the time of man's sinful actions. At other times, He delays that judgment, but Scripture reveals that God shall, in the end, bring every sin before His righteous judgment.

For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil. (Ecclesiastes 12:14 KJVP)

New Testament passages that teach the certainty of God's global righteous judgment against all sinful humanity abound. In Matthew 25:31-46, Jesus made the point clearly that what the wicked did was visited against them and was the cause for their punishment. 2 Thessalonians 1:6-10 likewise makes the point that, though righteous, godly people now suffer tribulation at the hands of the wicked, the time shall come when those same godly people shall "...rest..." from tribulation as they witness God's righteous judgment against the wicked. No child of God should fear the Second Coming, but rather, like Paul's words to the Thessalonians, look forward to that day as a time of peaceful rest while they witness God's righteous judgment against the wicked.

Thus, we return to Peter's comforting words. Our Lord Jesus Christ presently rules over all "...*angels and authorities and powers.*" He need not consult with them before imposing His judgment. He does not need or seek their permission in anything that He righteously chooses to do. There is none to whom He answers or must give account for what He does. Whether He manifest that rule now or later is irrelevant to the fact that He does presently rule and shall surely bring the wicked before Him in righteous judgment against them for their wicked deeds. Remember Paul's words to Timothy, "...*in his times he shall*

shew." Though He presently rules, the form of that governance is not such that it is always obvious to us, but Paul reminds us that it is no less certain. While sincere, but deceived believers today live under Satan's lie that he, not God, is presently the ultimate ruler of this world, no one shall doubt on Judgment Day that God alone was—and is—in charge. He shall judge and sentence the wicked to their deserved punishment, and He shall once and for ever vindicate His righteous name of all the false charges made against Him, even as He ushers His beloved and redeemed people, covered by His blood from all their own sins, into His eternal presence and joyful glory. Eternity shall, in ways that we cannot imagine, be filled with celebration of Him, of His righteous victory against sin and sinners, and of His glorious saving grace for His beloved people.

Little Zion Primitive Baptist Church
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Worship service each Sunday
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.
Pastor