

God's Gracious Covenant With Israel:

The Foundation For Worldwide National Covenanting #23 (Pt. 11)

Revelation 17:9-11
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Rev. Greg L. Price

In the previous two sermons, we considered the Preterist's spurious claim that the Book of Revelation was written prior to the destruction of the temple and of Jerusalem in 70 a.d. (which temple and city the Preterist alleges to be standing in Revelation 11:1-2 when John penned the Revelation) and that the Book of Revelation was even written prior to the suicidal death of Nero in 68 a.d. (which emperor the Preterist alleges to be yet alive in Revelation 13:18 when John was given this prophecy). But there is even a greater degree of confidence (according to Preterists) found in the next piece of internal evidence to which they point in order to demonstrate their contention that the Book of Revelation was written prior to the death of Nero (in 68 a.d.): namely, Revelation 17:9-11. Once again, I do not want to imply that all Preterists would agree with what is herein represented to be the interpretive position of Preterists; however, what is represented is a popular interpretive view of many Preterists.

I. Preterism and Revelation 17:9-11.

A. The Preterist claims that Nero is identified as the sixth king that was presently reigning (in Revelation 17:10) when John penned the Book of Revelation. How does the Preterist come to this conclusion?

1. First, the Preterist goes to Revelation 17:9 which reads: "The seven heads are seven mountains, on which the woman sitteth." It is noted that a key to the identity of this beast is given at this point: this beast and its seven heads represent a city that is historically known to have seven mountains or seven hills. Historically, Rome was called "the city upon seven hills" or "the seven-hilled city" (by ancient writers), and a

feast with that name was celebrated each year in Rome (*Commentary Upon The Book Of The Revelation*, Durham, p.816). Preterists identify the harlot that sat upon the seven hills of Rome as covenant-breaking Jerusalem that is alleged to have been in alliance with Rome in persecuting Christians, but was subsequently destroyed by the Romans in 70 a.d. Thus, the Preterist affirms that this beast with seven heads has its capital in “the city of the seven hills”, namely, Rome.

2. Secondly, the Preterist goes to Revelation 17:10 where the angel gives a second meaning of the seven symbolic heads: “And there are [or “And they are”—GLP] 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.” According to the Preterist, the angel not only identifies the seven heads with “the city of the seven hills”, Rome, but also then identifies the seven heads with seven kings (which according to the Preterist are the first seven Roman Caesars).

a. Five of these seven kings or Caesars have already fallen i.e. died. They are Julius Caesar (the first head, or first Caesar), Augustus (the second Caesar), Tiberius (the third Caesar), Caligula (the fourth Caesar), and Claudius (the fifth Caesar).

b. The angel then states in Revelation 17:10 that “one is”, i.e. according to the Preterist one of these heads or Caesars is presently reigning, which in the succession of Roman Caesars would make Nero to be the sixth head or Caesar. Now I hope you can see that if the interpretation of these seven heads as the first seven Caesars is true, it would mean that John necessarily penned this prophetic vision from Christ while Nero was still living and ruling (i.e. before 68 a.d. when he died).

c. The angel then declares that the seventh head (which the Preterist interprets to be the seventh Caesar in succession) would only reign for “a short space” or a little while (Revelation 17:10). The Preterist interprets this head to be Galba (who only reigned for about

six months due to civil war that fell upon Rome when Nero killed himself which the Preterist believes to be signified by the deadly wound that the sixth head or Caesar received, Revelation 13:3). Now once again, the case presented by Preterists appears at first glance to be very strong in demonstrating that Nero was still living when John was given this inspired vision. But let us take a much closer look at the text to see if the interpretation of the Preterists really is consistent with and agreeable to Scripture and history.

B. Let us now identify two significant problems with the Preterist's interpretation of Revelation 17:9-11.

1. **Problem #1.** As we noted in the previous sermon, the Preterist identifies the first beast that came out of the sea (in Revelation 13) generically with the Roman Empire and particularly with Nero Caesar, the sixth head of that beast (in Revelation 17:10). Preterists claim the head of the beast that persecuted and made war against the saints (in Revelation 13:7) and the number of whose name equals 666 (in Revelation 13:18) is Nero Caesar. However, I would submit that the sixth head of the Roman beast cannot be Nero according to the inspired vision of Revelation. Let's lay this argument out step by step.

a. In Revelation 17:8, the angel tells the meaning of the beast with the seven heads and ten horns: "The beast that thou sawest was, and is not; and shall ascend out of the bottomless pit, and go into perdition: and they that dwell on the earth shall wonder, whose names were not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, when they behold the beast that was, and is not, and yet is."

(1) Here we see that the Roman beast with the seven heads is in some sense said to have lived ("The beast that thou sawest WAS"), and then not to have lived ("and IS NOT"), and then to have lived again ("and YET IS" or "shall ascend out of the bottomless pit"), and finally to "go into perdition" (hell). Now the Preterist

understands this to mean that the Roman beast under the first six heads (Caesars) reigned in imperial power (that according to the Preterist is the alleged period of “WAS”); but then the sixth head (Nero) was wounded to death with a sword (Revelation 13:3) which led the Roman Empire to the brink of ruin by way of a year of civil war in seeking to establish a settled Caesar during which Galba, the seventh head, reigned only for about six months, to be followed by Otho who reigned for three months, and Vitellius who reigned for three months (that according to the Preterist is the alleged period of “IS NOT”). Finally, there appeared Vespasian (an eighth head or Caesar) under whom the Roman Empire was revived and rescued from internal ruin and civil war (that according to the Preterist is the alleged period of “YET IS”).

(2) But, dear ones, I would have you carefully observe that it is during the very period of the revived eighth head (the period of “YET IS”) that the beast ascends out of the bottomless pit to persecute and make war against the saints for a prophetic (not literal) 42 months.

(a) Note the two sets of three expressions that are clearly intended to be parallel to one another in Revelation 17:8: [1] At the beginning of Revelation 17:8 it is written, the beast that WAS, and IS NOT, and **SHALL ASCEND OUT OF THE BOTTOMLESS PIT**, and **GO INTO PERDITION**; [2] At the end of Revelation 17:8 it is written, the beast that WAS, and IS NOT, and **YET IS**. I submit that the beast that **SHALL ASCEND OUT OF THE BOTTOMLESS PIT** in the third expression of the first set and the beast that **YET IS** in the third expression of the second set of Revelation 17:8 both refer to the revival of the Roman Empire under the eighth head of the beast which **GOES INTO PERDITION**.

(b) For this is made clear when we come to Revelation 17:11, and there we find a third parallel set of three expressions: the beast that WAS, and IS NOT, **EVEN HE IS THE EIGHTH**, and **GOETH INTO PERDITION**. In other words, the beast that **SHALL**

ASCEND OUT OF THE BOTTOMLESS and **GO INTO PERDITION** (in Revelation 17:8) and the beast that **YET IS** (in Revelation 17:8) is the same beast that **IS THE EIGHTH HEAD** and **GOES INTO PERDITION**. I hope you can see from these parallel statements that the Holy Spirit intends to show us that it is the revived EIGHTH HEAD of the Roman beast (which the Preterist alleges to be Vespasian) that SHALL ASCEND OUT OF THE BOTTOMLESS PIT (NOT the wounded sixth head of the Roman beast which the Preterist says represents Nero).

b. In Revelation 11:7, we find the reason why the revived EIGHTH HEAD of the Roman beast ASCENDS OUT OF THE BOTTOMLESS PIT: “And when they [the faithful witnesses of Christ—GLP] shall have finished their testimony, the beast that ASCENDETH OUT OF THE BOTTOMLESS PIT shall make war against them, and shall overcome them, and kill them.” Thus, dear ones, it is NOT the sixth head of the Preterists (Nero) that ascends out of the bottomless pit to make war against Christ’s faithful Church, but is rather the revived eighth head of the Preterists (Vespasian) that ascends out of the bottomless pit to make war and overcome the faithful Church of Christ.

c. In Revelation 13:7, it was given to the same revived and healed eighth head of the Preterists (Vespasian) “to make war with the saints, and to overcome them”, and NOT to the sixth head of the Preterists (Nero). How do we know that it is the revived and healed eighth head of the Roman beast (and NOT the sixth head as Preterists teach) that makes war against the saints and overcomes them in Revelation 13:7?

(1) Because it is the same war that is waged against the saints by the Roman beast that ascends out of the bottomless pit in Revelation 11:7 (who is the revived eighth head of Revelation 17:8,11).

(2) Because all the world did not wonder after the head that received “the deadly wound” (namely, the sixth head), but to the contrary, all the world wondered after the head that was revived and

healed from “the deadly wound” (namely, the eighth head) in Revelation 13:3 (which is likewise said concerning the head of the Roman beast that ascends out of the bottomless pit in Revelation 17:8 and who is called the eighth head in Revelation 17:11). And it is also this same revived and healed eighth head of the Roman beast (and NOT the sixth head that had “the deadly wound”) that all the world worshipped (in Revelation 13:4 and Revelation 13:12) and to whom was given to make war against the saints (in Revelation 13:7).

d. Thus, it should be clear that it is NOT the sixth head of the Preterists that received “the deadly wound” (namely, Nero) that made war against the saints (in Revelation 11:7 and Revelation 13:7), but is rather the eighth head of the Preterists that was revived and healed of “the deadly wound” (namely, Vespasian) that made war against the saints.

e. And here is the clincher. There is NO historical record of Vespasian making war against the faithful Church of Christ during his reign as Caesar. To the contrary, we have testimony that Vespasian did not persecute Christians as did both Nero and Domitian. In the words of the ancient Church historian, Eusebius, we read:

Domitian, having shown great cruelty toward many, and having unjustly put to death no small number of well-born and notable men at Rome, and having without cause exiled and confiscated the property of a great many other illustrious men, finally became a successor of Nero in his hatred and enmity toward God. He [Domitian—GLP] was in fact the second that stirred up a persecution against us [Christians—GLP], **although his father Vespasian had undertaken nothing prejudicial to us.**

And a footnote by the editor, Philip Schaaf, likewise confirms what Eusebius noted about Vespasian:

The fact that the Christians were not persecuted by Vespasian is abundantly confirmed by the absence of any tradition to the opposite effect. Compare Tertullian’s *Apol.* chap. 5, where the persecutions of Nero and Domitian are recorded (EUSEBIUS PAMPHILUS: CHURCH HISTORY, LIFE OF CONSTANTINE, ORATION IN PRAISE OF CONSTANTINE, Book 3, Chapter 17, “The Persecution under Domitian”, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf201.iii.viii.xvii.html>).

f. So what is the problem that Preterists have at this point? Preterists have completely misidentified who the seven heads upon the Roman beast are in Revelation 17:10 and who the eighth head of Revelation 17:8,11 is. For on the one hand, the apostle John writes nothing about persecution brought against Christians by the sixth head of the Roman beast in Revelation 17:10 (that received “the deadly wound” in Revelation 13:3). Whereas Preterists (contrary to the apostle John) erroneously claim the sixth head to be Nero, the first great persecutor of Christians, who they also spuriously identify with the beast that makes war against the saints in Revelation 11:7 and Revelation 13:7. On the other hand, the apostle John clearly identifies the revived and healed eighth head of the Roman beast in Revelation 17:8,11 as the blasphemous persecutor of the faithful Church (Revelation 13:7,12) who shall ascend from the bottomless pit (Revelation 11:7; Revelation 17:8) and go to perdition (Revelation 17:8,11). Whereas Preterists (contrary to the apostle John) erroneously claim the eighth head to be Vespasian, concerning whom there is no recorded persecution against Christians. Thus, the sixth head of Revelation 17:10 that “IS” ruling IS NOT and CANNOT BE Nero as the Preterist claims; and therefore, Revelation 17:10 cannot be used as internal evidence to confirm that John penned the Book of Revelation prior to the suicide of Nero (in 68 a.d.) and prior to the destruction of the Temple and of Jerusalem (in 70 a.d.)

2. **Problem #2.** The Preterist likewise faces another significant problem in dating the Book of Revelation before the death of Nero (in 68 a.d.) when we consider Revelation 17:12: “And the ten horns which thou sawest are ten kings, which have received no kingdom as yet; but receive power as kings one hour with the beast.” The Preterist interprets the ten horns of the beast to be the governors of ten imperial provinces of Rome who rule with him at the time of Nero. But this cannot be the case for the following reasons.

a. Revelation 17:12 clearly states that these ten kings had not yet received a kingdom to reign with the Roman beast at the time that John penned the Book of Revelation, but that they would in the future receive power as kings one hour to rule with the Roman beast. However, the ten imperial governors (of the Preterists) had already received power from Nero to rule as provincial governors over their kingdoms before he died (in 68 a.d.). Thus, the ten imperial governors at the time of Nero could not be the ten horns or kings that are in view here in Revelation 17:12, and Nero could not be the sixth head of the Roman beast that was reigning at that time because the ten imperial governors were ruling with him before he died (in 68 a.d.).

b. Furthermore, I submit that Nero is not reigning as Emperor in Revelation 17:12 (just as he is not reigning as Emperor in Revelation 17:10 as the wounded sixth head), for when the ten kings are given power to rule with the Roman beast, they do not rule with the wounded sixth head of the Roman beast (in Revelation 17:10; Revelation 13:3), but rather the ten kings rule with the revived and healed eighth head of the Roman beast. For the angel's explanation concerning the ten kings in Revelation 17:12 contextually follows the explanation of the revived Roman empire under the eighth head that is healed (Revelation 17:11). I would submit that these ten kings became western and central Europe and ruled in a revived Roman Empire when the eighth head was healed in the year 800 a.d. at which time Charlemagne was crowned Emperor of the revived Holy Roman Empire by Pope Leo III (we'll develop this more fully in the next sermon). Therefore, this prophecy concerning the ten kings in Revelation 17:12 could not have been realized during the reign of Nero because the fulfillment of the prophecy is linked in time not to the wounded sixth head (which the Preterists allege to be Nero), but is rather linked in time to the revived and healed eighth head (which Preterists claim came AFTER the death of Nero).

C. Having given biblical reasons in this sermon why Nero cannot be the sixth head of the Roman beast that “IS” ruling (in Revelation 17:10) at the time that John penned the book of Revelation, and therefore why Revelation 17:10 cannot be used as internal evidence to confirm a pre-68 a.d. date for the Book of Revelation (as claimed by Preterists), it is my intention to return to this same text in the next sermon in order to lay out for you what I believe the harlot to be (in Revelation 17:9) and why; what I believe the seven heads of the Roman beast to be (in Revelation 17:10) and why; what I believe the eighth head of the Roman beast to be (in Revelation 17:11) and why; and what I believe the ten horns of the Roman beast to be (in Revelation 17:12) and why.

As I close this Lord’s Day, let me say what is most likely very obvious to you: Bible study is hard work (and this is especially true of a prophetic Bible study). I certainly do not think I have attained nor do I pretend to have all of prophetic literature wired. However, when an eschatological interpretive system like Preterism is developed by a Jesuit priest in order to hide from us a true understanding as to the identity of the man of sin (in 2 Thessalonians 2:3—the papacy) and the harlot (in Revelation 17:4-6—the papal Church and her daughter Churches that walk in her unfaithful paths), we can expect that digging for the truth in these passages of Scripture is not going to be easy and simple and obvious to all at a first glance. The enemy of our souls wants to mislead us into believing that the Pope is really a godly man at heart with just a few errors that he promotes. Dear ones, Reformed Churches used to be united in this basic truth: the man of sin is the papacy. Consider such a declaration as found in the Westminster Confession of Faith (25:6):

There is no other head of the Church but the Lord Jesus Christ: nor can the Pope of Rome in any sense be head thereof; but is that Antichrist, that man of sin and son of perdition, that exalteth himself in the Church against Christ, and all that is called God.

Likewise Reformed Churches were for centuries united in their agreement that the Romish Church is that harlot Church (mentioned in Revelation 17 & 18) from which we must flee all entanglement with her in her corrupt doctrine, idolatrous worship, masses and holy days for saints to whom they pray (not only Christmas and Easter, but St. Valentine's Day and St. Patrick's Day as well), flee her tyranny over the conscience in forbidding men and women to marry, in commanding men and women to abstain from certain foods at certain times of the year, flee her traditions that have no sanction from the Holy Scripture and yet are placed alongside Scripture in authority. Dear ones, this papal Church may not presently be or recently have been drunk with blood of saints (at least not as openly as once was the case), but never forget this is the same harlot Church from which we are commanded to flee (Revelation 18:4), for when she cannot take the physical life of those who resist her and stand as faithful witnesses against her, she resorts to devilish deception in order to delude and confuse the masses into following her. That is why, dear ones, a study like this is so important. An interpretive system that redefines who the chief ambassadors of the devil are in deceiving and misleading the world by seduction, antiquity, or popularity is a system that must be exposed as erroneous and dangerous if we would preserve ourselves and our children for a thousand generations.

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