

Objection to Preterism: They Neither Marry or Are Given In Marriage

Don K. Preston

**They Neither Marry or Are Given in Marriage
A Look At Ronnie Wade's Rejection of Covenant Eschatology
by Don K. Preston D. Div.**

I am offering a series of articles in response to Ronnie Wade, a church of Christ minister who recently wrote an article condemning Covenant Eschatology as heretical. I contacted him inviting him to debate me on the question of the coming of the Lord. Wade refused, stating that such a debate would be "unprofitable."

In his article Wade set forth some objections to Covenant Eschatology. One of his objections, one of the most common objections to preterism, is that if Christ has come, people should not be dying, and people should not be marrying. This objection is based on Luke 20:34f and parallels.

Here is Wade's Objection:

"In Luke 20:34-36 Luke contrasts "this world" with "that world" following the resurrection of the dead. He concludes that while marriage occurs in the former, it does not in the latter. He further states that those who "are accounted worthy to attain to that world, and the resurrection of the dead,...die no more." Do people still marry today? Are people still dying? Of course. These are not the eternal days, for if they were, there would be no marrying or dying."

Response: Sounds impressive, right? The thing is that it fails, badly, to pay attention to that one critical factor called context. But, let's take a look at the issues lying behind the controversy with the Sadducees.

- 1) It seems that the Pharisees did believe in some sort of a physical resurrection.
- 2) The Sadducees did not believe that, in any way, shape or fashion.
- 3) It seems apparent that the Sadducees assumed that Jesus agreed with the Pharisees. And this is a critical point.
- 4) The Sadducees framed their question around the debates that they had been having with the Pharisees, assuming that there were only two possible choices in defining the resurrection. In other words, they believed that either the Pharisees were correct to argue

for a physical resurrection or, they were right to deny any resurrection of any kind, period. Operating on those presuppositions, they then approached Jesus.

5) At the heart of the debate and discussion of the resurrection was the nature of the kingdom itself. The Pharisees believed in a nationalistic, physical restoration of the glory of the kingdom of David. Military might, national Israel ruling supreme (see John 6:15). The Sadducees rejected any kind of after life and seemingly, any kind of kingdom as identified by the Pharisees. It was the nature of the kingdom that was at stake, not just the question of resurrection, although resurrection was the focus of the debate.

6) Both the Pharisees and Sadducees were arguing from the premise that the Law of Moses— which mandated the Levirate Marriage— would still be in force in “the age to come.” To miss this point is to miss something critical to the discussion.

7) What that meant, the Sadducees deducted, was the dilemma they posed about the seven brothers with the single woman and no children. If, they argued, the resurrection was to a life and kingdom still ruled by Torah and Temple, then the Pharisees had to explain the mess of the seven brothers and the one woman under Torah. And that was quite a dilemma to be sure!

8) So, Jesus addressed the heart of the issue, the nature of the kingdom. He said that in the age to come— the age of the resurrection— that Torah and Temple would not rule the kingdom, because there would be no marrying and giving in marriage.

9) It is critical to see at this juncture that Jesus was not talking about marriage generically considered, as an institution among men. He was saying that the Pharisaic ideas of a restored kingdom based on Torah— that included the Levirate marriage— would not be valid. Thus, the nature of the kingdom was radically different from what even the Pharisees—and therefore even the Sadducees— imagined. The “age to come” would not be dominated and identified by Torah! In one deft stroke, Jesus thus destroyed both the Pharisaic and Sadducean concepts!

What Wade is missing or ignoring is that Jesus’ entire discussion and that of the Sadducees and Pharisees was taken from considerations of what Torah said, and in Jesus’s case, the contrast between Torah and the age to come.

10) The fact, by the way, that Jesus did disagree with the Pharisees on the resurrection is borne out when we examine Paul on trial (Acts 23:7f; 24:13f). Clearly, Jesus and Paul taught the same resurrection doctrine. So, when Paul ostensibly sided with the Pharisees on the issue of resurrection— as Jesus ostensibly did in Luke— the Pharisees temporarily exulted. However, just 10-14 days later at the most, they wanted to kill Paul for his resurrection doctrine. See my article Paul On Trial on this website for more on this critical issue.

Now, why did the Pharisees suddenly want to kill Paul for his doctrine of the resurrection when just a few days earlier, they were patting him on the back because they thought he was teaching their view of resurrection? Likewise, if Jesus and the Pharisees agreed on the nature of the resurrection/kingdom, why is it that they ultimately wanted to kill Jesus for his views of the kingdom?

11) So, in the controversy of Luke 20 Jesus cut with a two-edged sword. He deftly destroyed the Sadducean view, and at the same time he destroyed the Pharisaic view by noting that the kingdom would not be ruled by Torah and Temple.

12) Notice now the added note given in Matthew: "But as touching the resurrection of the dead." (Mt. 22:31). Do you catch what has happened? It is in this verse that Jesus is actually directly addressing whether there would be a resurrection! What went before was a discussion of the nature of the kingdom and resurrection world, not the question of whether there would be a resurrection!!

13) And notice how Jesus proved the resurrection. He did not say that the saints would come out of the ground. He affirmed, "I am the God of Abraham...I am not the God of the dead, but of the living!" The Sadducees believe that Abraham was dead—and he was biologically— but, Jesus affirmed he was "alive" thoroughly dispelling the Sadducean concept of when you are dead, you are like Rover, dead all over.

So, it seems clear that both the Pharisees and Sadducees were wrong on the resurrection and the nature of the age to come. And, Wade and his brethren badly miss the entire point of the argument Jesus was making. Even N. T. Wright, who is not a preterist, recognized that the context of the discussion was life under Torah: "The point is that the Levirate law of marriage on which the Sadducee's apparent *reductio ad absurdum* is based, only applies when the people of JHWH are constituted by marriage and begetting. Jesus is announcing the dawn of a new age, the time of resurrection, in which this would not be the case" (N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, (Minneapolis, Fortress, 2005)402, n. 109).

Notice now that Wade conveniently ignores Jesus' reference to "this age" versus "the age to come." A question that Wade ignores, but which is critical, is: In what age was Jesus living? What was his "this age." More specifically, what was Jesus' "this age" in which the Levirate marriage defined the very nature of the kingdom? Clearly, it was not the Christian age. Yet, this indisputable fact nullifies Wade's objection, for it means that Jesus' discussion of life under "this age" is not a discussion of life and the kingdom in the Christian age.

The desired destination of the previous ages was the promised age to come, the age of the resurrection (Luke 20) wherein sons of God would be produced by resurrection (not by the marrying and giving in marriage as under the Torah). Repeatedly, Paul said believers were joined with Christ's death, burial and resurrection in baptism, raised to walk in newness of life, forgiven of sin, and thereby sons of God by faith (Galatians 3:26-28; Romans 6:3f;

Colossians 2:11-13). The “age to come” was breaking into the “this age” for those leaving “this age” behind and entering Christ.

Under Torah, children of God were produced by marrying and giving in marriage, through the normal experience of conjugal relations. That is how the kingdom was maintained and identified. However, in the “age to come” children of God would be produced by faith.

Notice also that in contrast to “this age” Jesus said in the age to come, they can never die. Once again, Wade and his companions fail to note the covenantal contrast. Torah was the ministration of death; it did not bring life, but only death (Romans 7; 2 Corinthians 3:6f; Galatians 3:20f). But Jesus, anticipating life “in him” and the New Covenant, said that if a person keeps his words, “he shall never die” (John 8:51).

In Christ and the New Covenant, “there is no condemnation” (Romans 8:1f) as opposed to existence under the Law– the “this Age”– where, “I was alive once, without the law, but the commandment came, sin revived, and I died” (Romans 7:7f). Notice that in Hebrews, Torah, and thus “this age” where death was the order of the day, was “nigh unto passing away”(Hebrews 8:13).

So, Wade’s failure– which is the common failure of most who approach Matthew 20 / Luke 20 and the discussion of marrying and giving in marriage– is a failure to honor the actual context of the passage. It approaches the text with a presupposition that Jesus is describing life under the Christian age, in anticipation of the end of the Christian age. This is a false presupposition and leads directly to a misunderstanding and misapplication of the text.

Jesus was contrasting life under Torah and contrasting that with life under the New Covenant– the Gospel age.

In Christ men do not now die! Children of God are not produced by marrying and giving in marriage, but by faith, being raised from death through the power of Christ’s death and resurrection. The “age to come” has arrived, and Wade’s objection is falsified.