



The Sword & The Plow

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Revelation and the Moral Condition of the World

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“From Mummius to Augustus the Roman city stands as the living mistress of a dead world, and from Augustus to Theodosius the mistress becomes as lifeless as her subjects.” Freeman’s *Essays*, ii, 330

The epoch which witnessed the early growth of Christianity was an epoch of which the horror and the degradation have rarely been equaled, and perhaps never exceeded, in the annals of mankind. Were we to form our sole estimate of it from the lurid picture of its wickedness, which St. Paul in more than one passage has painted with a few powerful strokes, we might suppose that we were judging it from too lofty a standpoint. We might be accused of throwing too dark

a shadow upon the crimes of Paganism, when we set it as a foil to the lustre of an ideal holiness. But even if St. Paul had never paused amid his sacred reasonings to affix his terrible brand upon the pride of Heathenism, there would still have been abundant proofs of the abnormal wickedness which accompanied the decadence of ancient civilization. They are stamped upon its coinage, cut on its gems, painted upon its chamber-walls, sown broadcast over the pages of its poets, satirists, and historians. “Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee, thou wicked servant!” Is there any age which stands so instantly condemned by the bare mention of its rulers as that which recalls the successive names of Tiberius, Gaius, Claudius, Nero,

Galba, Otho, and Vitellius, and which after a brief gleam of better examples under Vespasian and Titus, sank at last under the hideous tyranny of a Domitian? Is there any age of which the evil characteristics force themselves so instantaneously upon the mind as that of which we mainly learn the history and moral condition from the relics of Pompeii and Herculaneum, the satires of Persius and Juvenal, the epigrams of Martial, and the terrible records of Tacitus, Suetonius, and Dion Cassius? And yet even beneath this lowest deep, there is a lower deep; for not even on their dark pages are the depths of Satan so shamelessly laid bare to human gaze as they are in the sordid fictions of Petronius and of Apuleius. But to dwell upon the crimes and the retributive misery of that period is happily not my duty. I need but make a passing allusion to its enormous wealth; its unbounded self-indulgence; its coarse and tasteless luxury; its greedy avarice; its sense of insecurity and terror; its apathy, debauchery, and cruelty; its hopeless fatalism; its unspeakable sadness and weariness; its strange extravagances alike of infidelity and of superstition.

At the lowest extreme of the social scale were millions of slaves, without family, without religion, without possessions, who had no recognized rights, and towards whom none had any recognized duties, passing normally from a childhood of degradation to a manhood of hardship, and an old age of unpitied neglect. Only a little above the slaves stood the lower classes, who formed the vast majority of the freeborn inhabitants of the Roman Empire. They were, for the most part, beggars and idlers, familiar with the grossest indignities of an unscrupulous dependence. Despising a life of honest industry, they asked only for bread and the games of the Circus, and were ready to support any government, even the most despotic, if it would supply these needs. They spent their mornings in lounging about the Forum, or in dancing attendance at the levees of patrons, for a share in whose largesses they daily struggled. They spent their afternoons and evening in gossiping at the Public Baths, in listlessly enjoying the polluted plays of the theatre, or looking with fierce thrills of delighted horror at the bloody sports of the arena. At night, they crept up to their miserable garrets in the sixth and seventh stories of the huge *insulae* – the lodging-houses of the poorer quarters of London, there drifted all that was most wretched and vile. Their life, as it is described for us by their contemporaries, was largely made up of squalor, misery, and vice.

Immeasurably removed from these needy and greedy freemen, and living chiefly amid crowds of corrupted and obsequious slaves, stood the constantly diminishing throng of the wealthy and the noble. Every age in its decline has exhibited the spectacle of selfish luxury side by side with abject poverty; of –

“Wealth, a monster gorged

Mid starving populations:” –

But nowhere, and at no period, were these contrasts so startling as they were in Imperial Rome. There a whole population might be trembling lest they should be starved by the delay of Alexandrian corn-ship, while the upper classes were squandering a fortune at a single banquet, drinking out of myrrhine and jeweled vases worth hundreds of pounds, and feasting on the brains of peacocks and the tongues of nightingales. As a consequence disease was rife, men were short-lived, and even women became liable to gout. Over a large part of Italy, most of the freeborn population had to content themselves, even in winter, with a tunic, and the luxury of a toga was reserved only, by way of honour, to the corpse. Yet at this very time, the dress of Roman ladies displayed an unheard-of splendour. The elder Pliny tells us that he himself saw Lollia Paulina dressed for a betrothal feast in a robe entirely covered with pearls and emeralds, which had cost forty million sesterces, and which was known to be less costly than some of her other dresses. Gluttony, caprice, extravagance, ostentation, impurity, rioted in the heart of a society which knew of no other means by which to break the monotony of its weariness, or alleviate the anguish of its despair.

“On that hard Pagan world disgust

And secret loathing fell;

Deep weariness and sated lust

Made human life a hell.

In his cool hall, with haggard eyes,

The Roman noble lay;

He drove abroad in furious disguise

Along the Apian Way;

He made a feast, frank fierce and fast,

And crowned his hair with flowers-

No easier nor no quicker past

The impracticable hours.”

At the summit of the whole decaying system – necessary, yet detested – elevated indefinitely above the very highest, yet living in dread of the very lowest, oppressing a population which he terrified, and terrified by the population which he oppressed – was an Emperor, raised to the divinest pinnacle of autocracy, yet conscious that his life hung upon a thread; - an Emperor who, in the terrible phrase of Gibbon, was at once a priest, an atheist, and a god.

The general condition of society was such as might have been expected from the existence of these elements. The Romans had entered on a stage of fatal degeneracy from the first day of their close intercourse with Greece. Greece learnt from Rome her cold-blooded cruelty; Rome learnt from Greece her voluptuous corruption. Family life among the Romans had once been a sacred thing, and for 520 years divorce had been unknown among them. Under the Empire marriage had come to be regarded with disfavour and disdain. Women, as Seneca says, married in order to be divorced, and were divorced in order to marry; and noble Roman matrons counted the years not by the Consuls, but by their discarded or discarding husbands.

To have a family was regarded as a misfortune, because the childless were courted with extraordinary assiduity by crowds of fortune-hunters. When there were children in a family, their education was left to be begun under the tutelage of those slaves who were otherwise the most decrepit and useless, and was carried on, with results too fatally obvious, by supple, accomplished, and abandoned Greeklings. But indeed no system of education could have eradicated the influence of the domestic circle. No care could have prevented the sons and daughters of a wealthy family from catching the contagion of the vices of which they saw in their parents a constant and unblushing example.

Literature and art were infected with the prevalent degradation. Poetry sank in great measure into exaggerated satire, hollow declamation, or frivolous epigrams. Art was partly corrupted by the fondness for glare, expensiveness, and size, and partly sank into miserable triviality, or immoral prettinesses, such as those which decorated the walls of Pompeii in the first century, and the Parc aux Cerfs in the eighteenth. Greek statues of the days of Phidias were ruthlessly decapitated, that their heads might be replaced by the scowling or imbecile figures of a Gaius or a Claudius. Nero, professing to be a connoisseur, thought that he improved the Alexander of Lysimachus by gilding it from head to foot. Eloquence, deprived of every legitimate aim, and used almost solely for purposes of insincere display, was tempted to supply the lack of

genuine fire by sonorous euphony and theatrical affectation. A training in rhetoric was now understood to be a training in the art of emphasis and verbiage, which was rarely used for any loftier purpose than to make sycophancy plausible, or to embellish sophistry with speciousness. The drama, even in Horace's days, had degenerated into a vehicle for the exhibition of scenic splendour or ingenious machinery. Dignity, wit, pathos, were no longer expected on the stage, for the dramatist was eclipsed by the swordsman or the rope-dancer. The actors who absorbed the greatest part of popular favour were pantomimists, whose insolent prosperity was generally in direct proportion to the infamy of their character. And while the shamelessness of the theatre corrupted the purity of all classes from the earliest age, the hearts of the multitude were made hard as the nether millstone with brutal insensibility, by the fury of the circus, the atrocities of the amphitheatre, and the cruel orgies of the games. Augustus, in the document annexed to his will, mentioned that he had exhibited 8,000 gladiators and 3, 510 wild beasts. The old warlike spirit of the Romans was dead among the gilded youth of families in which distinction of any kind was certain to bring down upon its most prominent members the murderous suspicion of irresponsible despots. The spirit which has come led the Domitii and the Fabii "to drink delight of battle with their peers" on the plains of Gaul and in the forests of Germany, was now satiated by gazing on criminals fighting for dead life with bears and tigers, or upon bands of gladiators who hacked each other to pieces on the encrimsoned sand. The languid enervation of the delicate and dissolute aristocrat could only be amused by magnificence and stimulated by grossness or by blood. Thus the gracious illusions by which true Art has ever aimed at purging the passions of terror and pity, were extinguished by the realism of tragedies ignobly horrible, and comedies intolerably base. Two phrases sum up the characteristics of Roman civilization in the days of the Empire – heartless cruelty, and unfathomable corruption.

If there had been a refuge anywhere for the sentiments of outraged virtue and outraged humanity, we might have hoped to find it in the Senate, the members of which were heirs of so many noble and austere traditions. But – even in the days of Tiberius – the Senate, as Tacitus tells us, had rushed headlong into the most servile flattery, and this would not have been possible if its members had not been tainted by the prevalent deterioration. It was before the once grace and pure-minded Senators of Rome – the greatness of whose state was founded on the sanctity of family relationships – that the Censor Metellus had declared in A.U.C. 602, without one dissentient murmur, that marriage could only be regarded as an intolerable necessity. Before that same Senate, at an earlier period,

a leading Consular had not scrupled to assert that there was scarcely one among them all who had not ordered one or more of his own infant children to be exposed to death. In the hearing of that same Senate in A.D. 59, not long before St. Paul wrote his letter to Philemon, C. Cassius Longinus had gravely argued that the only security for the life of masters was to put into execution the sanguinary Silanian Law, which enacted that, if a master was murdered, every one of his slaves, however numerous, however notoriously innocent, should be indiscriminately massacred. It was the senators of Rome who thronged forth to meet with adoring congratulations the miserable youth who came to them with his hands reeking with the blood of matricide. They offered thanksgivings to the gods for his worst cruelties,[43] and obediently voted Divine honours to the dead infant, four months old, of the wife whom he afterwards killed with a brutal kick.

And what was the religion of a period which needed the sanctions and consolations of religion more deeply than any age since the world began? It is certain that the old Paganism was – except in country places – practically dead. The very fact that it was necessary to prop it up by the buttress of political interference shows how hollow and ruinous the structure of classic Polytheism had become. The decrees and reforms of Claudius were not likely to reassure the faith of an age which had witnessed in contemptuous silence, or with frantic adulation, the assumption by Gaius of the attributes of deity after deity, had tolerated his insults against their sublimest objects of worship, and encouraged his claim to a living apotheosis. The upper classes were “destitute of faith, yet terrified at skepticism.” They had long learned to treat the current mythology as a mass of worthless fables, scarcely amusing enough for even a school-boy’s laughter, but they were the ready dupes of every wandering quack who chose to assume the character of a *mathematicus* or a *mage*. Their official religion was a decrepit Theogony; their real religion was a vague and credulous fatalism, which disbelieved in the existence of the gods, or held with Epicurus that that they were careless of mankind. The mass of the populace either accorded to the old beliefs a nominal adherence which saved them the trouble of giving any thought to the matter, and reduced their creed and their morals to a survival of national habits; or else they plunged with eager curiosity into the crowd of foreign cults – among which a distorted Judaism took its place – such as made the Romans familiar with strange names like Sabazius and Anchialus, Agdistis, Isis, and the Syrian goddess. All men joined in the confession that “the oracles were dumb.” It hardly needed the wail of mingled lamentations as of departing deities which swept over the astonished crew of the vessel of Palodes

to assure the world that the reign of the gods of Hellas was over – that “Great Pan was dead.”

Such are the scenes which we must witness, such are the sentiments with which we must become familiar, the moment that we turn away our eyes from the spectacle of the little Christian churches, composed chiefly as yet of salves and artisans, who had been taught to imitate a Divine example of humility and sincerity, of purity and love. There were, indeed, a few among the Heathen who lived nobler lives and professed a purer ideal than the Pagans around them. Here and there in the ranks of the philosophers a Demetrius, a Musonius Rufus, and Epictetus; here and there among Senators and Helvidius Priscus, a Paetus Thrasea, a Barea Soranus; here and there among literary men a Seneca or a Persius – showed that virtue was not yet extinct. But the Stoicism on which they learned for support amid the terrors and temptations of that awful epoch utterly failed to provide a remedy against the universal degradation. It aimed at cherishing an insensibility which gave no real comfort, and for which it offered no adequate motive. It aimed at repressing the passions by a violence so unnatural that with them it also crushed some of the gentlest and most elevating emotions. Its self-satisfaction and exclusiveness repelled the gentlest and sweetest natures from its communion. It made a vice of compassion, which Christianity inculcated as a virtue; it cherished a haughtiness which Christianity discouraged as a sin. It was unfit for the task of ameliorating mankind, because it looked on human nature in its normal aspects with contemptuous disgust. Its marked characteristic was a despairing sadness, which became specially prominent in its most sincere adherents. Its favourite theme was the glorification of suicide, which wiser moralists had severally reprobated, but which many Stoics belauded as the one sure refuge against oppression and outrage. It was a philosophy which was indeed able to lacerate the heart with a righteous indignation against the crimes and follies of mankind, but which vainly strove to resist, and which scarcely even hoped to stem, the ever-swelling tide of vice and misery. For wretchedness it had no pity; on vice it looked with impotent disdain. Thrasea was regarded as an antique hero for waking out of the Senate-house during the discussion of some decree which involved a servility more than usually revolting. He gradually drove his few admirers to the conviction that, even for those who had every advantage of rank and wealth, nothing was possible but a life of crushing sorrow ended by a death of complete despair. St. Paul and St. Peter, on the other hand, were at the very same epoch teaching in the same city, to a few Jewish hucksters and a few Gentile slaves, a doctrine so full of hope and brightness that letters, written in a prison with torture and death in view, read like idylls of serene happiness and Paeans of

triumphant joy. The graves of these poor sufferers, hid from the public eye in the catacombs, were decorated with an art, rude indeed, yet so triumphant as to make their subterranean squalor radiant with emblems of all that is brightest and most poetic in the happiness of man. While the glimmering taper of the Stoics was burning pale, as though amid the vapours of a charnel-

house, the torch of Life upheld by the hands of the Tarsian tent-maker and the Galilean fisherman had flashed from Damascus to Antioch, from Antioch to Athens, from Athens to Corinth, from Corinth to Ephesus, from Ephesus to Rome.

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WHY AREN'T MURDEROUS COMMUNISTS CONDEMNED LIKE NAZIS ARE?

By WALTER E. WILLIAMS

In Europe, especially in Germany, hoisting a swastika-emblazoned Nazi flag is a crime. For decades after World War II, people have hunted down and sought punishment for Nazi murderers, who were responsible for the deaths of more than 20 million people.

Here's my question: Why are the horrors of Nazism so well-known and widely condemned, but not those of socialism and communism? What goes untaught — and possibly is covered up — is that socialist and communist ideas have produced the greatest evil in mankind's history.

You say, "Williams, what in the world are you talking about? Socialists, communists and their fellow travelers, such as the Wall Street Occupiers supported by our president, care about the little guy in his struggle for a fair shake! They're trying to promote social justice."

Let's look at some of the history of socialism and communism.

What's not appreciated is that Nazism is a form of socialism. In fact, the term Nazi stands for the National Socialist German Workers' Party. The unspeakable acts of Adolf Hitler's Nazis pale in comparison with the horrors committed by the communists in the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and the People's Republic of China.

Under The Red Flag

Between 1917 and 1987, Vladimir Lenin, Josef Stalin and their successors murdered and were otherwise responsible for the deaths of 62 million of their own people. Between 1949 and 1987, China's communists,

led by Mao Zedong and his successors, murdered and were otherwise responsible for the deaths of 76 million Chinese.

The most authoritative tally of history's most murderous regimes is documented on University of Hawaii Professor Rudolph J. Rummel's website, at <http://www.hawaii.edu/powerkills> and in his book, "Death by Government."

How much hunting down and punishment have there been for these communist murderers? To the contrary, it's acceptable both in Europe and in the U.S. to hoist and march under the former USSR's red flag emblazoned with a hammer and sickle.

Mao Zedong has been long admired by academics and leftists across our country, as they often marched around singing the praises of Mao and waving his little red book, "Quotations From Chairman Mao Tse-tung." President Obama's communications director, Anita Dunn, in her June 2009 commencement address to St. Andrews Episcopal High School at Washington National Cathedral, said Mao was one of her heroes.

Path To Genocide

Whether it's the academic community, the media elite, stalwarts of the Democratic Party or organizations such as the NAACP, the National Council of La Raza, Green for All, the Sierra Club and the Children's Defense Fund, there is a great tolerance for the ideas of socialism — a system that has caused more deaths and human misery than all other systems combined.

Today's leftists, socialists and progressives would bristle at the suggestion that their agenda differs little from those of Nazi, Soviet and Maoist mass murderers. One does not have to be in favor of death camps or

wars of conquest to be a tyrant. The only requirement is that one has to believe in the primacy of the state over individual rights.

The unspeakable horrors of Nazism didn't happen overnight. They were simply the end result of a long evolution of ideas leading to consolidation of power in central government in the quest for "social justice."

It was decent but misguided earlier generations of Germans — who would have cringed at the thought of genocide — who created the Trojan horse for Hitler's ascendancy. Today's Americans are similarly accepting the massive consolidation of power in Washington in the name of social justice.

If you don't believe it, just ask yourself: Which way are we headed tiny steps at a time — toward greater liberty or toward more government control over our lives?

Perhaps we think we're better people than the Germans who created the conditions that brought Hitler to power. I say, don't count on it.

Questions from our Readers

Q: Dear Mr. Simmons,

I first want to thank you for the newsletter each month. I especially like the "Questions from our Readers" page. This month you made some statements, in answer to a question that caused me to have a question. You said, The earth is not eternal, of course. It doubtless has an appointed end."

I would like to know what support you have for this belief. I find many Scriptures stating the very opposite.

I have enclosed a SASE for your convenience, and would appreciate hearing from you regarding this matter.

Thank you very much for your time.

Sharon, Michigan

A: Thank you for writing.

Most of Christendom supposes that the earth and cosmos will be destroyed in a sudden, fiery conflagration at Christ's second coming. Typically, this

belief is based upon passages like II Pet. 3:1-13, which seem to teach that the physical elements, together with their physical heavens and earth are to be destroyed. Preterists look at the language and precedent of the Old Testament prophets, and conclude that the language of II Pet. 3 is figurative and poetic. Peter mentions a new heavens and earth that would replace the then existing world, citing the prophet Isaiah. But Isaiah's prophecy is clearly tied to the destruction of the Jewish nation in A.D. 70. The new heavens and earth describe the world under the dominion of Christ, in which his people have the ascendancy over their enemies and persecutors (the Jews), who are destroyed by the wrath of Christ (Isa. 65, 66).

However, early into the Preterist movement, many of these passages were not clearly known or understood, and Preterists—convinced that the second coming was a first century event—were forced to deal with passages like II Pet. 3 without adequately understanding them. One group thus attempted to explain II Pet. 3 "covenantally," arguing that the "heavens and earth" referred to the Old Testament. This view thus required the idea that the Old Testament was somehow still valid until A.D. 70, even though the New Testament clearly teaches that the law ended at Christ's cross (Col. 2:14; Eph. 2:15; Rom. 10:4; Heb. 7:12; 9:1; 10:9). This view had the further problem that if the "heavens and earth" were symbols for the Old Testament, then the "new heavens and earth" would logically be the New Testament. But the New Testament started at the cross, not A.D. 70 (Heb. 9:17; cf. 7:12; 10:9). Also, the wicked are depicted by John as dwelling in the "new heavens and earth," which would imply some form of Universalism by which the wicked share in the grace of Christ (Rev. 21:1; 22:15). These and other considerations rule out the plausibility of the "covenantal" heavens and earth model.

Another way of dealing with "end of the world" passages was that first put forward by John Noe, in his book *Beyond the End Times: The Rest of the Greatest Story Ever Told* (Preterist Resources, 1999). In this book, John attempted to make short shrift of passages like II Pet. 3, but arguing that the earth and world will *never* end. John cited passages like Eph. 3:21 where Paul says, "Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen." Being able to throw a verse like this at futurists looking for the end of the physical earth and world was pretty handy and served well as a debating tactic for almost a decade. I myself used this argument and came to view the earth as essentially endless, at least as far as scripture was concerned. Many other Preterists adopted this same view, until it now is probably a "majority view" among Preterists. It has also become a favorite of old earth creationists, who believe in evolution and

need an old earth to sustain their position. An old earth that is eternal is friendlier to their paradigm than a young earth that is temporary. In any event, I have since discarded the view that the earth is eternal as scripturally indefensible.

First, none of the passages cited for the alleged eternity of the earth actually teach the earth is eternal. The Greek of Eph. 3:21 shows that the physical cosmos is not in view at all: “To him be glory in the assembly in Christ Jesus, to all the generations of the age of the ages, Amen.” The Greek word for the physical cosmos is kosmos, which does not occur in this passage. The word used by Paul is “aionos” (“age”). It is true that sometimes the word “age” can have the meaning of “this world” or “this life,” as in the parable of the Sower where the “cares of this world” (Gk. aionos) choke the word and it becomes unfruitful (Matt. 13:22). That is not the meaning in Eph. 3:21. Paul is not making a doctrinal statement about the eternity of the earth. He is merely proclaiming glory to God in the church by Jesus Christ throughout all generations, as long as time endures (“until the age of the ages”). Citing this passage as proof the world will last forever is erroneous.

Another passage frequently cited is Eccl. 1:4: “One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh: but the earth abideth forever.” This passage clearly is not intended as a dogmatic statement about the eternity of the earth. In saying the earth abideth forever, Solomon is merely speaking relatively, contrasting the temporal and ephemeral nature of man vis-à-vis the earth which endures from one generation to the next. Again, to cite this passage as teaching the earth is eternal would be a misuse of scripture.

Second, there are numerous passages that expressly state the earth is perishable and will pass away.

Gen. 8:22 – While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease.

Following the flood, God promised Noah that he would not again curse the ground or smite everything living as he had with a flood. However, in saying “while the earth remaineth” the passage implies that the earth will not remain forever.

Matt. 24:35 – Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.

Advocates of the “covenantal” heavens and earth view have attempted to put a mystical interpretation upon this passage, arguing that the heavens and earth here refer to the Jerusalem temple. Don Preston thus says “I contend that in Matthew 24:35 Jesus was referring to the Old Covenant Temple as heaven and earth” (*The Elements Shall Melt With Fervent Heat*, (2006, Ardmore, OK), p. 164). But this is an abuse of scripture. The clear intent of the passage is express the certainty of Christ’s word, which he says is more abiding than the physical heavens and earth. The passage is therefore parabolic, not prophetic. Jesus makes a similar remark in Lk. 16:17: “It is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than one tittle of the law to fail.” The “covenantal” heavens and earth crowd attempts to give a mystical interpretation to the companion text of this passage in Matt. 5:17, 18, saying the law would be valid until heaven and earth passed away, which they say occurred in A.D. 70 based upon II Pet. 3. To argue that the law was valid until A.D. 70 is to say nothing happened at the cross and is to remove redemption from Calvary in A.D. 33 to the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. I have attempted to get Don Preston and William Bell to debate this issue, but all efforts have failed. But, again, this is an abuse of scripture. The clear intent of the passage is to set up the certainty of God’s word by comparing it to the heavens and earth, by saying it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than God’s word to fail. There is no mystical meaning intended in the passage.

But to return to the point at hand, Matt. 24:35 clearly states that heaven and earth will pass away. The earth is not eternal.

Heb. 1:10-12 – And, Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thy hands: They shall perish; but thou remainest; and they all shall wax old as doth a garment; and as vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed: but thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail.”

The Psalmist, who is here quoted by the writer of Hebrews, is comparing the perishable nature of the physical creation to the eternity of God. The very heaven and earth “shall perish,” but God is everlasting and his years will never fail.

These and other passages all teach that the earth is not eternal. I hope that helps.

Eusebius on the Destruction of Jerusalem

Excerpts from Eusebius' Ecclesiastical History,

Bk. III, Chpt. V-VIII

Chapter V. The Last Siege of the Jews After Christ.

1 After Nero had held the power thirteen years, and Galba and Otho had ruled a year and six months, Vespasian, who had become distinguished in the campaigns against the Jews, was proclaimed sovereign in Judea and received the title of Emperor from the armies there. Setting out immediately, therefore, for Rome, he entrusted the conduct of the war against the Jews to his son Titus.

2 For the Jews after the ascension of our Saviour, in addition to their crime against him, had been devising as many plots as they could against his apostles. First Stephen was stoned to death by them, and after him James, the son of Zebedee and the brother of John, was beheaded, and finally James, the first that had obtained the episcopal seat in Jerusalem after the ascension of our Saviour, died in the manner already described. But the rest of the apostles, who had been incessantly plotted against with a view to their destruction, and had been driven out of the land of Judea, went unto all nations to preach the Gospel, relying upon the power of Christ, who had said to them, "Go ye and make disciples of all the nations in my name."

3 But the people of the church in Jerusalem had been commanded by a revelation, vouchsafed to approved men there before the war, to leave the city and to dwell in a certain town of Perea called Pella. And when those that believed in Christ had come thither from Jerusalem, then, as if the royal city of the Jews and the whole land of Judea were entirely destitute of holy men, the judgment of God at length overtook those who had committed such outrages against Christ and his apostles, and totally destroyed that generation of impious men.

4 But the number of calamities which everywhere fell upon the nation at that time; the extreme misfortunes to which the inhabitants of Judea were especially subjected, the thousands of men, as well as women and children, that perished by the sword, by famine, and by other forms of death innumerable,-all these things, as well as the many great sieges which were carried on

against the cities of Judea, and the excessive sufferings endured by those that fled to Jerusalem itself, as to a city of perfect safety, and finally the general course of the whole war, as well as its particular occurrences in detail, and how at last the abomination of desolation, proclaimed by the prophets, stood in the very temple of God, so celebrated of old, the temple which was now awaiting its total and final destruction by fire,- all these things any one that wishes may find accurately described in the history written by Josephus.

5 But it is necessary to state that this writer records that the multitude of those who were assembled from all Judea at the time of the Passover, to the number of three million souls, were shut up in Jerusalem "as in a prison," to use his own words.

6 For it was right that in the very days in which they had inflicted suffering upon the Saviour and the Benefactor of all, the Christ of God, that in those days, shut up "as in a prison," they should meet with destruction at the hands of divine justice.

7 But passing by the particular calamities which they suffered from the attempts made upon them by the sword and by other means, I think it necessary to relate only the misfortunes which the famine caused, that those who read this work may have some means of knowing that God was not long in executing vengeance upon them for their wickedness against the Christ of God.

Chapter VI. The Famine Which Oppressed Them.

1 Taking the fifth book of the History of Josephus again in our hands, let us go through the tragedy of events which then occurred.

2 "For the wealthy," he says, "it was equally dangerous to remain. For under pretense that they were going to desert men were put to death for their wealth. The madness of the seditions increased with the famine and both the miseries were inflamed more and more day by day.

3 Nowhere was food to be seen; but, bursting into the houses men searched them thoroughly, and whenever they found anything to eat they tormented the owners on the ground that they had denied that they had anything; but if they found nothing, they tortured them on the ground that they had more carefully concealed it.

4 The proof of their having or not having food was found in the bodies of the poor wretches. Those of them who were still in good condition they assumed were well supplied with food, while those who were already wasted away they passed by, for it seemed absurd to slay those who were on the point of perishing for want.

5 Many, indeed, secretly sold their possessions for one measure of wheat, if they belonged to the wealthier class, of barley if they were poorer. Then shutting themselves up in the innermost parts of their houses, some ate the grain uncooked on account of their terrible want, while others baked it according as necessity and fear dictated.

6 Nowhere were tables set, but, snatching the yet uncooked food from the fire, they tore it in pieces. Wretched was the fare, and a lamentable spectacle it was to see the more powerful secure an abundance while the weaker mourned.

7 Of all evils, indeed, famine is the worst, and it destroys nothing so effectively as shame. For that which under other circumstances is worthy of respect, in the midst of famine is despised. Thus women snatched the food from the very mouths of their husbands and children, from their fathers, and what was most pitiable of all, mothers from their babes, And while their dearest ones were wasting away in their arms, they Were not ashamed to take away froth them the last drops that supported life.

8 And even while they were eating thus they did not remain undiscovered. But everywhere the rioters appeared, to rob them even of these portions of food. For whenever they saw a house shut up, they regarded it as a sign that those inside were taking food. And immediately bursting open the doors they rushed in and seized what they were eating, almost forcing it out of their very throats.

9 Old men who clung to their food were beaten, and if the women concealed it in their hands, their hair was torn for so doing. There was pity neither for gray hairs nor for infants, but, taking up the babes that clung to their morsels of food, they dashed them to the ground. But to those that anticipated their entrance and

swallowed what they were about to seize, they were still more cruel, just as if they had been wronged by them.

10 And they, devised the most terrible modes of torture to discover food, stopping up the privy passages of the poor wretches with bitter herbs, and piercing their seats with sharp rods. And men suffered things horrible even to hear of, for the sake of compelling them to confess to the possession of one loaf of bread, or in order that they might be made to disclose a single drachm of barley which they had concealed. But the tormentors themselves did not suffer hunger.

11 Their conduct might indeed have seemed less barbarous if they had been driven to it by necessity; but they did it for the sake of exercising their madness and of providing sustenance for themselves for days to come.

12 And when any one crept out of the city by night as far as the outposts of the Romans to collect wild herbs and grass, they went to meet him; and when he thought he had already escaped the enemy, they seized what he had brought with him, and even though oftentimes the man would entreat them, and, calling upon the most awful name of God, adjure them to give him a portion of what he had obtained at the risk of his life, they would give him nothing back. Indeed, it was fortunate if the one that was plundered was not also slain."

13 To this account Josephus, after relating other things, adds the following: "The possibility of going out of the city being brought to an end, all hope of safety for the Jews was cut off. And the famine increased and devoured the people by houses and families. And the rooms were filled with dead women and children, the lanes of the city with the corpses of old men.

14 Children and youths, swollen with the famine, wandered about the market-places like shadows, and fell down wherever the death agony overtook them. The sick were not strong enough to bury even their own relatives, and those who had the strength hesitated because of the multitude of the dead and the uncertainty as to their own fate. Many, indeed, died while they were burying others, and many betook themselves to their graves before death came upon them.

15 There was neither weeping nor lamentation under these misfortunes; but the famine stifled the natural affections. Those that were dying a lingering death looked with dry eyes upon those that had gone to their rest before them. Deep silence and death-laden night encircled the city.

16 But the robbers were more terrible than these miseries; for they broke open the houses, which were now mere sepulchers, robbed the dead and stripped the covering from their bodies, and went away with a laugh. They tried the points of their swords in the dead bodies, and some that were lying on the ground still alive they thrust through in order to test their weapons. But those that prayed that they would use their right hand and their sword upon them, they contemptuously left to be destroyed by the famine. Every one of these died with eyes fixed upon the temple; and they left the seditious alive.

17 These at first gave orders that the dead should be buried out of the public treasury, for they could not endure the stench. But afterward, when they were not able to do this, they threw the bodies from the walls into the trenches.

18 And as Titus went around and saw the trenches filled with the dead, and the thick blood oozing out of the putrid bodies, he groaned aloud, and, raising his hands, called God to witness that this was not his doing."

19 After speaking of some other things, Josephus proceeds as follows: "I cannot hesitate to declare what my feelings compel me to. I suppose, if the Romans had longer delayed in coming against these guilty wretches, the city would have been swallowed up by a chasm, or overwhelmed with a flood, or struck with such thunderbolts as destroyed Sodom. For it had brought forth a generation of men much more godless than were those that suffered such punishment. By their madness indeed was the whole people brought to destruction."

20 And in the sixth book he writes as follows: "Of those that perished by famine in the city the number was countless, and the miseries they underwent unspeakable. For if so much as the shadow of food appeared in any house, there was war, and the dearest friends engaged in hand-to-hand conflict with one another, and snatched from each other the most wretched supports of life.

21 Nor would they believe that even the dying were without food; but the robbers would search them while they were expiring, lest any one should feign death while concealing food in his bosom. With mouths gaping for want of food, they stumbled and staggered along like mad dogs, and beat the doors as if they were drunk, and in their impotence they would rush into the same houses twice or thrice in one hour.

22 Necessity compelled them to eat anything they could find, and they gathered and devoured things that were not fit even for the filthiest of irrational beasts. Finally they did not abstain even from their girdles and shoes, and they stripped the hides off their shields and devoured them. Some used even wisps of old hay for food, and others gathered stubble and sold the smallest weight of it for four Attic drachmae.

23 "But why should I speak of the shamelessness which was displayed during the famine toward inanimate things? For I am going to relate a fact such as is recorded neither by Greeks nor Barbarians; horrible to relate, incredible to hear. And indeed I should gladly have omitted this calamity, that I might not seem to posterity to be a teller of fabulous tales, if I had not innumerable witnesses to it in my own age. And besides, I should render my country poor service if I suppressed the account of the sufferings which she endured.

24 "There was a certain woman named Mary that dwelt beyond Jordan, whose father was Eleazer, of the village of Bathezor (which signifies the *house of hyssop*). She was distinguished for her family and her wealth, and had fled with the rest of the multitude to Jerusalem and was shut up there with them during the siege.

25 The tyrants had robbed her of the rest of the property which she had brought with her into the city from Perea. And the remnants of her possessions and whatever food was to be seen the guards rushed in daily and snatched away from her. This made the woman terribly angry, and by her frequent reproaches and imprecations she aroused the anger of the rapacious villains against herself.

26 But no one either through anger or pity would slay her; and she grew weary of finding food for others to eat. The search, too, was already become everywhere difficult, and the famine was piercing her bowels and marrow, and resentment was raging more violently than famine. Taking, therefore, anger and necessity as her counsellors, she proceeded to do a most unnatural thing.

27 Seizing her child, a boy which was sucking at her breast, she said, Oh, wretched child, in war, in famine, in sedition, for what do I preserve thee? Slaves among the Romans we shall be even if we are allowed to live by them. But even slavery is anticipated by the famine, and the rioters are more cruel than both. Come, be food for me, a fury for these rioters, and a byword to the world, for this is all that is wanting to complete the calamities of the Jews.

28 And when she had said this she slew her son; and having roasted him, she ate one half herself, and covering up the remainder, she kept it. Very soon the rioters appeared on the scene, and, smelling the nefarious odor, they threatened to slay her immediately unless she should show them what she had prepared. She replied that she had saved an excellent portion for them, and with that she uncovered the remains of the child.

29 They were immediately seized with horror and amazement and stood transfixed at the sight. But she said This is my own son, and the deed is mine. Eat for I too have eaten. Be not more merciful than a woman, nor more compassionate than a mother. But if you are too pious and shrink from my sacrifice, I have already eaten of it; let the rest also remain for me.

30 At these words the men went out trembling, in this one case being affrighted; yet with difficulty did they yield that food to the mother. Forthwith the whole city was filled with the awful crime, and as all pictured the terrible deed before their own eyes, they trembled as if they had done it themselves.

31 Those that were suffering from the famine now longed for death; and blessed were they that had died before hearing and seeing miseries like these."

32 Such was the reward which the Jews received for their wickedness and impiety, against the Christ of God.

Chapter VII. The Predictions of Christ.

1 It is fitting to add to these accounts the true prediction of our Saviour in which he foretold these very events.

2 His words are as follows: "Woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days! But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the Sabbath day; For there shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be."

3 The historian, reckoning the whole number of the slain, says that eleven hundred thousand persons perished by famine and sword, and that the rest of the rioters and robbers, being betrayed by each other after the taking of the city, were slain. But the tallest of the youths and those that were distinguished for beauty were preserved for the triumph. Of the rest of the multitude, those that were over seventeen years of age were sent as prisoners to labor in the works of Egypt,

while still more were scattered through the provinces to meet their death in the theaters by the sword and by beasts. Those under seventeen years of age were carried away to be sold as slaves, and of these alone the number reached ninety thousand.

4 These things took place in this manner in the second year of the reign of Vespasian, in accordance with the prophecies of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, who by divine power saw them beforehand as if they were already present, and wept and mourned according to the statement of the holy evangelists, who give the very words which he uttered, when, as if addressing Jerusalem herself, he said:

5 "If thou hadst known, even thou, in this day, the things which belong unto thy peace! But now they are hid from thine eyes. For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a rampart about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, and shall lay thee and thy children even with the ground."

6 And then, as if speaking concerning the people, he says," For there shall be great distress in the land, and wrath upon this people. And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations. And Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled." And again:" When ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh."

7 If any one compares the words of our Saviour with the other accounts of the historian concerning the whole war, how can one fail to wonder, and to admit that the foreknowledge and the prophecy of our Saviour were truly divine and marvellously strange.

8 Concerning those calamities, then, that befell the whole Jewish nation after the Saviour's passion and after the words which the multitude of the Jews uttered, when they begged the release of the robber and murderer, but besought that the Prince of Life should be taken from their midst, it is not necessary to add anything to the 9 account of the historian.

9 But it may be proper to mention also those events which exhibited the graciousness of that all-good Providence which held back their destruction full forty years after their crime against Christ,-during which time many of the apostles and disciples, and James himself the first bishop there, the one who is called the brother of the Lord, were still alive, and dwelling in Jerusalem itself, remained the surest bulwark of the place. Divine Providence thus still proved itself long-

suffering toward them in order to see whether by repentance for what they had done they might obtain pardon and salvation; and in addition to such long-suffering, Providence also furnished wonderful signs of the things which were about to happen to them if they did not repent.

10 Since these matters have been thought worthy of mention by the historian already cited, we cannot do better than to recount them for the benefit of the readers of this work.

Chapter VIII. The Signs Which Preceded the War.

1 Taking, then, the work of this author, read what he records in the sixth book of his History. His words are as follows: "Thus were the miserable people won over at this time by the impostors and false prophets; but they did not heed nor give credit to the visions and signs that foretold the approaching desolation. On the contrary, as if struck by lightning, and as if possessing neither eyes nor understanding, they slighted the proclamations of God.

2 At one time a star, in form like a sword, stood over the city, and a comet, which lasted for a whole year; and again before the revolt and before the disturbances that led to the war, when the people were gathered for the feast of unleavened bread, on the eighth of the month Xanthicus, at the ninth hour of the night, so great a light shone about the altar and the temple that it seemed to be bright day; and this continued for half an hour. This seemed to the unskillful a good sign, but was interpreted by the sacred scribes as portending those events which very soon took place.

3 And at the same feast a cow, led by the high priest to be sacrificed, brought forth a lamb in the midst of the temple.

4 And the eastern gate of the inner temple, which was of bronze and very massive, and which at evening was closed with difficulty by twenty men, and rested upon iron-bound beams, and had bars sunk deep in the ground, was seen at the sixth hour of the night to open of itself.

5 And not many days after the feast, on the twenty-first of the month Artemisium, a certain marvelous vision was seen which passes belief. The prodigy might seem fabulous were it not related by those who saw it, and were not the calamities which followed deserving of such signs. For before the setting of the sun chariots and armed troops were seen throughout the whole region in mid-air, wheeling through the clouds and encircling the cities.

6 And at the feast which is called Pentecost, when the priests entered the temple at night, as was their custom, to perform the services, they said that at first they perceived a movement and a noise, and afterward a voice as of a great multitude, saying, 'Let us go hence.'

7 But what follows is still more⁷ terrible; for a certain Jesus, the son of Ananias, a common countryman, four years before the war, when the city was particularly prosperous and peaceful, came to the feast, at which it was customary for all to make tents at the temple to the honor of God, and suddenly began to cry out: 'A voice from the east, a voice from the west, a voice from the four winds, a voice against Jerusalem and the temple, a voice against bridegrooms and brides, a voice against all the people.' Day and night he went⁸ through all the alleys crying thus.

8 But certain of the more distinguished citizens, vexed at the ominous cry, seized the man and beat him with many stripes. But without uttering a word in his own behalf, or saying anything in particular to those that were present, he continued to cry out in the same words as before.

9 And the rulers, thinking, as was true, that the man was moved by a higher power, brought him before the Roman governor. And then, though he was scourged to the bone, he neither made supplication nor shed tears, but, changing his voice to the most lamentable tone possible, he answered each stroke with the words, "Woe, woe unto Jerusalem."

10 The same historian records another fact still more wonderful than this. He says that a certain oracle was found in their sacred writings which declared that at that time a certain person should go forth from their country to rule the world. He himself understood¹¹ that this was fulfilled in Vespasian.

11 But Vespasian did not rule the whole world, but only that part of it which was subject to the Romans. With better right could it be applied to Christ; to whom it was said by the Father, "Ask of me, and I will give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the ends of the earth for thy possession." At that very time, indeed, the voice of his holy apostles "went throughout all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.
