



The Sword & The Plow

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Why I am a Preterist Part Two

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In this article, we continue our study of Biblical Eschatology and *Why I am a Preterist*.

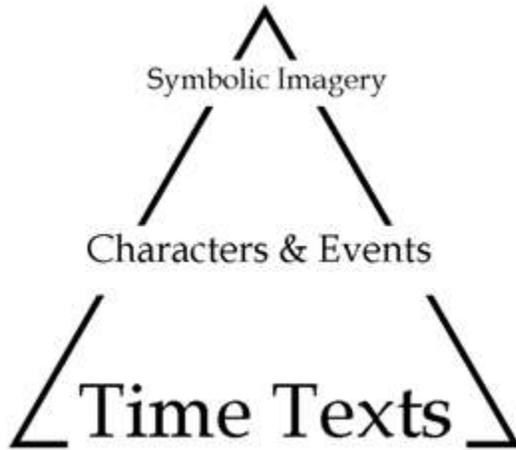
The body of scripture devoted to the topic of Eschatology may be divided into three categories: 1) Time Texts, 2) Characters & Events, and 3) Veiled Speech and Symbolic Imagery. The time texts are *direct statements* about *when* the things predicted would be fulfilled. The second category consists of passages describing *readily identifiable individuals and nations, and historically verifiable events* associated with Christ's second coming. The third category does not provide new or different material from the others. Rather, it merely describes the time, characters, and events in a *different form or manner*. Even though they merely describe the time, characters, and events in a different form, because

such passages are susceptible to varying interpretations, it is useful, if not necessary, to assign them a separate place of their own.

It is a basic rule of hermeneutics that *difficult or obscure passages are to be interpreted in light of others that are open and plain*. Thus, as we approach the corpus of eschatological writings, the foundation of our interpretation should be *express statements* of time. Next should come passages whose characters and events are *readily identifiable*. Last in order are passages that are of a *veiled or symbolic* nature. In other words, we interpret the symbolic passages in light of the other categories, and not vice versa.

This three-story pyramid is the foundation of the Preterist interpretation of eschatology. In our first article, *Why I am a Preterist Part I*, we reviewed 37

New Testament time texts, and saw that they unanimously placed Christ's return within the lives of the first disciples. In this article, we move to the second story of the pyramid: *readily identifiable individuals, nations, and historically verifiable events* associated with Christ's return.



"Everything points to the Destruction of Jerusalem"

I remember almost 30 years ago when a friend of mine, who was serving as a youth minister, brought a young man to meet me. It seems this young man felt that the second coming was a past event. When I asked him why he had this view, he said "because everything points to the destruction of Jerusalem." I could not agree more. Indeed, almost all who become Preterists do so out of this same conviction. The number and variety of passages tying "end time" events to the A.D. 70 destruction of Jerusalem is truly remarkable. When it is then considered that these are fully consistent with the time texts, their combined testimony becomes virtually unassailable. Let's survey some of the many passages whose characters and events tie the second coming to the fall of Jerusalem.

Gen. 49:1, 10 - "And Jacob called unto his sons, and said, Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you that which shall befall you in the last days...the scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be."

This passage, spoken by the patriarch Jacob upon his deathbed, ties the "last days" to events bound up with Biblical Israel and the coming of Christ. Since the "last days" are tethered by this prophecy to Biblical

Israel when the nation terminated and ceased to exist, so did the last days. Indeed, the "last days" are coterminous with the last end and closing days of the Jewish state. Jacob does not directly describe the destruction of the Jewish nation, but his saying "what will befall you in the last days" certainly carries ominous overtones suggesting that event. In saying that the monarchical power would not depart from Judah until Shiloh (Christ) had come, Jacob alludes to the political end and existence of the nation. With the appearance of Christ, a new dynasty and world epoch would begin, in which the government would devolve upon Christ who now reigns earth's nations from his throne in heaven. In transferring the government to heaven, Christ removed the mantle of authority from national Israel upon the earth. And since the Jews murdered Christ and persecuted his church, Jesus sent and destroyed the nation by the armies of Rome.

Num. 24:14-25 - "And now, behold, I go to my people: come therefore, and I will advertise thee what this people shall do to thy people in the latter days...I shall see him, but not now: I shall behold him, but now nigh: there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab and destroy all the children of Sheth. And Edom shall be a possession, Seir also shall be a possession for his enemies; and Israel shall do valiantly."

This is Balaam's prophecy of events that would occur in the latter days. Like Jacob's prophecy, Christ was to appear in the latter days while Biblical Israel still existed. Jesus is referred to under the imagery of a "Star" and "Sceptre," and "he that shall have dominion." Christ's "possessing Edom and Seir" should be compared with the prophecy of Amos about the restored tabernacle (house/throne) of David, "that they may possess the remnant of Edom" (Amos 9:11, 12). James said the prophecy of Amos was fulfilled in the apostles' day, as Christ reigned from heaven and the Gentiles came into the church (Acts 15:16, 17). As Balaam's prophecy treats the same events, it too was fulfilled in the first century. The last prediction in Balaam's prophecy states (Num. 24:24):

And ships shall come from Chittim and shall afflict Asshur, and shall afflict Eber, and he also shall perish forever.

The prophet Daniel mentions "Chittim" in a context that makes unmistakable reference to Rome (Dan. 11:30), and is witnessed by the Septuagint version of the Qumran community (Dead Sea Scrolls) and the

Vulgate in this place, both of which render "Chittim" "Romans."¹ "Asshur" is Assyria and represented the extreme eastern border of the Roman Empire. "Eber" was the forebear of Abraham (Gen. 10:21; 11:17, 26), and is believed to be the root of the word "Hebrew." In saying "he also shall perish for ever," Balaam's prophecy becomes the first direct prediction of the A.D. 70 destruction of Jerusalem by Rome. Spiritual Israel (the church) would do valiantly and conquer the world, but national Israel would be destroyed.

The Song of Moses & the Destruction of the Jewish State

The next passage we want to look at is the "Song of Moses." This is a long passage, taking up the whole of Deuteronomy 32, so we can only touch upon parts of it here. The prophecy describes the destruction of the Jewish nation, and it is cited by several New Testament writers as overtaking the first century Jews. Here is the introduction to the Song:

Deut. 31:28, 29 - Gather unto me all the elders of your tribes, and your officers, that I may speak these words in their ears, and call heaven and earth to record against them. For I know that after my death ye will utterly corrupt yourselves, and turn aside from the way which I commanded you: and evil will befall you in the latter days.

This is the third occurrence of the phrase "latter days" we have encountered. In each instance the latter days are tied to the destruction of the Jewish nation and polity. Like Jacob's prophecy to his sons, Moses uses the identical language, describing what will "befall you in the latter days." Here are selections from the Song itself:

*Deut. 32:15-21 - But Jeshurun waxed fat, and kicked: thou art waxen fat, thou art grown thick, thou art covered with fatness; then he forsook God which made him, and lightly esteemed the Rock of his salvation. They provoked him to jealousy with strange gods, with abominations provoked they him to anger. They sacrificed unto devils, not to God; to gods whom they knew not, to new gods that came newly up, whom your fathers feared not. Of the Rock that begat thee thou art unmindful, and hast forgotten God that formed thee. And when the LORD saw it, he abhorred them, because of the provoking of his sons, and of his daughters. And he said, I will hide my face from them, I will see **what their end shall be**: for they are a very froward generation, children in whom is no faith. They have moved me to jealousy with that*

*which is not God; they have provoked me to anger with their vanities: **and I will move them to jealousy with those which are not a people; I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation.***

This passage addresses Israel's future apostasy using the "prophetic perfect" tense, describing future events as if they were already past or accomplished. The passage describes God's abhorrence of Israel, saying, he would *hide his face* from them and see what *their end* shall be. But before God brought about the nation's complete end, he would try to draw them to repentance by provoking them to jealousy with other peoples. This is quoted by Paul in the book of Romans as being accomplished in the first century, and refers to Gentile obedience to the gospel (Rom. 10:19).

*Deut. 32:29, 35, 36 - O that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end!...**To me belongeth vengeance and recompense; their foot shall slide in due time: for the day of their calamity is at hand, and the things that shall come upon them make haste. For the LORD shall judge his people, and repent himself for his servants, when he seeth that their power is gone, and there is none shut up, or left.***

This portion of Moses' prophetic song again mentions Israel's latter end, saying God would be avenged upon the nation and judge his people. The destruction would be so great that it would *end the nation's political power* (existence) and there would *none shut up or left* (cf. Dan. 12:7). This passage is quoted by the writer of the epistle to the Hebrews, who cites it as evidence of Christ's imminent coming in vengeance and judgment upon the Jewish nation:

Heb. 10:30, 37 - For we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people...For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry.

The epistle to the Hebrews addresses the nation's apostasy from God by clinging to the Old Testament temple ritual while rejecting the gospel of Christ. Persecuted by unbelieving Jews, the epistle warns believers against succumbing to pressure to renounce Christ and return to the law. If there is a passage in the Old Testament that describes this precise period shortly before Christ's return to destroy the nation, it is Isaiah 66.

Isaiah and the Second Coming of Christ

¹ Cf. Matthew Henry and Adam Clarke *in loc*

We looked at Isa. 66 in our first article in this series, but include it again since it is so critical to our study. Isaiah opens by describing the Jews' adherence to the dead ritual of the law, calling the temple ritual an "abomination":

He that killeth an ox is if he slew a man; he that sacrificeth a lamb, as if he cut off a dog's neck; he that offereth an oblation, as if he offered swine's blood; he that burneth incense, as if he blessed an idol. Yea, they have chosen their own ways, and their soul delighteth in their abominations. I also will choose their delusions, and will bring their fears upon them; because when I called, none did answer; when I spake, they did not hear: but they did evil before mine eyes, and shoes that in which I delighted not. Isa. 66:3, 4

Next, Isaiah addresses Christians who were being "cast out" (excommunicated) by their fellow Jews for Jesus' name sake. Even before Jesus was crucified, the rulers of the Jews had decreed that anyone who confessed Christ was to be cast out (Jn. 9:22, 34; 12:42). The "appearing" of the Lord refers to his second coming.

Hear the word of the Lord, ye that tremble at his word; Your breath that hated you, that cast you out for my name's sake, said, Let the Lord be glorified: but he shall appear to your joy, and they shall be ashamed. Isa. 66:5

Finally, we see the Lord's wrath upon the Jews as he came in providential judgment upon the nation.

A voice of noise from the city, a voice from the temple, a voice of the Lord that rendereth recompense to his enemies...for behold the Lord will come with fire, and with his chariots like a whirlwind, to render his anger with fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire. Isa. 66:3-6, 15

Stephen quoted this passage in Isaiah when tried before the Sanhedrin for saying Christ would destroy Jerusalem and remove the customs given by Moses (Acts 6:13, 14; 7:48-50). This shows the first century fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy and the coming of Christ in the destruction of Jerusalem by Rome.

Zachariah and the Day of the Lord upon Jerusalem

Zachariah 14:1, 2 - Behold, the day of the LORD cometh, and thy spoil shall be divided in the midst of thee. For I will gather all nations against Jerusalem

to battle; and the city shall be taken, and the houses rifled, and the women ravished; and half of the city shall go forth into captivity, and the residue of the people shall not be cut off from the city. Then shall the LORD go forth, and fight against those nations, as when he fought in the day of battle.

Here is an express reference to the eschatological destruction of Jerusalem by one of the latter prophets. The phrase "day of the Lord" describes a time of divine judgment upon the world. The phrase occurs many times in the Old Testament when God brought the armies of the Babylonians and Mede-Persians upon earth's nations (Isa. 13, 34). The same usage occurs in the New Testament; it describes God's wrath upon the world, not the end of the cosmos itself. The "day of the Lord" is mentioned twice by the apostle Peter, once in the book of Acts and once in his second epistle. The citation in Acts quotes the prophet Joel, who also wrote about the destruction of Jerusalem (Acts. 2:17; Joel 1, 2). Peter's second epistle describes the same events, but in symbolic language in which the socio-political elements of the first century world are consumed, and the new heavens and earth of Christ's government and dominion assumes their place.

Malachi, Elijah, and the Day of the Lord

Zachariah is followed by Malachi, who predicted the opening of the eschatological period by the appearance of "Elijah". We know from Jesus' words in the gospels, that Elijah here referred to John the Baptist (Matt. 11:14). Notice that the coming of Christ is set in a Judean context:

Mal. 3:1, 2 - Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the LORD, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the LORD of hosts. But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap: And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the LORD an offering in righteousness.

Mal. 4:1- For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the LORD of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch... Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD:

And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.

The Old Testament thus closes with eschatological warnings of the "day of the Lord" marked by the Messiah's coming, who would be preceded by the appearance of "Elijah" (John the Baptist). The period in which we are to look for the events predicted therefore belongs to that of the first disciples, not people who live thousands of years later.

New Testament Predictions of Jerusalem's Fall

The Old Testament closed with Malachi's warning of a coming day of wrath. The New Testament opens with John renewing those warnings, saying that the time was now fulfilled and the day was soon at hand:

Matt. 3:7-12 - But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance: And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire: Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.

John warned the religious rulers of his day that the ax was already laid to the root of the trees, indicating that the eschatological period was upon them. Christ would soon appear, who would gather his followers into heaven by martyrdom, but burn up the persecutors with unquenchable fire.

Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen

This parable is one of the more explicit in terms of Christ's coming to destroy the Jewish nation. The parable describes Israel as God's vineyard (cf. Isa. 5:1-5), let out to wicked tenants, who refuse to render the owner his due. They kill the servants sent to them one by one, and finally, kill also the owner's son. Jesus then ends the parable asking:

Matt. 21:40-46 - When the lord therefore of the vineyard cometh, what will he do unto those husbandmen? They say unto him, He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons. Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes? Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof. And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder. And when the chief priests and Pharisees had heard his parables, they perceived that he spake of them. But when they sought to lay hands on him, they feared the multitude, because they took him for a prophet.

The chief priests and Pharisees clearly understood that Jesus had spoken this parable against them, thus confirming the first century context of the prediction. The imagery of the Stone crushing its opponents evokes the prophecies of Psalm 2, 110, and Daniel 2.

The Great Denunciation upon Jerusalem

Shortly before Jesus' arrest, he made his "great denunciation" upon Jerusalem, pronouncing seven woes upon the scribes and Pharisees and Jerusalem itself, ending with a prediction of his coming and the nation's destruction.

Matt. 23:34-39 - Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: and some of them ye shall kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city: That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar. Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.

Here is explicit reference to Jesus' coming in the events that witnessed Jerusalem's fall for the murder of Christ and those sent in his name. This prediction, which refers to *events* in history, should be coupled

with related predictions of *time* in Matt. 10:23, 16:27, 28, and 26:64.

Jesus' Great Eschatological Discourse

After his Great Denunciation, Jesus left the temple and walked to the Mount of Olives a short distance away where his disciples asked further clarification of his predictions. Jesus then devoted the whole of Matt. 24 and 25 to explaining world events that would transpire at his coming, including Jerusalem's fall:

Matt. 24:1-3 - And Jesus went out, and departed from the temple: and his disciples came to him for to shew him the buildings of the temple. And Jesus said unto them, See ye not all these things? verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down. And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?

The disciples asked three questions: 1) when will these things be (e.g., the destruction of Jerusalem); 2) what shall be the sign of thy coming; 3) and of the end of the world/age? The word rendered "world" (Gk. *aion*) is given as "age" in many modern translations. The disciples wanted to know what signs would precede the end of the world-age, which would yield to the kingdom and dominion of Christ. Messiah would put all enemies beneath his feet. Since the Jews and Romans set themselves up as the great enemies of the church and gospel, both were marked for wrath. But Jerusalem, since it was the fount whence sprung the poison of hatred against the gospel, was delivered to utter destruction. The time set for fulfillment of the things described was the lifetime of the apostles, or "this generation" (Matt. 24:34; cf. Matt. 10:23; 16:27, 28).

The Destruction of Jerusalem in Revelation

The symbolism and imagery of Revelation belongs to the top story of our interpretative pyramid, but there is at least one explicit reference to Jerusalem in its pages.

Rev. 11:1, 2 - And there was given me a reed like unto a rod: and the angel stood, saying, Rise, and measure the temple of God, and the altar, and them that worship therein. But the court which is without the temple leave out, and measure it not; for it is given unto the Gentiles: and the holy city shall they tread under foot forty and two months.

Reference to the "holy city" Jerusalem being trodden underfoot for 42 months (3 1/2 years) should be compared with Luke's version of the Olivet Discourse, which uses identical language:

Lk. 21:23, 25 - For these be the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled...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.

The similarity of language fairly conclusively shows an identity of subject, and means that Revelation describes, at least in part, the destruction of Jerusalem. Indeed, given the continuous and repeated reference to the eschatological destruction of the Jewish nation beginning in Genesis and onward, it would be impossible for Revelation not to treat of this event. John continues his description as follows:

Rev. 11: 3-7 - And I will give power unto my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and threescore days, clothed in sackcloth. These are the two olive trees, and the two candlesticks standing before the God of the earth. And if any man will hurt them, fire proceedeth out of their mouth, and devoureth their enemies: and if any man will hurt them, he must in this manner be killed. These have power to shut heaven, that it rain not in the days of their prophecy: and have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to smite the earth with all plagues, as often as they will. And when they 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. And their dead bodies shall lie in the street of the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified.

The identity of the "two witnesses" (Gk. "martyrs") is a matter of great dispute. We believe that this refers to Peter and Paul, whose martyrdom marked the beginning of the persecution under Nero and the Jews (the "beast" which ascends out of the bottomless pit), which continued 3 1/2 years ("three days and a half" v. 9, 11). But if the identity of the "two witnesses" is open to question, the "great city" is not, for John specifically tells us it is the city "where our Lord was crucified." If we trace the phrase "great city" throughout the rest of the book, we will find that Jerusalem, which is here spiritually called "Sodom and Egypt" is elsewhere called "Babylon the Great," the spiritual harlot that persecuted Christ's disciples and was the driving force behind Nero's war against

the church (Rev. 14:8; 16:19; 18:2, 10). Destruction of the great harlot is one of the major themes of Revelation, and the language attributing to her the blood of all earth's martyrs tracks precisely Jesus' saying in the Great Denunciation:

Matt. 23:35	Revelation 18:24
<p>"That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar."</p>	<p>"And in her was found the blood of prophets, and of saints, and of all that were slain upon the earth."</p>

This short survey is but a fraction of the verses that connect the A.D. 70 destruction of Jerusalem with the eschatological kingdom and coming of Christ. From Genesis to Revelation, the fall of Jerusalem emerges as one of the leading characters and events, which would mark the end of the old world and the beginning of the new. The young man's statement to me thirty years ago that "everything points to the fall of Jerusalem" at the second coming of Christ is certainly correct.

The Roman Empire: The Thorn in Futurism's Side

The next great eschatological figure is Rome. We have already seen that Rome ("Chittim") would be the latter day nation that brought about the destruction of the Hebrew state ("Eber") (Num. 24:24). However, Rome's place on the eschatological stage is most often associated with the prophecies of Daniel and the fourth world empire, and its persecution of the saints.

The prophet Daniel lived during the Babylonian captivity. The Jewish nation was destroyed by the Assyrio-Babylonian invasions, culminating in the destruction of Jerusalem 586 B.C. The prophet

Daniel was carried into captivity as a young man, and was made an officer in the king's court. King Nebuchadnezzar was given a dream by God, which Daniel miraculously interpreted for the king by prophetic gifts. The dream showed four world empires, beginning with Babylon, but ending with the kingdom and coming of Christ. These four empires are universally recognized as Babylon, Mede-Persia, Greece, and Rome (see Daniel 2). The same succession of world empires before the coming of Christ is portrayed in Daniel 7, where they are represented by four beasts that rise successively in the earth. The fourth is a persecutor of the saints, but Christ comes and destroys the persecutor (portrayed as a "little horn" upon the beast), and the kingdom and dominion under the whole heaven devolves upon the saints (Dan. 7:23-27).

We can even pin-point the time in Roman history when these events had to occur, as described by the prophet Daniel. First, the period was one when the Roman Empire was marked by a ten-fold division of its political powers, portrayed in Nebuchadnezzar's dream by the images' ten toes and in Daniel 7 by the fourth beast's ten horns. We believe this points to the ten senatorial provinces created by Augustus in 27 B.C., as a sop to the senate and to preserve the traditional form of republican government. The other terminus marking the coming of Christ was the persecution of the saints immediately before the destruction of the Jewish state. In Daniel seven, a little horn (Nero Caesar) persecuted the saints, but the persecution ends with the coming of the "Ancient of days." In Daniel 12, these same events are described as a time of "great tribulation" for the saints that ends when "Michael" (Christ) stands up on behalf of his people, culminating in the resurrection from Hades (Dan. 12: 1, 2). The vision expressly states that it would be fulfilled when the Jewish nation was destroyed:

When he shall have accomplished to scatter the power of the holy people, all these things shall be finished. Dan. 12:7; cf. Deut. 32:36

Thus, the window for fulfillment is about 100 years (27 B.C. to A.D. 70). (See our commentary on Daniel for a full explication of these visions).

Although interpretation of Daniel's visions belongs in part to the third tier of our interpretative pyramid (veiled speech and symbolic imagery), it overlaps the second tier of *readily identifiable historical characters and events*. Rome's place as an eschatological figure is universally acknowledged, even by futurists. Futurists admit the succession of

world empires portrayed in Daniel consist in *Babylon, Mede-Persia, Greece, and Rome*. However, as Rome has disappeared from the world stage, they believe the Roman Empire will be *revived* before the end. The late John F. Walvoord, former president of the Dallas Theological Seminary and a vocal proponent of Dispensationalism, thus writes of the beast portrayed in Revelation:

*In the first ten verses of chapter 13, a character is introduced of central importance to the events of the great tribulation. This passage is first of all a revelation of the revived Roman Empire in its period of worldwide dominion...The identity of this beast is quite clear in its reference to the revived Roman Empire, as the description is similar to that found in Daniel 7:7-8...The wounding of the heads seems instead to be a reference to the fact that the Roman Empire as such seemingly died and is now going to be revived.*²

According to Walvoord, the dragon of Revelation is also the revived Roman Empire:

*"The second sign appearing in heaven is described as a great red dragon having seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns upon his heads. From the similar description given in 13:1 and the parallel reference in Daniel 7:7-8, 24, it is clear that the revived Roman Empire is in view."*³

Thus, Walvoord acknowledges that Rome is the world power scripture says would exist at the time of Christ's second coming. However, whereas normal exegesis based upon the identification of Rome as a central actor would require acknowledgement the prophecies describe events fulfilled in ages past, Dispensationalists argue that the prophetic clock for fulfillment was "suspended" and that we are now in a time of prophetic "limbo" until the Jews are ready to convert to Christ, when the clock will resume ticking. Dispensationalists believe that Christ came to set up a literal 1,000 year kingdom upon earth at his coming, but because the Jews rejected Christ, the kingdom and prophecies have all been temporarily put on "hold" until the Jews convert *en masse*, which will only then resume and the end come. However, since Rome is permanently fixed as an acknowledged character upon the world stage at the second coming, Dispensationalists are forced to "revive" the Roman Empire so that the prophecies can be made to predict future events. Certainly, this is dubious exegesis at

best. In either case, it should be compared with the Continuous Historical model.

The Continuous Historical method believes that books like Daniel and Revelation portray a continuous panorama of history from the time of their writing until earth's supposed end. Like Futurists, the Continuous Historical school recognizes that the kingdom and coming of Christ are intimately connected Roman Empire. However, where Futurists argue for a *revived* Roman Empire, the Continuous Historical school *extends* the Roman rule and era, arguing that the Roman Catholic Church and Papacy assumed its mantle and were a continuation of its empire. According to this school of thought, the ten toes of the image of Nebuchadnezzar's dream (Dan. 2) and the ten horns of the fourth beast (Dan. 7) are ten nations or kingdoms that the Roman Empire allegedly divided into following the reign of Theodosius the Great (AD 295-347). Sir Isaac Newton thus wrote:

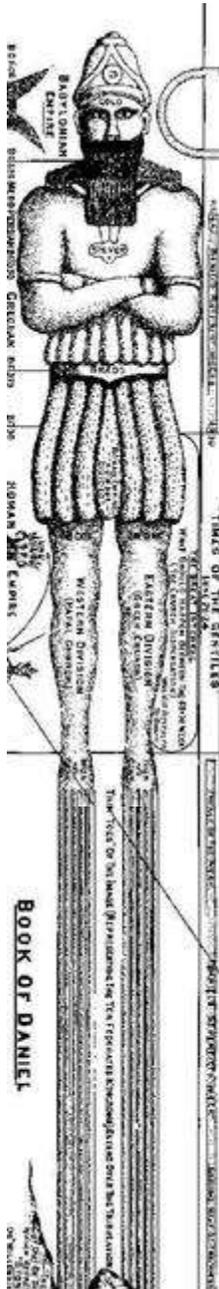
"The fourth Beast was the empire which succeeded that of the Greeks, and this was the Roman...This Empire continued in its greatness till the reign of Theodosius the great; and then brake into ten kingdoms, represented by the ten horns of this Beast."

The eleventh horn, which rose up among the ten (Dan. 7:8), is asserted to be the Catholic Church and Papacy:

"It was a horn of the fourth Beast, and rooted up three of his first horns; and therefore we are to look for it among the nations of the Latin Empire, after the rise of the ten horns. But it was a kingdom of a different kind from the other ten kingdoms, having a life or soul peculiar to itself, with eyes and a mouth. By its eyes it was a Seer; and its mouth speaking great things and changing times and laws, it was a Prophet as well as a King. And such a Seer, a Prophet and a King, is the Church of Rome...With his mouth he gives laws to kings and nations as an Oracle; and pretends to Infallibility, and that his dictates are binding to the whole world; which is to be a Prophet in the highest degree...In the eighth century, by rooting up and subduing the Exarchate of Ravenna, the kingdom of the Lombards, and the Senate and Dukedom of Rome he acquired Peter's Patrimony out of their dominions; and thereby rose up as a temporal Prince or King, or horn of the fourth Beast."

² John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Moody Press, 1967), pp. 197-199.

³ *Ibid*, p. 189.



Although this view was widely received during the Reformation, no respected scholarship believes it today. History has moved on and the Catholic Church's almost complete irrelevance in world events no longer allows us to suppose that it figures in the books of Daniel or Revelation, particularly as any sort of credible world power capable of leading world-wide persecution of the saints. Besides, the whole hypothesis runs counter to scripture in many places. Jesus expressly declared that his kingdom and coming would occur in the lives of the first disciples (Matt. 16:27, 28; 26:64; Mk. 8:38; 9:1; 14:62). But by this hypothesis, the kingdom and coming of Christ

have not come after 2,000 years. Moreover, Daniel set 490 prophetic weeks from the order of Artaxerxes Longimanus to rebuild Jerusalem's wall (454 B.C.) to "seal up the vision and prophecy" (Dan. 9:24). Thus, apart from some theory suspending the prophetic clock like that used by Dispensationalists, the whole period covered by Daniel's visions cannot reach beyond the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. The whole period from Babylon to Theodosius the Great was less than 1,000 years, which by the Continuous Historical method fills up the period from the head to the ankles in the image of Nebuchadnezzar's dream. But the feet and toes, which allegedly represent the period belonging to Papal dominion, represent almost 1,700 years. Thus, the feet and toes take up nearly twice the time span represented by the rest of the entire body. Those are very long toes and they grow longer every day!

In sum, Imperial Rome stands as a readily identifiable historical character, which scripture associates with the eschatological coming of Christ. Since there is no credible way to revive the Roman Empire or to extend its life, we are forced to place the second coming as a past event. And why shouldn't we in light of the time texts and other indicia pointing that way?

A Future Temple & Elijah

Other "end time" figures Futurists believe will be revived or reappear include the Jerusalem temple and Elijah. Destruction of the Jerusalem temple is an unmistakable part of Jesus' Olivet Discourse connected with his return. Ignoring the obvious historical context and Jesus' statement placing his return within his own generation (Matt. 24:34), Dispensationalists argue a "third temple" will be built sometime in the future. Regarding the temple portrayed in Rev. 11:1, 2, Walvoord states,

"The Temple here is apparently that which will be in existence during the great tribulation. Originally constructed for the worship of the Jews and the renewal of their ancient sacrifices, during the great tribulation it is desecrated and becomes the home of an idol of the world ruler."⁴

According to Walvoord, the appearance of "Elijah" who was to appear before the day of the Lord was only "partially" fulfilled in John the Baptist and will therefore in some form or manner appear again:

⁴ Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 176.

"Support for the identification of Elijah as one of the two witnesses is found in the prediction that Elijah will come 'before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord' (Mal. 4:5). This seems to be at least partially fulfilled by the coming of John the Baptist according to the discussion of Christ with his disciples."⁵

Why are Futurists forced to bring these ancient characters back onto the stage of history? It is owing to their belief in a literal kingdom upon earth and the sudden, cataclysmic end to the universe at Christ's return. In other words, they interpret the third tier of the pyramid - the symbolic speech and veiled language - literally, and are thus forced to ignore the time texts and revive ancient historical characters. We leave to the reader to decide which paradigm is the more reasonable: the Preterist view, which takes the scriptures as it finds them, or the Futurist view, which is constantly forced to "fudge" in order to validate its views.

Predestination According to Calvin

[Editor's note: the following is taken from the 1803 *Orthodox Churchman*, a publication of the Anglican Church, when the English clergy represented some of the world's most learned men. In this review, the author sets out the basic doctrines of Calvin regarding predestination. I suspect most Christian will find them more than a little shocking.] *The Articles of the Church of England proved not to be Calvinistic. By Thomas Kipling, D.D. Dean of Peterborough, and late Fellow of St. John's College, Cambridge. 8vo. 1802. Second Edition.*

In the supplement to our second volume, p. 414, one of our correspondents had so fully expressed our sentiments respecting this treatise, that we did not deem it necessary to notice it in our reviewing department. We think it right, however, to announce its appearance in a second edition, more especially as it is now enlarged by the addition of an Appendix.

The learned author, after premising, that all the peculiar opinions of Calvin, which are connected with the subject of his enquiry, may be comprised under the single doctrine of predestination, proceeds to prove that the doctrines of our Church are not, as

has sometimes been asserted, in unison and correspondence with those opinions of Calvin. This he does, and in the most satisfactory manner, 1st, by delineating the Calvinistic doctrine of predestination; and, 2^{dly}, by comparing this doctrine with the Articles and Liturgy of the Church of England.

He considers the Calvinistic doctrine of predestination as reducible to the following propositions.

1st. That omnipotent Being, who has existed from all eternity, after he had decreed to create man in his own image, and had fore-ordained his fall from original righteousness, by which fall Adam's own nature would be corrupted and depraved, viewed with the eye of prescience the whole of Adam's offspring as a mass of corruption and perdition.

2nd. Among the vast multitude of human beings composing this mass of corruption and perdition, Almighty God decreed, before the foundation of the world, to bring some everlasting salvation and to damn all the rest eternally. This decree or purpose of God is denominated by Calvin predestination, some being thereby predestined to everlasting happiness, and other condemned by it to everlasting misery.

3^{dly}. The objects of this decree are not collective bodies of men, as *Jews, Gentiles, Greeks, Romans*, but individuals, as *John, Matthew, Thomas, Peter*, every one of whose fate after death is fixed by it, before he is born, immutably and everlastingly.

4^{thly}. Adam, agreeably to the preordination of God (for we are now come to the *execution* of this decree) fell from innocence; and, in consequence of this lapse, the whole of man's nature, as the Deity had foreseen and foreordained, underwent a complete change. It became corrupt, depraved, vicious; and every descendant of Adam, through his first parents' transgression, became a lost, a damned, an accursed creature, and fuel for the flame of divine vengeance.

5^{thly}. From the birth of Abraham (if not from an earlier period) to this present time, the Deity, agreeably to his eternal purpose and immutable decree, hath constantly been taking, and will continue daily to take, those individuals, whom he hath predestinated before the world began, to everlasting salvation, out of this mass of corruption and perdition. All the rest, every one whom he passeth by, and leaves in this state of corruption and perdition, he reprobates; that is, abandons to wickedness in this life, and will torture eternally in the next. Those whom he makes choice of, selects, and segregates for salvation, are called *elect*. Those

⁵ *Ibid*, 178, 179.

whom he leaves in their original pollution, abandons, and will eternally torment, are called *preterits* (*praeteriti*) [Latin: “passed by”] but most commonly reprobates. By election and reprobation is executed the immutable decree of predestination.

6thly. This discrimination made by the Deity between the *elect* and the *reprobates* is arbitrary; in no degree owing to any superior excellence, worth, or merit in the former, either present and actual, or future and foreseen, but wholly and solely to God’s will and pleasure. He extricates the *elect* from destruction for a demonstration of his mercy and goodness. He leaves the *reprobates* in their original state of perdition for a display of his power and glory.

7thly. The *elect* are put under the custody and protection of Jesus Christ; and, do what they will in this life, they cannot fail of being saved finally, being under an immutable decree, and guarded by omnipotence. The *reprobates*, how much soever they may exert themselves for the purpose, cannot attain everlasting salvation, being *hindered* therefrom, and *repelled* by Almighty God. As the final salvation of the *elect* is in no degree doubtful, from their first entrance into this world to their departure out of it, but is all the time fixed and certain; so neither is the eternal damnation of a *reprobate* ever uncertain, during his passage through this world, but is even before he is born unalterably fixed and sure. That he should perish, is the very purpose, for which he was created.

8thly. Neither the best purposes, nor the best endeavors, nor the best acts, of an *elect*, even after regeneration, are in any wise *preparatory* to eternal salvation. On the contrary, as the elect people of God under the Mosaic dispensation, were commanded to desist on the Sabbath day from their worldly occupations, so, in respect of all *spiritual* concerns, the elect under the Gospel dispensation are enjoined to bid adieu to all wills, works, and endeavors of their own, and to keep most religiously a perpetual Sabbath; that there may be free and ample scope within them for the operation of God’s spirit.

9thly. God, who of his own will and pleasure predestinated the elect to eternal salvation, himself prepares and fits them for it. The means used by him for this purpose are the preaching of his word, and the operations of his Spirit; both which together constitute what is denominated special calling.

10thly. The operations of God’s Spirit are manifold –

1. He forms in the elect a new understanding.

2. He destroys their natural, and creates in them a new will.

3. Every propensity they may have, and every effort they may make, to do works pleasing and acceptable to God, is his.

4. He also, it is, who begins, continues, and finishes, every good work done by them; and who makes them persevere unto the end in well doing.

In each of these operations, he does not concur or cooperate with the elect, but is the sole and entire operator; and they are his instruments or organs.

11thly. Though the elect may, for a time, resist the grace of God, they cannot finally overcome it. This grace is sovereign, and invincible in its operation.

12thly. God, who arbitrarily predestinated the reprobates to eternal destruction, himself also prepares and fits them for it. He does this by blinding their minds, hardening their hearts, stupefying their intellects, depriving them of the knowledge of himself, withholding from them the influence of his Spirit, and delivering them over to the devil.

13thly. The number of the elect is very small. The reprobates, of course, are numberless.

Lastly. The reprobates, those numberless rational beings, whom Almighty God hath raised up for the illustrating of his glory, are hateful to him. He also hates, in proportion to their naughtiness, the chosen few.

When these propositions are brought together, and considered in one view, they almost induce us to think that Calvin had set himself to collect all the absurdities on the subject, which the human imagination was capable of conceiving. That the above is a faithful representation of the opinions of Calvin on the subject of predestination, is most incontrovertibly shown by copious extracts from the writings of Calvin himself. These extracts the learned reader will do well to consult; but it is not necessary for us to transcribe them here. After this delineation of what Calvinism is, we need not follow the author in his comparison of it with the Articles and Liturgy of our Church; but may safely leave it to the judgment of our readers to determine whether the doctrines of the Church can with any propriety be called Calvinistic.

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The Man of Sin

Kurt Simmons

The Objects of Christ's Wrath

Futurists have long believed that II Thessalonians "man of sin" is an arch-evil world leader who will appear before the world's end. Preterists maintain that this individual appeared once for all on the world scene centuries ago. In this article we want to solve the riddle of the "man of sin" and the events described by St. Paul.

"Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, that ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God. Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things? And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time. For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way. And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming: Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders. And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness" (II Thess. 2:1-12).

Four issues rise from this passage: 1) What is the "falling away;" 2) who is the "man of sin;" 3) who and/or what restrained him; and 4) who would be destroyed? Examination of these will show that St. Paul's man of sin was Nero Caesar and the events he described culminated in the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. We will take these in reverse order in which they appear.

The first thing we should note is that the coming of Christ and day of the Lord would result in the destruction of those who "received not a love of the truth." Thus, the coming of Christ in wrath was in wrath upon a *specific people*. This is an unmistakable reference to the Jews.

In his first epistle, Paul mentions that the Thessalonians had "received the word in much affliction" (I Thess. 1:6). He says that they had "become followers of the churches of God which in Judea are in Christ Jesus: for ye also have suffered like things of your own countrymen, even as they have of the Jews: who both killed the Lord Jesus, and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they please not God, and are contrary to all men: forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved, to fill up their sins always: for the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost" (I Thess. 2:14-16). Here is specific reference to the wrath that was to come upon the Jews for crucifying the Lord and persecuting the church. This is the same wrath described in Paul's second epistle. Although Paul indicates the Thessalonians had suffered from their own countrymen, it is clear the Jews were ultimately responsible.

In Acts, we learn that the Jews of Thessalonica set the whole city in an uproar, assaulted the house of Jason, and brought him and others forcibly before the city rulers (Acts 17:1-9). The brethren then sent Paul and Silas by night unto Berea, but the Jews of Thessalonica were so strident in their opposition to the gospel that they followed Paul there and stirred up the people of Berea also (Acts 17:10-13). Paul was thus forced to depart to Athens, and it is from there that he wrote his epistles to the Thessalonians by the hand of Timothy. It is in this context that Paul thus writes: "it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; and to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus

Christ” (II Thess. 1:6-8). The gospels also make abundantly clear that the day of the Lord would come upon the Jews (Matt. 3:11, 12; 8:12; 10:23; 16:27, 28; 21:33-46; 22:7; 23:34-39; 24; Mk. 13; 14:62; Lk. 19:41-44; 20:16; 21; *etc.*). Luke sums it up well when he says, “For there shall be great distress in the land, and wrath upon this people” (Lk. 21:23). This does not mean Christ’s coming was confined to Judea and the Jews, for the whole Roman world came under wrath (recall the image in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream). However, it does identify the time of Christ’s coming, linking it to “that generation.”

He Who Lets

The time for fulfillment of these things was definitely fixed by the Lord, saying, “This generation shall not pass away, till all be fulfilled” (Lk. 21:32; *cf.* Matt. 24:34). However, as St. Paul indicates, the “falling away” and “man of sin” had first to come upon the scene. This could not occur until “what withholdeth” and “he who now letteth” was taken “out of the way” (II Thess. 2:6, 7). This has long been recognized as referring to Claudius Caesar and the restraining power of the *religio licita*. Tertullian (A.D. 145-220) was among the earliest to comment that the restraining power of the Roman state is alluded to by Paul in these verses, saying “What obstacle is there but the Roman state.”⁶ This is echoed by several patristic writers. Victorinus, in his commentary on the Apocalypse, states:

*And after many plagues completed in the world, in the end he says that a **beast ascended from the abyss**...that is, of **the Romans**. Moreover that he was in the kingdom of **the Romans**, and that he was among the **Caesars**. The Apostle Paul also bears witness, for he says to the Thessalonians: Let him who now restraineth restrain, until he be taken out of the way; and then shall appear the **Wicked One**, even he whose coming is after the working of Satan, with signs an lying wonders.’ And that they might know that he should come **who then was the prince**, he adds: ‘He already endeavours after the secret of mischief’ – that is, the mischief which he is about to do he strives to do secretly; but he is not raised up by his own power, nor by that of his father, but by command of God.’⁷*

⁶ Tertullian, Concerning the Resurrection of the Flesh, XXIV; *cf.* Apology, XXXII.

⁷ Victorinus, Commentary on the Apocalypse, ad 11:7; Ante-Nicene Fathers, p. 354; emphasis added.

Victorinus here connects the “beast” from the abyss with the Roman empire and the “Wicked One” with the one who was prince when Paul wrote (Nero), and would follow his father (Claudius) to the throne. Augustine (A.D. 354-430) is even more explicit:

*“Some think that these words refer to the **Roman empire**, and that the apostle Paul did not wish to write more explicitly, lest he should incur a charge of calumny against the Roman empire, in wishing ill to it when men hoped that it was to be everlasting. So in the words: ‘**For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work**’ he referred to Nero, whose deeds already seemed to be as those of Antichrist.”⁸*

The late Canon of Westminster, F.W. Farrar, wrote:

“St. Paul, when he wrote from Corinth to the Thessalonians, had indeed seen in the fabric of Roman polity, and in Claudius, its reigning representative, the “check” and the “checker” which must be removed before the coming of the Lord.”⁹

J. Stuart Russell, in his classic work on the Parousia of Christ, states

“At that time Nero was not yet ‘manifested;’ his true character was not discovered; he had not yet succeeded to the Empire. Claudius, his step-father, lived, and stood in the way of the son of Agrippina. But that hindrance was soon removed. In less than a year, probably, after this epistle was received by the Thessalonians, Claudius was ‘taken out of the way,’ a victim to the deadly practice of the infamous Agrippina; her son also, according to Suetonius, being accessory to the deed.”¹⁰

Kenneth L. Gentry Jr. is among modern writers reaching the same conclusion:

Apparently something is presently (ca. A.D. 52) ‘restraining’ the Man of Lawlessness: ‘you know what is restraining [katechon; present participle], that he may be revealed in his own time’ (2:6). This strongly suggests the preterist understanding of the whole passage. The Thessalonians themselves know what is presently restraining the Man of Lawlessness; in fact the Man of Lawlessness is alive and waiting to

⁸ Augustine, *City of God*, XX, xix; *cf.*, Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, V, xxv-xxviii; Lactantius, *Divine Inst.* VII, xxv; emphasis added

⁹ F.W. Farrar, *The Early Days of Christianity* (1891, Columbian Publishing Co, NY), p. 13; *cf.* *The Life and Work of St. Paul*, Excursus XIX, (1879, Cassell and Co. ed), p. 726.

¹⁰ J. Stuart Russell, *The Parousia* (1887, London, T. Fisher Unwin; republished 1983, 1999 by Baker Books, Grand Rapids, MI), pp. 182, 183.

be 'revealed.' This implies that for the time-being Christians can expect some protection from the Roman government. The Roman laws regarding *religio licita* are currently in Christianity's favor, whole considered a sect of Judaism and before the malevolent Nero ascends the throne.¹¹

A final consideration worth noting is that the Greek "ha katechon" ("he who lets") may be rendered in Latin "qui claudit." The similarity of *claudit* and *Claudius* has led many to conclude that Paul cryptically referred to Claudius Caesar by this allusion in a manner similar to St. John's reference to Nero by the number six hundred threescore and six.¹²

Beginning with Tiberius, the Jews were under intense imperial disfavor, which continued through the reigns of Caligula and Claudius. Claudius restrained the Jews from persecuting the church, extending it the protection of law under the *religio licita*, even banishing the Jews from Rome for rioting because of "Chrestus."¹³ As long as Claudius was at the head of Rome, the Jews were prevented from openly persecuting the church. However, Claudius was taken out of the way when he was poisoned by his wife, Agrippina, Nero's mother. This brought Nero to the throne, opening the way for the Jews back into imperial favor; Nero's wife, Poppaea, was a Jewish proselyte. The antichristian movement ("mystery of iniquity") that had thus been hidden and repressed under Claudius was loosed and revealed under Nero.¹⁴

Man of Sin

Tradition among primitive Christians identified St. Paul's "man of sin" with St. John's "antichrist" and

¹¹ Kenneth L. Gentry Jr, *Perilous Times* (1999, CMP), p. 104-106 (emphasis in original).

¹² F.W. Farrar, *The Life and Work of St. Paul*, Excursus XIX, (1879, Cassell and Co. ed), p. 727; *Darkness and Dawn* (1891), pp 73, 74; .Kenneth L. Gentry Jr, *Perilous Times* (1999, CMP), p. 104-106.

¹³ Suetonius, *Lives of the Caesars, Claudius*, XXV, 4. Cf. Acts 18:2.

¹⁴The correspondence between II Thess. 2:1-12 and Rev. 20:1-11 suggests that the binding of the dragon in Rev. 20:1-11 refers to Claudius' reign and the loosing of the dragon to the persecution under Nero; the reign of the martyrs answers to those that had fallen asleep in I Thess. 4:13-18. See Kurt M. Simmons, *The Consummation of the Ages* (2003, Bimillennial Preterist Assoc.), pp. 362-388.

Revelation's "beast," many holding that these were references to Nero. Victorinus and Augustine we already heard from, above. In his fourth homily on II Thessalonians, St. Chrysostom (A.D. 347 to 407) states,

*"For the mystery of lawlessness doth already work." He speaks here of Nero... But he did not also wish to point him out plainly: and this not from cowardice, but instructing us not to bring upon ourselves unnecessary enmities, when there is nothing to call for it."*¹⁵

Lactantius (A.D. 260-330) writes:

*"And while Nero reigned, the Apostle Peter came to Rome, and, through the power of God committed unto him, wrought certain miracles, and, by turning many to the true religion, built up a faithful and steadfast temple unto the Lord. When Nero heard of those things, and observed that not only in Rome, but in every other place, a great multitude revolted daily from the worship of idols, and, condemning their old ways, went over to the new religion, he, an execrable and pernicious tyrant, sprung forward to **raze the heavenly temple** and destroy the true faith. He it was who first persecuted the servants of God; he crucified Peter, and slew Paul; nor did he escape with impunity; for God looked on the affliction of His people; and therefore, the tyrant, bereaved of authority and precipitated from the height of empire, suddenly disappeared, and even the a burial-place of that **noxious wild beast** was nowhere to be seen."*¹⁶

Reference to Nero as a "noxious, wild beast" is generally understood to be an allusion to the beast of Revelation; reference to Nero's attempt to raze the temple of God (the church), to Thessalonians' "man of sin" taking his seat in the temple of God. Sulpicius Severus (A.D. 360-420) makes similar comments:

*"In the meanwhile, Nero, now hateful even to himself from a consciousness of his crimes, disappears from among men, leaving it uncertain whether or not he had laid violent hands upon himself: certainly his body was never found. It was accordingly believed that, even if he did put an end to himself with a sword, his wound was cured, and his life preserved, according to that which was written regarding him,- **"And his mortal wound was healed,"** -to be sent*

¹⁵ St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on II Thess.*, *Nicene-Post Nicene Fathers*, Vol. XXIII; emphasis added.

¹⁶ Lactantius, *Of the Manner in which the Persecutors Died*, Chpt. II; *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. VII, p. 302; cf. *Divine Institutes*, VII, xvii; emphasis added.

forth again near the end of the world, in order that he may practice the *mystery of iniquity*.”¹⁷

Although Sulpicius Severus erroneously concludes that Nero’s life was somehow wondrously preserved and would appear again at the world’s end, he correctly identified Nero with the “beast” and “man of sin” (cf. Rev. 13:3; II Thess. 2:7). Other evidence that Nero was the “man of sin” will be discussed below.

The Falling Away

During the Reformation, many believed that the “man of sin” was the pope and the “falling away” spoke to Catholicism’s corrupt forms of worship and doctrine. However, few scholars can be found who take this seriously today. The present tense of the verbs indicates that the “mystery of iniquity” was *already* at work, and he who “*now letteth*” would let until taken out of the way (II Thess. 2:6, 7). This can hardly describe the papacy, which did not grow up until centuries later. Instead, the better view is that Paul is describing the full and final rejection of Christ by the Jews through their participation in the persecution under Nero and apostasy from the church and a return to Judaism. This is the crux of Daniel’s prophecy of the seventy prophetic weeks (*viz.*, 490 yrs) which would end in the destruction of the city and temple (Dan. 9:24-27).¹⁸ It was also spelled out at length by the prophet Isaiah. First, Isaiah describes God’s anger and contempt for the Jews’ idolatrous devotion to the temple:

“Thus saith the Lord, The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: where is the house that ye build unto me? And where is the place of my rest? For all those things hath mine hand made, and all those things have been, saith the Lord: but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word (Isa. 66: 1, 2).

¹⁷ Sulpicius Severus, *Sacred History*, II, xxviii-xxix; emphasis added.

¹⁸ “And when did this happen? When were prophecies completely done away with?...Daniel makes it clear that he is not talking about the destruction of the temple under Antiochus but the subsequent destruction under Pompey, Vespasian, and Titus.” St. John Chrysostom, *Fifth Homily Against the Jews*.

Then, he shows his abhorrence for the continuing temple cultus, which stood in denial of Christ’s substitutionary death and atoning sacrifice:

“He that killeth an ox is as if he slew a man; he that sacrificeth a lamb, as if he cut off a dog’s neck; he that offereth an oblation, as if he offered swine’s blood; he that burneth incense, as if he blessed an idol. Yea, they have chosen their own ways, and their soul delighteth in their abominations. I also will choose their delusions, and will bring their fears upon them; because when I called, none did answer; when I spake, they did not hear: but they did evil before mine eyes, and chose that in which I delighted not (Isa. 66:3, 4).

Next, Isaiah speaks to the persecution of Christians by unbelieving Jews and the promise of Christ’s coming:

“Hear the word of the Lord, ye that tremble at his word; Your brethren that hated you, that cast you out for my name’s sake, said, Let the Lord be glorified: but he shall appear to your joy, and they shall be ashamed (Isa. 66: 5).

And finally, Christ’s coming in wrath to destroy the city and nation:

“A voice of noise from the city, a voice from the temple, as voice of the Lord that rendereth recompence to his enemies...For, behold, the Lord will come with fire, and with his chariots like a whirlwind, to render his anger with fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire” (Isa. 66: 5, 15).

Here is an explicit reference to the coming of the Lord to destroy his enemies in the events culminating in the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, predictions repeated by Christ in his Olivet discourse (Matt. 24, 25; Mk. 13; Lk. 21).¹⁹ This would come, as suggested by the Hebrew writer, after forty-years, like their fathers’ in the wilderness (Heb. 3:7-4:11; cf. Num. 14:34). The church’s persecution and apostasy from the faith by a return to the temple cultus is the dominate theme of the epistle to the Hebrews and attests to the fact the apostasy Paul spoke of was then underway. The writer is at pains to demonstrate the provisional nature of the temple service and Christ’s

¹⁹ St. Stephen quoted Isaiah in this place (Acts 7:49) when accused of teaching that Jesus would come and destroy the temple (Acts 6:13, 14), to show that he was merely teaching what the nation’s acknowledged prophets had said all along.

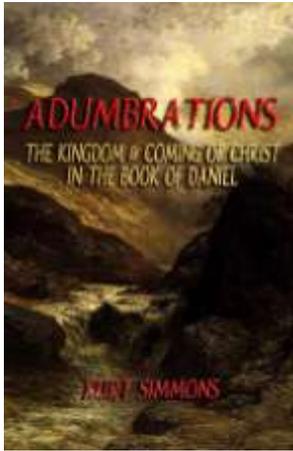
imminent return to put his enemies beneath his feet by destruction of the city and nation, warning his readers from apostasy by returning to Judaism:

“For if we sin willfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries...For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul (Heb. 10:26, 27, 37-39).

Conclusion

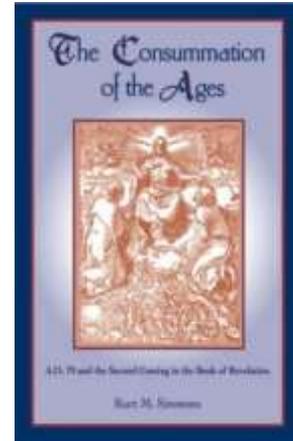
St. Paul’s “mystery of iniquity” and “man of sin” spoke to the apostasy of the Jewish nation by its full and final rejection of Christ and persecution of Christians under Nero. The restraining power of Claudius was taken out of the way when he was poisoned by Nero’s mother, Agrippina. Nero then came to the throne and was revealed as the “man of sin,” setting the stage for the final drama in God’s eschatological purpose, which culminated in the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

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The Harrowing of Hell:

Questions from our Readers

Q: Hi Kurt. Eph 4:8 seems to indicate that Christ “cleaned out Hades” of the OT saints immediately following His crucifixion when He descended into Hades. However some preterists put this activity off until 70AD. Can you clarify this for me (and others)?

A: Eph. 4:8-10 reads:

Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. (Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things).

Scripture is clear that at his death Jesus descended to Hades Paradise, the interim abode of the righteous dead (Luke 23:43; Acts 2:27). We may assume for present purposes that it is to the Hadean realm that the apostle here alludes when he says that Jesus “descended into the lower parts of the earth” (cf. Rom. 10:6, 7). Based upon statements by Peter, some believe that Jesus preached to the souls in Hades (I Pet. 3:19; 4:6). However, when Peter says that Christ “went and preached unto the spirits in prison,” he plainly refers to those that perished in the deluge (v. 20). Thus, if this passage teaches Jesus preached to the dead, it teaches he preached only to those who *perished in the flood*. Moreover, Jesus did not preach to the righteous dead, but to the *wicked lost*, to the spirits in *prison*, which clearly signifies Hades Tartarus (cf. II Pet. 2:4). Since this would mean that those who perished in the deluge received a second chance that the rest of the wicked dead will never receive, this can hardly be correct!

However, this is a rather obvious misreading of the text. What the passage actually says is that Jesus *by the Holy Spirit* (v. 18) preached “in the days of Noah” while the longsuffering of God waited while the ark was being constructed (v. 20). Hence, the preaching did not occur at Christ’s death, but *prior to the flood*. The recipients of the preaching were in prison when Peter wrote because they rejected the warning of God’s Spirit through Noah! Moreover, that Jesus did not preach to them when he died is clear from the fact that Jesus descended to Hades Paradise, not to Hades Tartarus. Since Jesus did not descend to Tartarus, he obviously did not preach to the spirits in prison there.

In the second passage, Peter states

Who shall give account to him that is ready to judge the quick and the dead. For for this cause was the gospel preached also to them that are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit (I Pet. 4:5, 6).

This passage is linked by some to that already discussed. However, we must understand that the gospel was preached in every age and generation. It is true that the gospel of man’s salvation was *veiled* during the ages preceding the cross and that men did not understand *how* God would bring it about. Nevertheless, the message of God’s salvation had been present in all ages and men looked by faith unto the salvation God’s Messiah would bring. Hence, when Peter says the gospel was preached to the dead, we should understand him to say that the message of salvation had been preached to preceding generations who could receive it by faith, according to the light given while they were yet living as men in the flesh. Those that received the message in faith would be judged according to “*the things done in the body*” (II Cor. 5:10), or as Peter expresses it here “*according to men in the flesh*,” and thus receive eternal life and so live according to God in the spirit (fleshly bodies are not the object of God’s salvation). Those who rejected the message would suffer eternal destruction.

Finally, leading captivity captive evokes the imagery of a triumphal procession in which the victors led the conquered through the streets of Rome. Thus, the “captives” are the enemy, not the saints. Jesus did not lead the saints to heaven at his ascension; they had to wait until AD 70. The imagery of leading the captives in triumphal procession is not intended literally (Christ ascended alone into heaven), but figuratively of Jesus’ complete victory over the powers of sin and death. The saints would not be taken to heaven until the destruction of Hadean death at Christ’s second coming:

For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ’s at his coming. Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. I Cor. 15:22-26

Since Hades did not give up its dead until the second coming, Jesus obviously did not take the righteous to heaven at his ascension.

Preterist Preacher Percival Tanierla's Work in the Philippines, Baptizing Souls into Christ

Many thanks to Bill Fangio for donating a case of Bibles for the work there!

