

The Sword & The Plow

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The Prophecy of Daniel Two

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The image in Nebuchadnezzar's dream is among the most important prophecies of the Bible. In it we see the hand of God carefully guiding the progress of history to accomplish his purpose to bring Christ into the world, establish his kingdom, and save mankind. The dream's primary purpose was to serve as a timeline unto the kingdom and coming of the Messiah. The specificity of the vision and the facility with which it enables us to pinpoint the coming of Christ's kingdom makes it unique among the visions of the Old Testament. However, it was remarkable in more ways than this: the vision occurred while the Jews were in captivity and their political institutions and government were non-existent; it was given to the very Gentile king who had carried the Jews into captivity and burned God's own temple, but who later became a worshipper of the one true God; the dream foretold events until an appointed consummation that would mark the transfer of world dominion

from Gentile powers unto the Messiah and his people.

Historical Antecedents

The Babylonians rose as an independent power when Nabopolassar ascended the throne of Babylon circa 625 B.C. upon the fall of the Assyrians of Nineveh. Taking advantage of the event, Egypt, which had been subjugated by Assyria, asserted itself and rebelled from Assyrio-Babylonian rule. All Syria came under Egyptian control under Pharaoh Necho II. During a campaign by Egypt against the king of Assyria (viz., the Medes and Babylonians), Josiah went forth to engage Necho and was slain (II Kng. 23:29-30; Josephus, *Ant.* X, v, 1). Returning from battle, Necho deposed Josiah's son, Jehoahaz, whom the people had crowned, and set his brother, Eliakim, on the throne instead, changing his name to Jehoiakim. Jehoiakim reigned eleven years in Jerusalem (II Kng. 23:36; II Chron. 36:5). In or about the

fourth year of his reign (605 B.C.), which was the first year of Nebuchadnezzar (Jer. 25:1), Nebuchadnezzar defeated Necho at Carchemish (Jer. 46:2) and proceeded to conquer Syria and Palestine. By the eighth year of Jehoiakim (601 B.C.), the holy land fell to Babylonian rule and was set under tribute. In the third year of this servitude (598 B.C.), Jehoiakim rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar, prompting the latter to return and besiege Jerusalem (II Kng. 24:1). Nebuchadnezzar took the city, slew Jehoiakim, and carried Daniel and his fellows, including Ezekiel, into captivity (Dan. 1:1-6; cf. Josephus, *Ant. X*, vi, 3). After the siege, word reached Nebuchadnezzar that his father, Nabopolassar, had died. Nebuchadnezzar thus hurried back to Babylon where he acceded to the sole principate as absolute monarch of the realm (Josephus, *Contra Apion*, I, ixx). In the second year of his sole principate, God visited Nebuchadnezzar with a dream (Dan. 2:1).

The Dream and its Interpretation

In his dream, Nebuchadnezzar saw an image in human form, whose head was gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of brass, and its legs of iron and feet partly of iron and partly of clay. He saw until a Stone cut out without hands smote the image upon its feet, reducing the whole to shards. The Stone that smote the image thus grew into a great mountain, filling all the earth. Daniel interpreted the vision, saying that the image's four divisions were four world empires that would obtain until the kingdom of God and Christ, whose dominion would supplant all other kingdoms and endure forever. The main issues presented by the vision are:

- 1) The Last Days and Coming of Christ
- 2) The identity of the four empires and their duration
- 3) The symbolism of the metals and materials comprising the image's body
- 4) The nature and timing of the kingdom

The Last Days and Coming of Christ

Daniel is a book of time-lines. Chapter seven provides a time-line in the form of four beasts, which depict four world empires to the persecution under Nero (the "little horn") and the

second coming of Christ and the kingdom of heaven; chapter nine provides a time-line in the form of 490 prophetic years until the death of the Messiah and the destruction of Jerusalem; chapters 10-12 provides a time line from the kingdom of Persia until the rise of the Roman power, the fall of Jerusalem, and the resurrection of the dead. The present chapter is a time-line in the form of four world empires that would appear until the coming of Christ and the establishment of his kingdom. The kingdom and resurrection are joined many times in the New Testament (Matt. 16:27, 28; II Tim. 4:1) so that the mention of the kingdom here should be understood to embrace also the resurrection. And because the resurrection was tied to Christ's second coming, we may know that that Nebuchadnezzar's dream also includes this.

The idea that Nebuchadnezzar's dream reaches to the second coming is not new, but has been current in the church from at least as early as Jerome (AD 347-420), whose commentary on Daniel is one of the earliest in our possession, and the first to attempt an expository interpretation (versus a homiletic or allegorical). Jerome believed that Daniel's assignment of Nebuchadnezzar's dream to the "latter days" implied that the vision entailed the "end of the world":

"Now either these 'last days' are to be reckoned from the time when the dream was revealed to Daniel until the end of the world, or else at least this inference is to be drawn, that the over-all interpretation of the dream applies to that final end when the image and statue beheld is to be ground to powder."

"We would refute those who think the world will never be destroyed. For never would any days be called 'the last days' if the world were everlasting." Comments at vv. 28, 29.

The assumption that the end of the world implies the end of the cosmos has created immense confusion in the church down through the centuries. But the of the world and end of the universe are not the same thing. We agree with Jerome that the image in Nebuchadnezzar's

dream portrays the end of the world. We disagree that this implied an end of the cosmos. Rather, the point of the imagery is that the world that was under dominion of the Gentile powers would come under the dominion of Christ, as indeed it has. The correct view is that the “latter days” signified the closing days of the era preceding the kingdom of Christ, and was marked the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70.

“The Old Testament prophets contemplated the appearance of the Messiah and the going forth of the new word of Jehovah as occurring ‘in the end of the days’ – that is, the last days of the eon or dispensation under which they were living...This ‘end of the times’ belongs, not to the era of the new dispensation, but to the concluding days of the old...It is a serious error, therefore, when learned exegetes persist in assuming that the phrase ‘the last days,’ as employed in the Scriptures, means the period of the new Christian dispensation.”¹

This is not new. Several church fathers saw distinctly that the “latter days” were tied to the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. Eusebius of Caesarea is probably the most famous:

“For we must understand by ‘the end of the days’ [viz., ‘the last days,’ LXX] the end of the national existence of the Jews. What, then, did he say they must look for? The cessation of the rule of Judah, the destruction of their whole race, the failing and ceasing of their governors, and the abolition of the dominant kingly position of

¹ Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Apocalypics*, (1898, reprinted Wipf and Stock Publishers, Eugene, OR, 1999), p. 361. “Daniel’s prophecies of the latter days concern the future history of Israel down to AD 70, and do not directly deal with the gospel era (except as general principles). The same is true of Zechariah 9-14. Arguably every instance of ‘last days’ and ‘last hour’ in the New Testament also refers to the end of Israel’s history down to AD 70.” (James B. Jordan, *The Handwriting on the Wall* (American Vision, Powder Springs, GA, 2007), p. 20) Jordan makes the common mistake of interpreting the latter days in overly narrow terms, applying them exclusively to Israel. The vision here and in chapter seven concern the succession of *world empires* from Babylon to Rome and make no mention of Israel at all; likewise, Balaam’s prophecy of the last days also involved Rome, Moab, and Asshur (Num. 24:14, 24), and Jeremiah speaks of God’s gathering the captivity of Elam, Moab, and Ammon in the last days through the gospel (Jer. 48:47; 49:6, 39). Hence, although the last days would mark the end of the Jewish nation and it is to this that the phrase often refers, the latter days were not Israel-specific.

the tribe of Judah, and the rule and kingdom of Christ, not over Israel but over all nations, according to the word, ‘This is the expectation of the nations.’”²

The Identity of the Four Empires and their Duration

The identify of the Four Empires is not greatly in dispute. Liberals try to impugn the authenticity of Daniel by charging that it is a pseudo-epigraphical forgery, written during the period of the Greeks shortly after the persecution of Antiochus Ephiphanes and describes the valor and victory of the brothers Maccabee. This view has been completely discredited long, long ago, so we will not stop to address it here.³ Daniel provided the starting point for identifying the succession of empires when he stated that the image’s head of gold represented Nebuchadnezzar’s Babylon. With this information in hand, it is a simple matter to identify the succession of world empires. The four world empires preceding the kingdom and coming of Christ were:

Babylonian	598-539 BC
Mede-Persian	539-330 BC
Greco-Macedonia	330-188 BC
Roman	188 BC – AD 70
Total =	668 years

Babylon fell to the Medes and Persian in 539 BC during a siege of the capital city led by Cyrus the Great, who diverted the city’s water courses, allowing his soldiers to gain access and take the city by surprise while it was feasting and carrying on as if it were impervious to defeat. Taken from the sole accession of Nebuchadnezzar, the period assigned to Babylon would represent 59 years, a length proportioned

² Eusebius, *Demonstratio Evangelica*, VIII, cccclxxv; Ferrar ed.

³ Edward Chandler, Lord Bishop of Coventry and Lichfield, *A Vindication of the Defense of Christianity from Prophecies of the Old Testament* (1728). For a free on-line edition www.danielstudies.info.

to the size of the head as against the rest of the body.

The Mede-Persian Empire suffered defeat to Alexander the Great. Alexander crossed the Hellespont in 334 BC and in 330 BC took the Persian capital of Persepolis, which he burned to the ground. The chest and arms would thus represent a period of 209 years.

The Greco-Macedonia Empire yielded to the power of Rome about 188 BC, at the treaty of Ampaneia, following the defeat of Antiochus III the Great at Thermopylae (191 BC) and Magnesia (190 BC). This would assign a period of about 142 years to Greek domination.

The Roman Empire did not fall until 476 AD, but the vision is unconcerned with events beyond AD 70. The point of the imagery is not when the empires ceased totally to exist, but when their dominion was surrendered to a greater power. Babylon did not cease to exist by conquered by Cyrus in 539 BC. Indeed, it continued until Alexander's time and beyond. So with the rest of the empires mentioned. It is dominion that is at issue, and after AD 70 world dominion belonged firmly to Christ. Thus, the period represented by the legs and feet would be from approximately 188 BC to AD 70, or about 258 years.

With AD 70 as our terminus and the monarchy of Nebuchadnezzar as the beginning, the whole period of the image would be 598 BC – AD 70, or 668 years. We feel that the overall proportion of the images members to the length of the empires they represent bear an overall and important correlation that corroborates this interpretation. Those who attempt to extend the toes down to our modern era find themselves with toes which represent a period approximately four times that of the rest of the body combined. As this would destroy all proportion in the image, it argues against attempts to extend the vision beyond AD 70.

The Symbolism of the Metals

In his book *The Prophecies of Daniel 2*, my friend John Evans argues that the materials in the image bear an actual, historical relation to the kingdoms they represent. Thus, Babylon was

known as the golden city; Persian, he asserts, was known for the silver coinage with which it paid its army; Greece for the bronze prow of its war ships used to ram enemy vessels, and Rome for its use of iron. The clay in the feet and toes, he argues represents the Jews from the time of Roman dominion in Palestine. However, we do not feel John has made his case for historical identity of the materials with the kingdoms they represent. This is particularly true of his assignment of clay for the Jews, for here there is no historical association at all. Rather, he builds his case upon an asserted *Biblical* association.

Jeremiah 18:1-10 contains a parable in which God sent the prophet to the potter. When the pot he was making was marred in the potter's hands, he made it into a new vessel as seemed best to the potter. The incident became an object lesson for Judah that the nation was an earthen vessel in God's hands. Having become marred or ruined by their rebellion and sin, God would remake or destroy Judah as seemed best to him. On this basis, John concludes that the Jews represent the clay in Nebuchadnezzar's dream.

Obviously, this is not an historical association, but a Biblical one, and therefore incongruent with the hypothesis. More importantly, however, is the fact that the clay in the parable did not represent the Jews to the exclusion of earth's other people and nations. Jeremiah is very clear that the clay in the parable stood for all humanity and the nations of the world in God's hands:

At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it;; if that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them" (Jer. 18:7, 8)

Thus, the parable is applicable with equal force to all nations, not just the Jews; there is no historical or Biblical association to support the idea that the clay in Nebuchadnezzar's dream represents the Jews. But if there is no historical association of clay with any particular nation, then we feel the argument as to the metals is equally invalid. For the rule by which we interpret one we must interpret all. If the historical association does not explain one, it

does not explain any. To our mind, the better view is that the metals were chosen for the universal symbolism associated with their glory and value, and that these in turn reflect the nature and quality of the kingdoms these represent.

Gold is the most precious metal. It is a universal symbol of prosperity and wealth. Gold is incorruptible; it does not rust or tarnish. It is used in ornamentation of buildings, art, and the body. Gold is universally sought and accepted as a store of value and a medium of exchange. Silver is more common than gold and is next in value. It too is a symbol of wealth, and is universally employed as a store of value and medium of exchange. Brass has some of the beauty of gold and silver and has been used in coinage, but is of vastly lesser value. Its qualities and appearance are such that is employed in common instruments and usages where men want to combine both beauty with utility and strength. Iron is the most common metal. It possesses strength and utility, but lacks beauty and other qualities normally associated with glory and splendor. Because iron easily corrupted an overly abundant, it is a poor store of value and is therefore unsuitable as a medium of exchange. Clay is the stuff of common utensils. It is easily molded and formed, and just as easily broken. It possesses the least strength and is the least stable and enduring material, being the most susceptible to spoilage and breakage.

Thus, the image is composed of metals that decline in value and glory even as they descend from the head to the feet. They also decline in permanence and incorruptibility as they increase in abundance and grow more common. Gold is the most esteemed and desired, iron and clay the least of all.

In construction of the tabernacle and temple, this same declension is seen. The nearer to God and the Holy of Holies, the more precious metal was employed. The further from God, the more common metals were used. Thus, gold adorned the ark of the covenant and overlay the cherubim of glory. A golden censor was used for the golden altar of incense just outside the Holy of Holies (Ex. 37:1-9; II Chron 3:3-11; Heb. 9:4). Silver was used for the lamp stands and tables (I Chron. 28:15-17); brass was used for the altar of burnt offering and the brazen sea in the court yard (II Chron. 4:1-5); but the doors and joinings

of the outer gates were of iron (I Chron. 22:3). Obviously, this arrangement was based upon the symbolic associations of the metals, so that what was best was placed nearest to God.

Applied to the image, we would suggest that metals and corresponding body parts portray the character and political constitutions of the kingdoms and that they were 1) precious and valued as they gave glory to God, but base and disesteemed as they resisted and opposed him; and 2) glorious and noble the nearer they approximated the absolute monarchy of God and Christ, but inglorious and ignoble as they declined there from.

Monarchy, Aristocracy, Republics, & Democracies: The Political Constitutions of the Four World Kingdoms

In our commentary on Daniel, we take the view that Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon served as something of a foreshadow and type of the sole monarchy of Christ, in the manner Solomon's golden reign did before him. Daniel calls Nebuchadnezzar "king of kings" even as John calls Christ "King of kings and Lord of lords" (Dan. 2:37; Rev. 19:16). God gave Nebuchadnezzar "a kingdom, power, strength, and glory" even as Christ was given a kingdom "power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing" (Rev. 5:12; 11:15). Nebuchadnezzar is the head of gold (Dan. 2:38) even as Christ is head over his body, the church, and head over all mankind (I Cor. 11:3; Eph. 1:22-23). The sole, absolute monarchy of Nebuchadnezzar is therefore most like the absolute monarchy of the reigning Christ in terms of the glory and power attached to his government. However, as we descend through the image's body, the monarchical power grows more and more attenuated. The Mede-Persian monarchy was not absolute, but offset by its nobles, as seen in their designs against Daniel under Darius the Mede, and the resistance Cyrus, Darius, and Ahasuerus experienced in allowing the Jews to return and rebuild the temple (Dan. 6; 11:1; Ezra 4:5).

The Greek's are known for their devotion to democratic government, which they identified with political liberty. However, history shows

that democracy is the most unstable form of government of all, bounded only by the fickle will of the masses. The golden glory of Nebuchadnezzar's sole monarchy was further diminished by the division of the Greco-Macedonian Empire at Alexander's death between the four warring monarchies of Macedonia, Thrace, Syria, and Egypt. Rome is represented by iron, the most *common* and *corruptible* metal. Rome was a republic, which differs in theory from a democracy in that it is governed by a written law (the "twelve tables") or constitution. The Roman people trace their descent from the Greeks and therefore abhorred monarchy, and viewed their political liberty as existing in direct administration of the government by the "senate and people." However, as with the Greeks, Roman history was marred by class antagonisms, parties, and continuous upheaval and civil war. Even during the period of the empire, Rome was still in form, if not in fact, a republic in which the emperor shared power with the senate. Our view is that the legs of iron point to the period of the republic, and that the feet of iron mingled with clay point to the period of the empire and Rome's direct administration of subject peoples through proconsuls of senatorial rank. The clay is the common mass of humanity and nations of the empire; the iron, Roman rule. The iron and clay do not mix, signifying that the sovereign and subjects exist in mutual antagonism and do not adhere to one another.

The kingdoms of the image thus represent a scale ranging from absolute monarchy (Nebuchadnezzar), to mixed monarchy-aristocracy (Mede-Persian), the divided empire of Alexander (Greece) to democratic and republican governments (Greece and Rome). The glory of sole monarchy, most approximates that of Christ, and is portrayed as the most resplendent by the head of gold, whereas republican government is represented by the common and corruptible metal of iron.

The Character and Quality of the Kingdoms

As it happens, the form of government was also mirrored by the glory they returned to God. Nebuchadnezzar converted and became a worshipper of the Most High God (Dan. 4:37). Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes acknowledged

God, released the captives and gave order to rebuild the temple, even financing its construction and sacrifices. However, the Greeks and Romans only bruised and crushed God's people and opposed his worship (not unlike the condition into which America is declining). Ptolemy Philopater entered the temple and attempted to compel the Jews in Alexandria to abandon the worship of God, and to annihilate the race from among his people. Antiochus Epiphanes carried the outrage still further, setting an idol in the Jerusalem temple and defiling the altar with swine's blood, and persecuting to death the people of God. And Nero carried the outrage to its very height and pitch as the great eschatological persecutor of the church and gospel, whose name was synonymous with the beast. Thus, if the metals reflect the glory associated with the kingdom's respective political constitutions, they seem also to bear some relation to the moral condition of their leaders as they embraced or resisted the religion of God.

This is not to say that republics and democracies are invariably bad or opposed to true religion, and that monarchies are invariably good and friends of the gospel. The Greek monarchies that grew up after the death of Alexander were great persecutors of God's people and cannot be characterized as republics or democracies. Even so, it is difficult to resist the conclusion that governments and cultures that pander to popular will and the universal suffrage of unenlightened masses tend to undo a nation's morals and institutions, resulting in lawlessness and rebellion to the government of heaven and the gospel of Christ, and that monarchies, because they do not depend upon popular will to rule, can restrain the licentious will of the masses, assuming the rulers so minded. In ancient Israel, the hereditary priesthood of Aaron may have been intended to serve this purpose. However, this philosophical inquiry is beyond the pale of the present discussion and we must hasten ahead.

Nature and Timing of the Kingdom

Many futurist paradigms assume that the kingdom and coming of Christ would be physical and political, ruling over earth's people's from Jerusalem. For this paradigm to be valid, the kingdom must be future, for thing

anticipated or expected has yet to manifest. Against this view, however, is the immutability of God's prophetic word, which placed the coming of the kingdom in the days of the Roman Caesars. Jacob's prophecy to his sons placed the coming of "Shiloh" and the kingly sceptre in Messiah's hand in the "latter days" (Gen. 49:1,10). Balaam placed the coming of the "Star and Sceptre of Jacob" in the time when Chittim (the Romans) afflicted Eber (the Hebrews) (Num. 24:17, 24). Isaiah tied the coming of the kingdom to the birth of Christ, saying, "unto us a child is born...of the increase of his government there shall be no end" (Isa. 9:6, 7) At his conception, the angel told Mary that God would give him the throne of his father David, and that he would reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end (Lk. 1:32, 33). Jesus began his ministry with the announcement that the "time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel" (Mk. 1:15). He told his disciples "There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom" (Matt. 16:26, 27). At the conclusion of his ministry before his ascension, Jesus said "all power in heaven and in earth" (Matt. 28:18). He was given a kingdom, power, and glory (Dan. 7:13, 14; Rev. 5:12), and sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven as co-regent in the government of the world, and now rules the nations with a rod of iron (Acts 2:33; Rev. 2:27). Unless all of this scripture, which cannot be broken, is to be ignored, then we must accept that the kingdom came in the days of the apostles and the rule of the Roman Caesars.

The timing of the kingdom is further corroborated by the ten toes of the feet for these clearly mark the time of the kingdom's coming. We believe the toes are best understood as the ten senatorial provinces created by Augustus Caesar in 27 BC. These provinces were in a settled condition, without legions to defend them. The provinces retained by Augustus were on the boarders and required military force to govern. Dio Cassius explains: "His professed motive in this was that the senate might fearlessly enjoy the finest portion of the empire, while he himself had the hardships and the dangers; but his real purpose was that by this arrangement the senators will be unarmed and unprepared for battle, while he alone had arms

and maintained soldiers."⁴ These ten province became a permanent, identifying feature of the empire, weak but distinct among the body's members:

*"In 27 B.C. the provinces had been divided into two classes, Imperial and Senatorial, 'provinciae Caesaris,' and 'provinciae Senatus' or 'populi.'" The latter were ten in number, Africa, Asia, Bithynia, Achaea, Illyricum, Macedonia, Crete and Cyrene, Sicily, Sardinia, and Hispania Baetica...The Imperial provinces in 27 B.C. were Gaul, Syria, Cyprus and Cilicia, and Hispania Citerior. The number was increased subsequently by the division of single provinces into two or more, and by the inclusion of all provinces constituted after 27 B.C., e.g. Moesia, Pannonia, and Dalmatia."*⁵

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, use of an image reminds us of an *idol*, which points, first, to the Gentiles and signifies the allotted time of their government and dominion over the world vis-à-vis the people of God; a dominion that would end with the kingdom and coming of Christ; second, use of an idol suggests a specific era in world history. Paul said God "winked at" Gentile worship of idols in other eras, but with the gospel call commands all men everywhere *to repent*, showing that the worship of idols was marked by Christ to be rooted out of the nations and all men called to worship of the true God (Acts 17:22-31). Hence, as idolatry is now

⁴ Dio Cassius, LIII, ii-xii; Loeb ed.

⁵ Thomas Marris Taylor, *A Constitutional and Political History of Rome* (Methuen & Co., London, 1889), 464. "Africa, Numidia, Asia, Greece with Epirus, the Dalmatian and Macedonian districts, Crete and the Cyrenaic portion of Libya, Bithynia with Pontus which adjoined it, Sardinia and Baetica were held to belong to the people and the senate; while to Caesar belonged the remainder of Spain,— that is, the district of Tarraco and Lusitania,— and all the Gauls,— that is, Gallia Narbonensis, Gallia Lugdunensis, Aquitania, and Belgica, both the natives themselves and the aliens among them." Dio Cassius, LIII, xii; Loeb ed.

largely extinct in the civilized world and few men fall down before images or worship them as gods, the image is plainly seen *not* to reach unto the modern era. Since the kingdom would root these evils out, the kingdom is necessarily come. The kingdom is the time when world dominion would become Christ's, as depicted by the Stone smiting the image and growing up into a mountain, filling all the earth. We believe that the Stone smote the image in the first century events marked by the destruction of Jerusalem and Roman civil wars. Bishop Lightfoot is put it like this:

*"Whereas the Jews would not own Christ before for the Son of man, or for the Messiah, then, by the vengeance that he should execute upon them, they and all the world should see an evident sign, that he was so. This, therefore, is called 'his coming,' and 'his coming in his kingdom;' because this did first declare his power, glory, and victory, on that nation that had despised him...not only in the horrid civil wars among the Jews, but also in the great concussions in the Roman empire, in the wars betwixt Otho and Vitellius, and betwixt Vitellius and Vespasian (of which the Roman historians, especially Tacitus, are very large); the like to which, there had not been before, even to the sacking of Rome itself, and the burning of the Capitol."*⁶

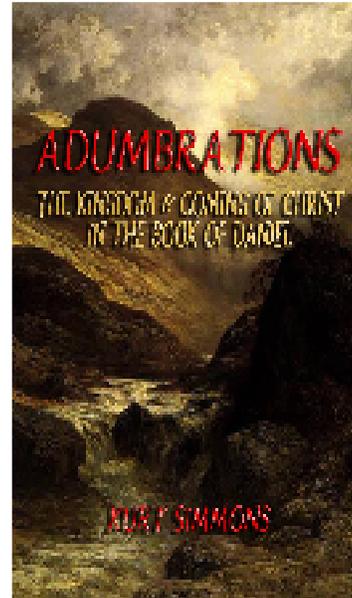
After the destruction of Jerusalem and the Roman civil wars, the church went on to dominate the world. In the Byzantine empire of the east, Christianity became the very heart of its culture for over 1,000 years. In the west, and more especially England, Christianity was the dominate force in the development of civilization almost from the start.

Conclusion

The dominion of Christ is firmly established over the earth and he rules the nations with a rod of iron.

⁶ John Lightfoot, *Harmony of the New Testament, The Complete Works*, Vol. 3, pp. 141, 142.

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A Sermon by R. Polwhele

Whosoever shall confess me before men, him shall the Son of Man, also, confess before the Angels of God. But he, that denieth me before men, shall be denied before the Angels of God. Luke 12:28, 29

In the first ages of Christianity, it required more than common fortitude to hold fast the profession of the faith. To vindicate, in those days, the doctrines of Christ, was no other than to declare war against the world. The general opinions and habits of mankind, were unfriendly to the spirit of the true religion. The champions of the Gospel beheld in array against them the whole force of prejudice and sin. They were to combat the obstinacy of the Jews, and the sophistry of the heath. They were to inculcate a morality, unembarrassed by ceremonial observances, and unadulterated by superstitious corruptions; and they were to publish a Revelation, whose doctrines, refusing to be tried by the subtleties of the schools, were accounted “the foolishness of preaching.” In this arduous conflict, they had no view of any temporal reward. They enjoyed no prospects of honour, of riches, or of pleasure, that might conciliate attention or encourage perseverance; but were compelled to relinquish their earthly pursuits, to dissolve their tenderest connexions, and abandon their most innocent enjoyments; to meet the menaces of power, and to expose themselves to every species of barbarity.

In the subsequent ages of the Christian Church, the same resolution was often necessary to maintain the cause of truth – “To confess Christ before men,” was still to resign the good things of life, to bear with patience the sharpest insults, and to despise the terrors of persecution. Even when the enemies of the Gospel could no longer prevail, that spirit of superstition and intolerance, which disarranged the principles of order, and shook the pillars of the Church to their very basis, was exerted in various parts of Christendom, with all the ferocity of a Pagan persecution, against the professors and the preachers of true Christianity.

At this awful moment, a spirit not unlike the Pagan, displays itself over a vast extent of territory against all who have the fortitude “to confess Christ before men.”

On a survey, however, of the Christian religion, as professed in this country, we have every reason to congratulate ourselves on its present tranquil establishment. We observe no difficulties, no dangers, attending the profession of it. In all its paths, we meet peace and security.

In pursuance of the subject, I mean to particularize a few of those periods in which the most distinguished professors of Christianity were exposed to persecution, and to point out to you the conduct of those professors; that, duly sensible of the peculiar advantages attending your religion as at this day established, you may look to your own demeanour with sentiments becoming Christians; and may be enabled to determine also whether you have reason to expect the promise, or to dread the menace of the text.

In the Epistle to the Hebrews, St. Luke has drawn an admirable portrait of the martyrs of old time, “who wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, in deserts and on mountains, in dens and caves of the earth, being destitute, afflicted, tormented – who had trial of cruel mocking and scourgings, yea, moreover, of bonds and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection.”

Let us see, whether they who actually “received the promises,” were possessed of the same magnanimity and fortitude.

The sufferings of the Christians, during the ten famous persecutions, are too well known to be here described at large. I shall therefore select a few examples only, by way of refreshing your memories, and impressing on your minds a just sense of those great characters, the primitive defenders of the faith.

The deaths of St. Peter and St. Paul are both such as must inspire us with the deepest reverence for those holy martyrs. They suffered under Nero.

St. Peter, we are told, having taken a last farewell of his brethren, especially St. Paul, was brought out of prison, and led to the top of the Vatican Mount, to be crucified there. And he, who once denied his master, was now fully established in the Faith. He embraced, indeed, his death, with ardour. And, with feelings truly characteristic of this zealous apostle, he entreated the execution to crucify him with his head downwards; deeming himself unworthy to suffer in the posture in which his Lord had suffered before him.

St. Paul is said to have converted three of the soldiers that were appointed to conduct him to the place of execution; and on his arrival there, the, the *aquae salviae*, (three miles from Rome) resigned his neck, with cheerfulness, to the fatal axe.

What devout Christian, in contemplating such deaths, does not, for a moment, wish “to be dissolved and be with Christ!” St. Paul owned his condemnation, it is reported, to the circumstance of his having converted a mistress of Nero’s to the Faith: and, in truth, the pure lives of those holy men, and their disciples, were too strikingly contrasted with the prevailing immoralities, to be tolerated by the heathen world. The worship, indeed, which they taught, was so directly hostile to the Pagan idolaters, that wherever we turn our eyes, we observe it exciting indignation.

Thus we see St. Thomas sacrificed to the rage of the Brahmans, on the coast of Coromandel; St. Timothy stoned to death at Ephesus, by the votaries of Diana; and St. Mark assaulted by the worshipers of Serapis at Alexandria, and dragged through the streets in so violent a manner, that his flesh was torn from his bones, and he expired in agonies!

Those who, by our ecclesiastical writers, have been emphatically styled “The Fathers,” were as unrelentingly persecuted as the Apostles or Evangelists.

The circumstances attending the deaths of St. Ignatius and St. Polycarp, deserve our particular notice.

Perhaps no one of the Father’s of the Church ever suffered such merciless torments, as St. Ignatius. Imprisoned and scourged, forced to hold fire in his hands, whilst his sides were burnt with papers dipt in oil, obliged to stand upon live coals whilst his flesh was torn with burning pincers; he yet remained invincible, and rejoiced in his final sentence, that he should be carried in chains to Rome, there to be delivered to wild beasts. To Rome he was accordingly conveyed, and, at the time of the saturnalia, brought into the amphitheatre; when the lions were let loose, and quickly devoured the venerable bishop, to the entertainment of an impious multitude.

St. Polycarp’s calm and cheerful acquiescence in any sentence that the Proconsul might pronounce, affords us a wonderful example of a truly Christian Faith. The Proconsul threatened “the wild beasts,” or the “more terrible punishment of fire.” The mode of punishment was indifferent to Polycarp; he was committed to the flames.

The same spirit prepared for martyrdom, did Irenaeus possess; when, at Lyons, he was put to death, together with almost all the Christian of that great city; insomuch that its streets flowed with their blood.

It would be endless to recount the various instances of saintly fortitude that occurred among the primitive professors of Christianity.

Eusebius informs us, that to avoid the dreadful spectacle of persecuted Christians at Caesarea, he withdrew to Thebais in Egypt, where, however, the furiousness of the heathen was still more shockingly displayed. There (he says) multitudes, both men and women, sometime an hundred in a day, were doomed to the most excruciating death, which they endured with the firmest constancy; which many of them, indeed, courted, by approaching the tribunal immediately after the condemnation of their companions, and by openly “confessing Christ!”

Such were the difficulties and dangers with which Christianity was at first surrounded! Such was the noble intrepidity with which its professors resigned their lives! And thus the champions of the Gospel, protected by the whole Armour of Light, were enabled to triumph, in life and in death, over all the cruelties of the persecuting enemy!

In succeeding ages, Christianity had been as violently assailed by the malice of her enemies, or the bigotry of her friends.

But the time would fail me to enumerate the martyrdoms of more recent periods.

In this country we have examples of Christian magnanimity, as illustrious as the proto-martyrs themselves. And we might withdraw our views with no abatement of admiration, from the zeal and fidelity of a St. Ignatius, or the patience and serenity of a Polycarp, to the peity and firmness of a Ridley, or the venerable simplicity and resignation of a Latimer.

In the tremendous revolution which has been just exhibited before us, we have observed a great revolt from the standard of Christianity; be we have seen many faithful.

It hath been remarked, that a nation of profest infidels, is a phenomenon absolutely new amongst mankind. The truth is, that the present rulers of the French people, avowed ruffians as they are, have terrified the multitude into a renunciation of their religion. It is also to be noticed, that, in France, the public mind is fully occupied by martial enterprise, and agitated by the most violent passions.

If we look back to the time when the French ecclesiastical establishment was first invaded, we shall see many characters that proved by their firmness the sincerity of their religious professions. We shall recollect, that vast numbers of the clergy refused to take the oath which the national assembly attempted to impose; though all the non-conformists wee immediately ejected from their benefices. And (what we deem a glorious instance of the integrity of the clerical order) of a hundred and thirty-one bishops, three only were found servile enough to betray their conscience and their honour, in stooping to take the oath for the preservation of their bishoprics. And, for the common people, we lately observed a striking

instance of their religiousness; when, immediately as the churches (which had been long shut up) were thrown open, they rushed into the sacred edifices; and agitated with the strongest penitential emotions, prostrated themselves before the Eternal!

With these various views of suffering Christianity before us, we are now, I think, duly prepared to inquire, for a moment, into our own situation and conduct as the disciples of Jesus.

It is sufficiently clear, I conceive, that “the yoke,” with us, “is easy, and the burthen light.” Here may the Christian “confess Christ,” in security. He hath no cause to fear the diminution of his temporal happiness, however open the avowal of his principles. Thus fortunately situated, we have every motive to be religious, both in reality and in appearance. Surely, then, religion must flourish where nothing rises to obstruct its growth; where the happiest circumstances concur to favour its expansions, and to produces its maturity! Surely, the Christian Faith, no more a cold assent, must now possess the heart, and operate upon the conduct!

The threatenings, denounced in the text, need not be extended to this country, in which no objects of fear exist to deter us from our duty; nor any shew of reason to be ashamed of Him, whose religion is established amongst us!

But alas! The nature of men has been, in all ages, corrupt; and the allurements of sense, fall in with our vicious propensities. Actuated by the force of mere sensitive ideas, we forget “the things which are not seen.” So little do we feel our dependence on God, the father of all; and so faint is our gratitude to Christ, the Author of our redemption, that the Holy Spirit “strive with us in vain” whilst the charms of lucre, the pleasures of sensuality, and the pride of life, efface the image of religion, and even obliterate the natural characters of virtue. From “the iniquity of the word, the love of many hath waxed cold.”

Thus religion insensibly loses its influence on the heart: and, as its impression fades gradually away, we may observe the unhappy substitution of religious indifference, false modesty, prompting a too easy compliance with licentious fashion; and infidelity, industrious in the obtrusion of its wretched opinions.

If we look around us, even with prejudices favourable to the professors of Christianity in the country, we cannot but remark a general listlessness in their very performance of religious duties. This, surely, is a service of the lips, which has little or no connection with the heart; and must be attributed to a want of that operative faith, under the influence of which, no one could thus coldly and languidly “confess Christ before Men.” An indifference also obtains, in some degree owing to the very circumstance which ought to awaken our gratitude to the tranquility of the Church. The ferment of religious controversy hath subsided: and, amidst so general a serenity, there are some who scarcely employ a thought on the leading characteristics of their own persuasion. In this manner doth the perverseness of men abuse the most valuable blessings. We are apt to value ourselves on our liberal opinions: but the line of distinction between a liberality and a licentiousness of opinion, is too nicely drawn, for every eye to discern it with precision.

Preston/Simmons Debate

We are pleased to announce we are presently in discussion with Don Preston about a debate. Don wants the debate to focus exclusively upon the validity of the law until AD 70, and proposed to affirm the following resolution:

Resolved: *The Bible teaches that the Mosaic Law (also called the Old Testament, the Old Covenant, or Torah), remained valid until the time of the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70.*

However, we feel this evades the larger issue of the nature of the resurrection. The “corporate body view,” which Don espouses, assumes that the law was valid until AD 70. Indeed, the validity of the entire “Covenant Eschatology” system Max King whipped up is founded upon this assumption. Therefore, we have proposed that the debate include the nature of the resurrection, and have offered to affirm something along these lines:

Resolved: *The Bible teaches that the law of sin and death was fulfilled at the cross. The destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 was irrelevant in terms of man's reconciliation to God.*

Resolved: *The general, eschatological resurrection consisted exclusively in the release of souls/spirits from Hades to their eternal reward in heaven/Gehenna.*

The actual propositions have not been decided; these are provided here merely to give an idea of the direction the debate will take. I have not heard back from Don, but we are in discussion and there does appear to be a written debate coming sometime in the beginning of next year. Stay tuned as we try to work through these enormously important issues regarding fulfilled eschatology!

From our Readers

Question: Our study group here has been going through Rev., *primarily* using thoughts from your commentary. Here's a query that arose:

The only places in Rev. where *dendron* can be found is in 7:1, 7:3, 9:4, & 8:7. In the initial 3 you indicated that the tree(s) rep. saints, but in 8:7 you say they aren't saints, yet no explanation is offered for why, in the midst of John's ref. to *dendrons* in three straight chapters, the one in the middle is different from the others. Any words of wisdom? - TD

Answer: I have writing a Revelation in a "nutshell" booklet and going over the whole book. As I read the passages you cited, I felt less convinced that the trees in those passages were references to men at all. The sense is that God is limiting judgment until the remnant could be sealed (chapt 7), so that by preventing the winds of war and persecution from destroying the land (trees, grass, etc), men were allowed time to obey the gospel before the wrath in chapter 8 began to break out. The point in chapter nine seems to be that the army does not desolate the land of vegetation, but men. The assumption that "green thing" equals righteous/saints, may not be the point at all so much as the army is not sent to destroy crops but sinners of the Jews. So,

I am no longer of the opinion that trees equals men at all. Guess I am still learning, too!

Question: I have a couple questions that perhaps you can help me with, one is pertaining to resurrection, and the other is related to OT prophecy.

1) What part do you believe the physical body played/plays in resurrection? Based on 1 Cor. 15:44, I understand the result of resurrection is a spiritual body, but is it the physical body that transforms into the spiritual body? If so, wouldn't that mean that physical bodies should be missing from the ground? If not, why do you think Paul speaks of resurrection while speaking of the physical body in 1 Cor. 6:14?

2) Dan. 7:11 speaks of the destruction of the beast. Currently I understand the beast to be Rome, so was wondering how you think that fits in with Matt. 5:17 and all OT prophecy being fulfilled in the first century, seeing how the fall of Rome (Western Empire at least) did not occur until 476 AD? - Jeff

Answer: Thanks for writing. These are good questions and I am glad to answer them.

1) The physical body is no part of the resurrection. Paul is very clear about this in 1 Cor. 15:37 when he says the "body that thou sowest, thou sowest not the body that shall be." That is, we plant a physical body, but a spiritual, intangible, immaterial body is raised/provided for the soul or spirit. Think of a seed. We plant a hard kernel but a soft, green plant immerses totally unlike the seed that housed it. So in the resurrection the spirit of man within him will immerge to be clothed with a house from heaven. Paul said, Christ became a "quickening/life giving spirit" (1 Cor. 15:45). God is spirit (Jn. 4:24). In the resurrection we will be spirits, like the angels in heaven (Matt. 22:30).

2) The Little Horn (Nero) in Daniel was destroyed at Christ's coming after the persecution of 3 1/2 years. In Revelation the beast and dragon were cast into the lake of fire at the coming of Christ (Rev. 19 & 20). Thus, when Daniel speaks about the body of the beast being given to burning, he probably does not mean the total end of Rome as a political entity, but the

defeat that marked the transfer of dominion to Christ at the eschaton. Jesus began to rule from the time of his ascension, but his dominion and kingdom "came in power" by the destruction of his enemies in the Roman civil wars that broke out upon the death of Nero (AD 68-70) and the Jews' war with Rome (AD 67-70). The "Rome" that went into the eschaton was not the "Rome" that came out. The city was destroyed and its temple Jupiter Capitolanus burned; the line of the Caesars ended and a great part of its nobility was slain by Nero. Italy was a ruin. So, just because a form of government still existed and there was a certain continuity there the reality is that Christ came out with his enemies firmly beneath his feet, and began ruling the nations (including Rome) with an iron rod. Thus, although the imagery in Daniel 7 looks like it might be pointing to the fall of Rome in 476 AD, I think that Revelation requires we see Daniel as merely pointing to the defeat that marked the dominion turning to Christ. It is not the end of the political entity that is in view, but its dominion. Hope that helps. Write any time!

Question: Thanks again Kurt. Based on 1 Cor. 15, I think it makes total sense that the nature of the resurrection is a spiritual (and therefore physically invisible) body. But 1 Cor. 6:14 is somewhat bothersome to me that Paul would say "raise us up" in the middle of speaking about things pertaining to the physical body.

I've been doing some reading and I've come across an argument from critics of full preterism that the first century Jewish understanding of resurrection had to do with the physical body, and since no attempt was made by Jesus or the apostles to clarify what was meant when they mentioned "resurrection" then that means they had the same understanding. One verse quoted was Acts 24:15 where Paul speaks of the common belief between himself and the Pharisees of the coming resurrection. How would you respond to this argument, that the Pharisees understood the resurrection to involve the physical body and since Paul said he agreed with them, then the resurrection must involve the physical body? - Jeff

Answer: Paul did agree with the Pharisees that the resurrection was central to their hope of salvation, but he did not share their view of what the resurrection entailed, at least not after he

converted to Christ. The Jews conception of the resurrection was that physical bodies would live upon a material new earth, where they would marry, bear children, etc. Jesus expressly rejected this concept, saying instead that in the resurrection we would be "as angels of God in heaven" (Matt. 22:30). In other words, we will be immortal, intangible, immaterial, invisible, etc. Thus, the charge that Jesus did not refute the Jews' misconception is incorrect. He most certainly did refute it, and established that the resurrection is on the other side of eternity, into realms above, not upon the earth here below. Hope that helps!

Question: Hi Kurt, hope this finds you well. When you find the time, could you explain Ro.5:14 to me? Thanks, Larry

Answer: Thanks for writing. As I see it at present, "**death reigned from Adam to Moses**" means that the penalty of sin was without remedy from the time of the fall and onward. The law of Moses could provide no remedy. The remedy - the only remedy - was Christ. "Death" was the "prince of this world" that was coming for Jesus, but had no power over him (because he had no sin) (Jn. 14:30). When Jesus said "now shall the prince of this world be cast out" and "now is the prince of this world judged" (Jn. 12:31; 16:11), he meant that the power of sin/death would be annulled in his cross for those that believe and obey. See Col. 2:15 where Paul says Christ triumphed over the principalities and powers (of sin and death) in his cross by fulfilling the sentence of death in himself, relinquishing its hold upon us.

"Even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression." Adam's transgression was qualitatively unique in that Adam was created with a moral disposition to good through the indwelling of the Spirit/inspiration breathed into him at creation. We, too, have free will, but our moral disposition is toward our carnal nature and sinful appetites. The idea that men today do not have free will is contradicted by many scriptures Rom. 7:18 says "for me to will is present". Thus, we can will to do right, but the performance of it is beyond our reach due to our fallen nature. We can never live completely above the flesh. Thus, "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God."

"who is the figure of him that was to come" - Adam was a type or figure of the second Adam (Christ). As "in Adam all die" so in Christ all are made alive (e.g., all those that obey the gospel). Adam was the first man of the earth; Christ is the second man, the Lord from heaven. Adam stands at the head of creation as the source of physical birth; Christ stands at the head of the re-creation as the source of our second birth (forgiveness of sins/adoption as sons). We contract the contagion of sin from physical descent from Adam, we receive the gift of eternal life and atonement from Christ.

Hope that helps. Write again if you have further questions. - Blessings, Kurt

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