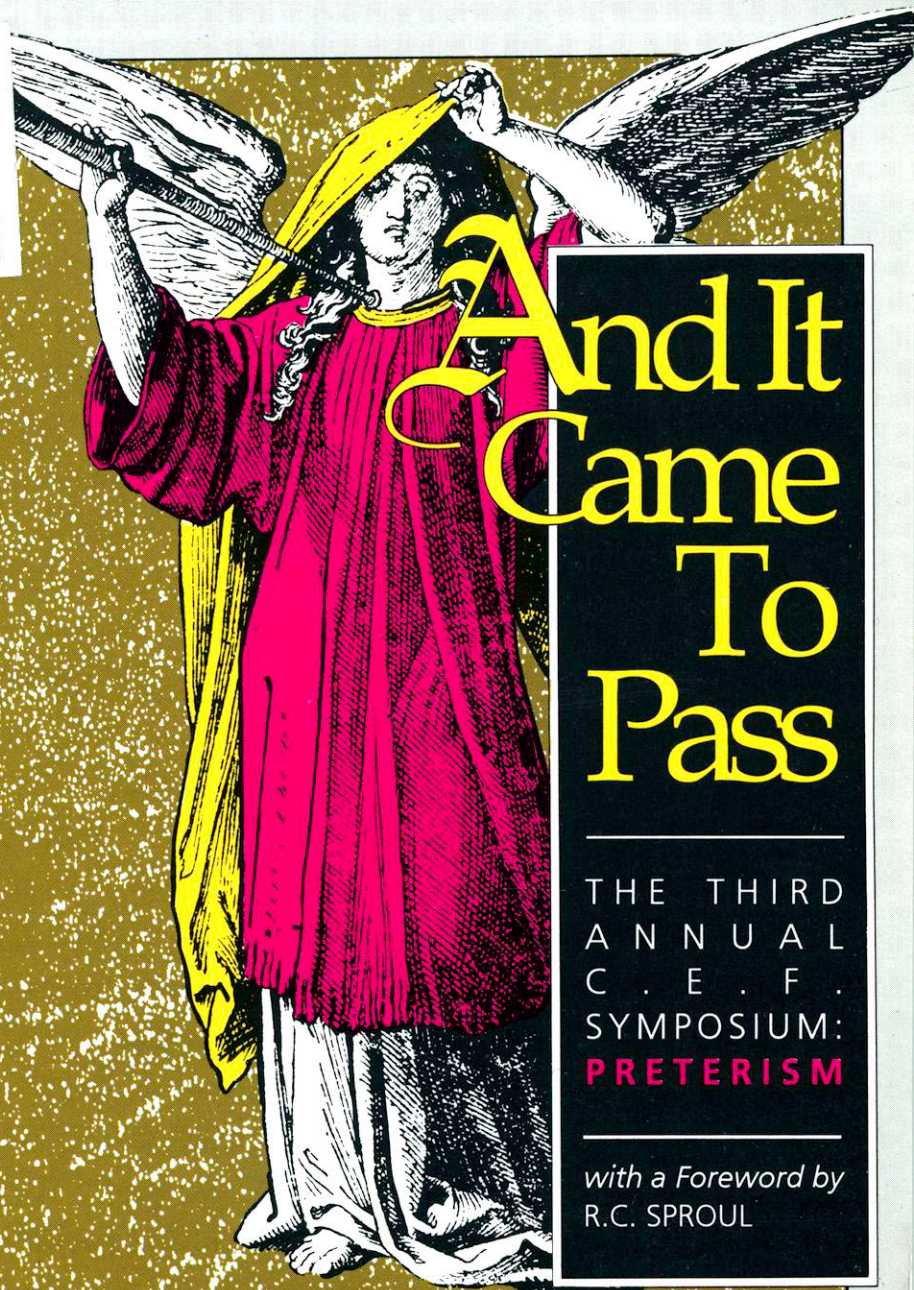


#49B-00146



And It Came To Pass

THE THIRD
ANNUAL
C . E . F .
SYMPOSIUM:
PRETERISM

with a Foreword by
R.C. SPROUL

**AND IT CAME
TO PASS
Third Annual
CEF Symposium:
Preterism**

With a Foreword by R.C. Sproul

**CANON PRESS
Moscow • Idaho**

AND IT CAME TO PASS

Third Annual CEF Symposium: Preterism

First edition Copyright 1993 CANON PRESS

Under the following conditions, permission to use the material in this book is hereby granted. Please notify us at the address below about your use of the material, and please include our address on any reprinted material.

Other titles in the CEF Symposium Series:

No Stone Unturned, Proceedings of the First Annual CEF Symposium: Creation

The Forgotten Heavens, Proceedings of the Second Annual CEF Symposium: Cosmology

CANON PRESS
P.O. Box 8741
Moscow, Idaho 83843
(800) 488-2034

Printed in Colombia.
Impreso en Colombia.

Table Of Contents

Foreword R.C. Sproul	v
Introduction T.J. Morin	1
Old Testament Pictures Of Judgment James Nance	6
Biblical Pictures Of The New Cosmos Douglas Wilson	16
Daniel's Seventy Weeks: Imposing An Impotent Atonement Douglas Jones	36
Apocalypse Then: The Historical Doctrines Of Matthew 24 Gregory C. Dickison	63
A Reasonable Look At Revelation Chris Schlect	78
The Anti-Christ And The Beast James Nance	108
The Harlot T. J. Morin	119

Who Cares? Douglas Wilson	129
A Select Bibliography	134
Index	136

Foreword

One of the ironies of church history is that a biblical text that reveals one of the most astonishing prophecies of a future event has served as a crucial launch pad for devastating critical theories that assail the inspiration and authority of the Bible.

I am thinking, of course, of Christ's vivid prediction of the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem that is discussed in the Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21. Here, clearly decades before the event that occurred in 70 A.D., Jesus gives what almost appears as an eye-witness account. His prophecy is not a studied ambiguity such as those found in the Oracle of Delphi or in the predictions of false prophets. That Jesus' concrete prediction was so uncannily accurate is strong testimony to His possession of supernatural knowledge.

On the other hand, the same prophetic discourse has been used as a proof text of both the Bible's and Jesus' fallibility. Why? Because in the same discourse Jesus predicted the "end of the age" and His own coming (*Parousia*) in clouds of glory.

The problem of the Olivet Discourse is linked with the *time-frame references* Jesus apparently gave with respect to the fulfillment of all the aspects of the prophecy. He indicated that "all these things" would be fulfilled before the generation of people He was addressing would pass away.

The critics argue that while Jesus was accurate about the coming destruction of the temple (an event considered unthinkable by Jesus' contemporaries), He was, nevertheless

abysmally wrong about His coming at the end of the age. Albert Schweitzer saw this as the fatal blow to Jesus' own expectations. Bertrand Russell appealed to the Olivet Discourse as one of his chief reasons for rejecting Christianity.

Critics of the Bible see a slowly developing doctrine of *Parousia delay* even within the New Testament documents designed to accommodate the failure of Jesus and the early apostolic writings to predict the future accurately. They had to deal with the stress of unrealized eschatology.

The critics stress the time-frame references of New Testament prophecy regarding the Parousia of Jesus and the end of the age as their Exhibit A in their evidence against biblical inspiration. Christians who insist on inspiration tend to either ignore the time-frame references or spiritualize them away with special pleading techniques of exegetical gymnastics.

A second irony of church history is that a clear consensus on eschatology has never been reached. A host of competing views has emerged including classical premillenniumism, futuristic dispensationalism, amillenniumism, varieties of postmillenniumism, realized eschatology, and others. Each eschatological system leaves some serious questions unanswered.

Each eschatological system is a land of paradigm or model. It represents a framework in which the details of Bible prophesy are interpreted. No framework has been devised that satisfactorily answers all the questions. Anomalies continue to plague each paradigm.

In the ancient world, Plato nurtured the desire in philosophy and science to "save the phenomena." Thinkers sought paradigms that would make sense of all the data. The history of science is the history of paradigm shifts.

Each generation has witnessed breakthroughs when the abundance of anomalies that refused to fit the existing paradigms cried out for new models.

The modern revival of preterism represents an interesting and important paradigm shift in eschatology. The advantage of preterism is that it “saves the phenomena” of the New Testament time-frame references; it interprets biblical prophecy according to the images used in Scripture itself; and it offers a framework for consistent interpretation of the difficult apocalyptic literature of the Bible, such as that found in Daniel and Revelation.

Preterism has its own intermural debates, particularly as it addresses the question of what remains to be fulfilled, what is still “not yet” in biblical eschatology. Radical preterism, which incorporates all eschatological references into the “already” mode of fulfillment, faces serious difficulties with crucial issues, such as the believer’s experience of the resurrection of the body (1 Corinthians 15). Serious study and dialogue are needed if we are to reach agreement as to how far preterism is to go and what remains for the hope of the church’s and the cosmos’ future in the full plan of redemptive history.

I commend this volume as a fine introduction to some of the most fascinating and important elements of preterist interpretation and hope that it will stimulate serious, scholarly research and discussion into the questions that remain in doubt.

R.C. Sproul
Orlando, 1993

Introduction

T.J. Morin

Christian orthodoxy has long maintained that human history is teleological in nature, that is, it reveals the presence of design and purpose. There are clear examples in the Scriptures of God at work in history, and there are clear prophecies which point to the consummation of human history. A grammatico-historical treatment of the book of Daniel, Matthew 24, and the Apocalypse, for example, clearly places the locus of fulfillment in the past, rather than in the present or future. That is, at least, the opinion of the contributing authors whose essays are presented in this book.

In the context of John's Apocalypse, this conclusion regarding the locus of fulfillment has acquired the tag *preterism*, distinguishing the view from historicism and futurism.¹ As these names imply, the historicists do not believe there to be a particular locus of fulfillment for the prophecies of the Apocalypse; instead, the fulfillment is realized over the entire remainder of human history. The futurists, on the other hand, believe the locus of fulfillment to be in the indefinite future. The preterism explored and presented here has a much broader context than that of the Apocalypse, and, for the sake of preserving the integrity of

¹See, for example, the discussion of the three views in Philip Schaff's *History of the Christian Church*, 7 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), vol. 1, pp. 837-838.

terms, it should be distinguished from a preterism which has only the last eighteen chapters of the Apocalypse in view. Perhaps *radical* or *general preterism* would serve to describe the view that the loci of the prophecies of *Scripture as a whole* are in the past.

In reading the papers published herein, there are two types of evaluation possible. The first is a scrutiny of the work in light of the reviewer's interpretive framework, and the second is a scrutiny of the work in light of correspondence between the authors' premises and conclusions. The distinction in the two evaluations is analogous, as far as the reader is concerned, to that between truth and validity. In order to assist the reader in pursuing an evaluation of the second kind a brief statement of interpretive and textual premises is made here.

First, the authors are committed to the principle of *sola et tota Scriptura*, that is, *only Scripture and all of Scripture*. Only Scripture, and Scripture in its entirety, is authoritative in matters of belief and practice.

Second, the authors are committed to the grammatico-historical hermeneutic in their exegesis of the texts. In particular, they explicitly disavow hermeneutical approaches which consider the Scriptures to be one sustained *double* or *treble entendre*. They embrace an "interpretive naturalism" and reject an "interpretive maximalism." The grammatico-historical method is defined in the following quotation from Milton Terry's *Biblical Hermeneutics*.

Its fundamental principle is to gather from the Scriptures themselves the precise meaning which the writers intended to convey. It applies to the sacred books the same principles, the same grammatical process and exercise of common sense and reason,

which we apply to other books. The grammatico-historical exegete, furnished with suitable qualifications, intellectual, educational, and moral, will accept the claims of the Bible without prejudice or adverse prepossession, and, with no ambition to prove them true or false, will investigate the language and import of each book with fearless independence. He will master the language of the writer, the particular dialect which he used, and his peculiar style and manner of expression. He will inquire into the circumstances under which he wrote, the manners and customs of his age, and the purpose or object which he had in view. He has a right to assume that no sensible author will be knowingly inconsistent with himself, or seek to bewilder and mislead his readers.²

Those who attempt to give the sense of the Scriptures, particularly those who lay hands on the Apocalypse, would do well to keep that last phrase in mind.

The third common premise of the authors is a corollary of the first two premises, and it is a commitment to the self-interpreting character of the divine revelation. The Scriptures as a whole, not a particular systematic, is the arbiter in settling disputes of interpretation. The Westminster Confession, Chapter I, Article IX reflects this conviction.

The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the

²Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1974), p. 173.

Scripture itself; and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture (which is not manifold, but one), it must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly.³

A frequent violation of this rule of interpretation occurs in dealing with the apparent symbolism of the Apocalypse. Often the symbolic images are interpreted in light of every context except that of the well-developed prophetic imagery of the Old Testament.

The fourth common premise is a textual rather than an interpretive one. The authors are committed to an early date for the Apocalypse. The case for this position has been ably and, in our view, conclusively made.⁴ As most of the papers presented in the book make explicit, the early date for John's Apocalypse is a necessary premise in the preterist view.

An additional qualification is, unfortunately, at this point necessary. It is one thing to believe and teach that apostate Judaism was rightly and divinely judged in 70 A.D., but it is entirely another to seek theological justification for an unbiblical race hatred. The preterist may be unjustly

³Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom: With a History and Critical Notes*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1990), vol. 3, p. 605. Attached are the following Scripture proofs: 2 Pet 1:20,21, Acts 15:15, and John 5:46.

⁴Kenneth L. Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell* (Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989).

accused of doing the latter while engaged in the former.⁵ In organization, the papers presented here proceed from the general to the specific, and they work from pan-Scriptural surveys on themes of judgment (“Old Testament Pictures of Judgment” by Jim Nance) and re-creation (“Biblical Pictures of the New Cosmos” by Douglas Wilson), to topical treatment of the identity of the beast, antichrist, and harlot of the Apocalypse. The final chapter is intended as a serious answer to the serious question present in the minds of most people concerning one more book on eschatology. The clear intent of the authors is to provoke a shift, if not in paradigm, then in category, and to move much of the prophetic data of the Bible from the category of eschatology, to that of history.

⁵Such oblique references to latent anti-Semitic tendencies of preterism have been highlighted and refuted in *House Divided*, by Bahnsen and Gentry (Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), p. 53ff.

Chapter 1

Old Testament Pictures Of Judgment

James Nance

The most fundamental aspect of preterism is the belief that many events prophesied in the Bible have come to pass in history. At first glance this may look like a self-contradiction. Prophecy is the foretelling of events yet to come, events which have *not* yet occurred. To say that events have occurred which have not occurred is obviously nonsense.

This apparent contradiction is resolved by defining prophecy more accurately as the foretelling of events which had not *yet* occurred when the prophecy was made. When the angel Gabriel told Mary that she would give birth to a son, he was foretelling an event which had not yet occurred *as he spoke*. But the event prophesied by him has occurred in history for us, to the blessing of the world, in the birth of Jesus Christ.

Someone could argue, "But the prophecy of the birth of Christ is different from the prophecies with which eschatology is concerned. Eschatology is by definition prophecy of the last things, the end-times. The last things cannot have occurred yet. The end-times are not in the past."

It is here that our hypothetical objector has fallen into the fallacy of begging the question. He is, in fact, arguing that events of the end-times have not occurred because they have not occurred. He is assuming at the beginning of the argument that which the argument is about.

Am I declaring that all the events prophesied in the Bible have already occurred? No. There are many glorious prophecies given by God that He is still working to bring to fulfillment in the future, perhaps the distant future. We have not seen all that God has commanded us to look for and work for. I am saying that *many* of the prophecies which people assume to be unfulfilled in history have in fact taken place, but the fulfillment of those prophecies has been missed by those who ignore certain criteria of biblical interpretation.

What then is the criteria for determining whether a prophecy given in Scripture has or has not been fulfilled? How do we know if an event foretold by God has in fact occurred in the past?

We need to know two things, both having to do with *context*. To understand biblical prophecy – indeed, to truly understand any passage in the Bible – the reader must be aware of that passage’s *scriptural* context. What are the verses surrounding that passage? Are there similar passages elsewhere in the Bible? Also, the reader must understand the passage’s *historical* context. What was the writer’s historical situation? What was the writer assuming to be his readers’ situation? If the passage is a prophecy, do we see in history an event which fulfills this prophecy?

To understand New Testament prophecy well, the reader must understand Old Testament prophecy. Many misinterpretations of prophecy, especially prophecies of judgment, arise because the reader assumes without warrant

that the prophetic words of the New Testament somehow differ in their meaning from similar prophetic words of the Old Testament. Even where the New Testament quotes the Old Testament directly, the reader interprets the New Testament prophecy far differently than the Old Testament prophecy.

For example, the Bible student reads the prophecies of invading locusts devouring the land in passages such as Nahum 3:15-17 and Jeremiah 51:27, and he comes to the reasonable conclusion that locusts are an apocalyptic picture of a destructive, irresistible, invading human army sent by God in judgment. But then he reads of the locusts in Revelation:

And they had breastplates like breastplates of iron, and the sound of their wings was like the sound of chariots with many horses running into battle. They had tails like scorpions, and there were stings in their tails. And their power was to hurt men five months (Revelation 9:9-10).

Because this is found in the New Testament, our reader interprets *these* locusts as helicopters or Stinger missiles. He ignores the scriptural context and explains the New Testament prophecy with modern or futuristic interpretations.

This error can also come from the modern-day reader's very reasonable desire for the Bible to have immediate application to himself. But in doing this, he is forced to ignore the fact that the words he is reading were written to real Christians thousands of years ago, with a specific meaning for them. The Bible was written *for us*, but it was not written *to us*.

The Old Testament contains much apocalyptic imagery which is reflected in the prophecies of the New Testament, around which the interpretational error just described is quite common. I will now focus on two major pictures of judgment: "The Darkening of the Heavens", and "The Coming of the Lord."

The Darkening of the Heavens

The Holy Spirit was poured out on the apostolic company at the birth of the Christian church recorded in Acts 2; this caused the believers gathered together to declare the wonders of God in the languages of those assembled in Jerusalem for the feast of Pentecost. When the listeners heard them speaking but did not understand the significance of the event, Peter addressed the crowd. He began this first sermon by appealing to a prophecy from Joel:

And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, that I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your young men shall see visions, your old men shall dream dreams. And on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days; and they shall prophesy. I will show wonders in heaven above and signs in the earth beneath: blood and fire and vapor of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the coming of the great and notable day of the Lord. And it shall come to pass that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved (Acts

2:17-21).

Peter declared that Joel prophesied concerning the days of the Christian church when he wrote about “the last days.” This is evident in the first half of the quote – God’s Spirit *was* poured out on the men and women of the Jerusalem church and they prophesied. But what of the last half? When were the sun and moon darkened? And what was the “notable day of the Lord”?

The answers are found by examining the Old Testament context. This type of picture in which the heavens were darkened had a well-defined meaning for the prophets. We read in Isaiah:

For the stars of heaven and their constellations will not give their light; The sun will be darkened in its going forth, and the moon will not cause its light to shine (Isaiah 13:10).

Looking to the scriptural context, we see that this prophecy is sandwiched between “The burden against *Babylon*” (13:1), and “Behold, I will stir up *the Medes* against them” (13:17). From history, we know that this destruction of Babylon by the Medes occurred around 540 B.C. The lights of the sky being turned off was used by Isaiah as a picture of the destruction of a land under God’s judgment at the hand of a foreign nation.

A more startling use of this apocalyptic language is seen later in Isaiah:

All the host of heaven shall be dissolved, and the heavens shall be rolled up like a scroll; All their host shall fall down as the leaf falls from the vine,

and as fruit falling from a fig tree (Isaiah 34:4).

This is a more cataclysmic picture than the previous citation. The image here is one of finality – the hosts are dissolved as if there is no more use for them, the heavens are rolled up as if the story is finished. It would be tempting to assume that this prophecy concerns the end of the world, but only if we ignore the next verse:

For My sword shall be bathed in heaven; indeed it shall come down on Edom, and on the people of My curse for judgment (34:5).

This passage concerns not the end of the world, but the end of a single nation – Edom. The picture is universal, but the fulfillment is very limited.

This is how we should interpret Peter's quotation from Joel in Acts 2. We should assume, as Peter's original hearers undoubtedly did, that the picture of judgment he used had the same meaning as the identical pictures in the Old Testament. The turning of the sun to darkness and the moon to blood were images of God's judgment on the city in which Peter was speaking – Jerusalem – carried out by the Roman armies of Titus in A.D. 70. Those who apply the second-half of the prophecy to the end of all things force an unnecessary two-thousand year (or greater) gap between verse 18 and verse 19.¹

Incidentally, this understanding of the prophecy in Acts 2 gives additional insight into the sign of tongues. Peter

¹ A similar, large pause is often applied to Jesus' words in the Olivet Discourse, (Luke 21:24-25). Compare also Matthew 24:29 and Revelation 6:12-14.

declared that the new Christian church speaking in tongues was evidence that God would bring judgment on the land of the Jews, but that “whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” The Jews in Jerusalem heard the words of God in the tongues of the nations of the Roman empire as a sign that within their generation their city would be destroyed by the armies of Rome.

The Coming Of The Lord

In Matthew 10 we read that Jesus sent out the Twelve to preach that “the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” As Jesus spoke to them of the opposition they would encounter, He prophesied the following:

But when they persecute you in this city, flee to another. For assuredly, I say to you, you will not have gone through the cities of Israel before *the Son of Man comes* (Matthew 10:23,[italics mine]).

It would be easy to interpret the italicized phrase as the return of Christ at the end of all history, if it were not for the rest of the sentence. The apostles went through the cities of Israel, but in that time did Jesus come?

The liberal scholar and the unbeliever have a simple solution: Jesus was wrong about the time of His return. But those of us who take the Bible seriously must take Jesus at His word, even though the cities He referred to are long since buried under centuries of dirt. We must conclude that sometime in the first century this prophecy was fulfilled; Jesus *has* come.

To justify this, we again look to the Old Testament

prophets and their use of apocalyptic language. Isaiah wrote the following:

The burden against Egypt. Behold, the Lord rides on a swift cloud, and will come into Egypt. The idols of Egypt will totter at His presence, and the hearts of Egypt will melt in its midst (Isaiah 19:1).

The prophet Micah used similar language:

For behold, the Lord is coming out of His place; He will come down and tread on the high places of the earth. The mountains will melt under Him, and the valleys will split like wax before the fire, like waters poured down a steep place (Micah 1:3-4)

These are both prophecies of the coming of the Lord. He was to come upon an evil nation *in judgment*, upon the nation of Egypt in Isaiah's prophecy and upon Samaria in Micah's. How was the coming of the Lord manifested to these nations? It was manifest when each of them fell to the Assyrians around 700 B.C. The Lord came in judgment, using one nation to punish another for its sins.

Similarly, in the Matthew 10 passage, Jesus prophesied the punishment of Israel for its persecution of Himself and His church. Before the apostles went through the cities of Israel, the Son of man came in judgment on the Jews and Jerusalem. This explains how Jesus could say to the high priest at His trial:

...hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven (Matthew 26:64).

Jesus declared that *the high priest* would see Him coming on the clouds, just as in Revelation 1:7 we are told that those who pierced Christ would see Him “coming with the clouds.”

Did these people of the first-century actually see Jesus coming on the clouds with the angels in judgment? The writings of two ancient, non-Christian historians seem to record such an incident. The Jewish historian Josephus wrote concerning the destruction of Jerusalem:

I suppose the account of it would seem to be a fable, were it not related by those who saw it, and were not the events that followed it of so considerable a nature as to deserve such signals; for, before sun-setting, chariots and troops of soldiers in their armour were seen running about among the clouds, and surrounding the cities.²

The Roman historian Tacitus relates a strikingly similar account of the destruction of the Jewish temple:

There had been seen hosts joining battle in the skies, the fiery gleam of arms, the temple illuminated by sudden radiance from the clouds...in the ancient record of their priests was contained a prediction of how at this very time the East was to grow powerful, and rulers, coming from Judea, were to acquire universal empire.³

²Flavius Josephus, *Wars of the Jews* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications,), Book VI, Ch. V, Sec. 3.

³ Tacitus, *The Histories*, Book V, sec. 13

Jesus came in His kingdom, to judge His enemies and bless His people who waited patiently for Him.⁴

⁴ See also Matthew 16:27-28, Luke 17:24-30, James 5:7-9.

Chapter 2

Biblical Pictures Of The New Cosmos

Douglas Wilson

It is commonly difficult to learn a new language; not only are there new words to learn, there are many times new *categories* of thought. In language acquisition, it is therefore not enough to *say* different things, it is necessary to *think* differently.

In eschatological matters, evangelicals, for the most part, have spoken a common language for the last hundred years or so. The modern world is careening toward Armageddon, an unnamed antichrist is waiting in the wings somewhere in Europe, plans to rebuild the Temple are afoot, and there is some debate over whether Christians will be raptured before, during, or after, the seven-year Tribulation.

But in recent years, some Christians here and there have begun to speak differently. Unlike the previous debaters, these people are not disputing over *details* within the framework of the accepted language. They are questioning the grammar of that language itself -- the very structure of it has been challenged. Those who debate whether the Rapture will be at the beginning or end of a seven-year Tribulation are speaking different *dialects*. But this new language challenges the very foundations of the old.

In order for the proponents of both languages to engage in profitable debate, it is essential for both to recognize that they do not share a common grammar. It is foolish to look up an English phrase in a French grammar book. In the same way, it is foolish for a speaker of the old language, dispensationalism, to look up in *his* grammar text a word, phrase, or reference which he has heard from a proponent of this new eschatological language. In order to understand the position, it is necessary to understand *first* the grammar, and then the words.

I write, I must confess, as one who speaks this new language. I also write not simply as a speaker of it but also as a *proponent* of it, which brings us to a problem with our analogy. The example of language has one particular limitation. To speak French, as opposed to another language, is not correct or incorrect. It is not right or wrong to speak Sanskrit. But it must be recognized that in this debate over eschatology, the Bible does not allow for both languages. At least one of them is incorrect. This fact also shows the limitation of the word *new*, for of course, if the position is biblical, it is hardly *new* in any absolute sense.

Because we are concerned to speak in the biblical tongue, it is not sufficient to show a consistency between a system's grammar and its subsequent vocabulary. Indeed, the language of dispensationalism does that; it is certainly *internally* consistent. But internal consistency is not the test for theological accuracy; the test is *exegetical* consistency. The question for Christians should be whether or not the grammar of their particular system of interpretation is the grammar of the Bible. While both are important, it is more important to speak with a biblical grammar than with a biblical vocabulary. A central objection to the dispensational approach is that it speaks with a biblical vocabulary built on

an unbiblical grammar -- with the result a sort of pidgin eschatology. It is misleading to the average Christian, who recognizes the words, but quite destructive in its long-term tendency to undermine biblical categories of thought.

The goal of this paper is to present a basic grammar of eschatological events taken from Scripture. The design is to show that the framework of interpretation is given to us in the Bible itself; it is not something we are allowed to *impose* on the text. If there is to be any success in this endeavor at all, I must take the liberty of asking the reader to do two things:

First, we must ask and answer our eschatological questions from the vantage point of the first century. The Bible was not written in 1948. We must always remember that the first-century Christians were the first believers to read the words of the New Testament, and we must seek to put ourselves in their shoes. What did these expressions, words, and phrases mean to *them*?

Second, we must ask and answer our eschatological questions from the vantage point of people immersed in the Scriptures, most particularly the Old Testament. This is quite simply a necessary protection; there are symbols in the Scripture to be interpreted, and we must not allow ourselves to fill the meaning of those symbols from places other than the Bible itself.

I am going to concentrate on two expressions (along with some variants and offshoots) found in Scripture. We are going to look for the contextual grammar for these phrases: *the end of the age*, and *the new heavens and the new earth*. The reader is asked to keep in mind as we proceed the two limitations mentioned above. What is the Bible's framework, or grammar, in the use of these expressions, and what would these words have meant to

Demitrius of Corinth?

The End of the Age

The Bible describes human history as divided up into ages. As we read the New Testament, we discover that the writers of the sacred volume considered themselves to have been living at a terminal point for these ages. This did not mean that history was to *end* in their generation; they also quite clearly anticipated an age to come.

Paul reminds the Christians of his day that they are not to imitate the rebellious Israelites of the wilderness, and he points out that the record of that rebellion was handed down as a warning for the first-century Christians. He says the following:

Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come (1 Cor. 10:11).

The ends of the ages had come upon *them*, two thousand years ago. A similar statement is made by the author of Hebrews. He places the crucifixion at the end of the ages.

He then would have had to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now, once at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself (Hebrews 9:26).

If this were all that was said, we might be justified in

thinking that he was referring to the end of the world, and then trouble ourselves with wondering why the world had not ended. But in the sixth chapter of the same book, he says of those who fall into apostasy that they had "tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come" (Hebrews 6:5). The fact that they were at the end of the ages did not mean they were at the end of the world. Quite clearly, they anticipated an age to come. Paul's anticipation can be seen in his recognition of the supremacy of Christ -- not only in *his* age, but also in the coming age. God has exalted Christ, he says, "far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come" (Ephesians 1:21).

If the Bible spoke only of an age to come, it would be possible to think that such an age would arrive thousands of years after the writing of the Bible. But the biblical authors do not just say there is a coming age, they also maintain that *they* were living at the *end* of their age. This means that the coming age must be, from their perspective, arriving *soon*.

So we can say that Christ and His first-century followers appeared at the end of an age -- the age of Judaic Temple worship, the aeon of the shadows. This age was to be followed by, if I dare say it, a new age. This new age is the Christian aeon, in which we live. In this age, the age which the biblical writers referred to as the age to come, the Temple is a spiritual one and will never be torn down, much less rebuilt.

This understanding affects how we read certain passages which warn of "this present evil age." It is not that the warnings concerning moral purity are ever out of date, but rather there must be a shift in our thinking concerning what

sort of deliverance they were looking for. There is a tendency among Christians to regard such warnings as *timeless*. There is no thought given to the possibility that the transition from one age to another changes the nature of the conflict, as well as the nature of a believer's duties. Not that there is a lessening of the moral antithesis, but rather a change from defense to offense.

The early Christians had heard prophecy and had been taught that the old age was not going to go quietly. There was to be a cataclysm of fire, through which the faithful would endure. Those who endured to the end would be saved. This raging fire was going to consume the enemies of God (Hebrews 10:26-27), and they had been expressly warned to not be standing too close to the God-haters when it happened (Matthew 24:15-20). Just as Moses told those who feared God to stand back from the rebellious (Numbers 16:5), so Paul quotes Moses to similar effect (2 Timothy 2:19).

So, when they speak of deliverance from this present evil age, they are looking for a similar kind of deliverance to what Noah received in *another* transition from age to age. They are looking for a deliverance *through* the change. In this category, we should place Paul's words in Galatians 1:4, "...who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father..."

In another place, he says that "...denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age..." (Titus 2:12).

Of course this does not mean we do not have to be sober and godly and righteous and so on. But the *reason* for maintaining purity changes under the new circumstance. The early Christians were to maintain their witness as the

old age collapsed under the wrath of God. Christians after that point were to maintain their witness because they were charged with the responsibility of conquering the world with the gospel. There is a difference between the sin of Korah (Numbers 16) and the sin of Achan (Joshua 7). The early church was in the wilderness; we are in the land -- with the responsibility of conquest. If we are thinking biblically, then we should not be worried about how the present evil age might swallow us up; our concern should be about how to overcome the world. When Jesus says that the gates of Hades would not prevail against the Church, He was not thinking of those gates as an *offensive* weapon. Those gates were to be besieged by a conquering, triumphant Church.

Preparing Christians for the coming invasion is, in large part, a major theme of the book of Hebrews. "For He has not put the world to come, of which we speak, in subjection to angels" (Hebrews 2:5). The world to come is subjected to man *in Christ*. As man in Adam forfeited his birthright, so man in Christ regains it.

The book of Hebrews can be well understood as a New Testament Deuteronomy. While the circumstances surrounding the writing of the two books were certainly different, the parallels between them are, nevertheless, obvious. There are parallels in the purposes of the two books (as can be seen in the use of the Old Testament in Hebrews), and there is a clear teaching in Hebrews on the typology of the wilderness experience of Israel.

The book of Deuteronomy was given in order to prepare the people of Israel for the coming invasion of the promised land under Joshua. The book of Hebrews was written to prepare the new Israel, the Church, for the coming "invasion of the world." For example, this purpose can be

clearly seen in the first chapter of Hebrews.

The Old Testament is quoted seven times in that chapter; *five* of the quotations are from places in the Old Testament where the Lord's universal dominion over the entire earth is prophesied. In turn, these quotations are:

“You are my Son; today I have begotten You.” This is from the second Psalm (2:7), one of the clearest prophecies of the Messiah's universal dominion in the Old Testament. In Acts 13, the apostle Paul applies this phrase to the resurrection. In other words, this is a prophecy that Christ would be firstborn from among the dead. But the prophecy continues -- the second Psalm goes on. What does the next verse say? “Ask of Me, and I will give You the nations for Your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for Your possession” (2:8). Was Christ aware of this inheritance of His after the resurrection? He certainly was. He said: “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore...”(Matthew 28:18). This prophecy of the resurrection (from a context that promises the inheritance of *all* nations) is the first passage quoted by the author of Hebrews.

The third quotation in this chapter is from Deuteronomy 32:43 (Septuagint, Dead Sea Scrolls). It says: “Let all the angels of God worship Him.” This is the first quotation from Deuteronomy, the book we are comparing with Hebrews. A different portion of the quoted verse is quoted elsewhere in the New Testament. That portion is quoted by Paul in Romans 15:10, “Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people.” His concern is to provide a scriptural justification for the ongoing, Gentile world mission. This means the author of Hebrews cited a verse that not only called upon the angels to worship, but also called on the *nations* to rejoice with the people of God.

The fifth O.T. passage that appears in the first chapter of Hebrews is this one: "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your Kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; therefore God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of gladness more than Your companions" (Hebrews 1:8b-9). This is from Psalm 45:6-7. What immediately precedes this passage in the original context? "Your arrows are sharp in the heart of the King's enemies; the peoples fall under You."

The next Old Testament passage quoted is Psalm 102:25-27. The author of Hebrews quotes: "You, Lord, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth..." But earlier in that psalm there is a wonderful prophecy of the coming, realized dominion of the Lord. "So the nations shall fear the name of the Lord, and all the kings of the earth Your glory. For the Lord shall build up Zion; He shall appear in His glory" (Psalm 102:15-16).

The last citation is from Psalm 110:1 and is quoted in Hebrews 1:13. It stands by itself as a prophecy of the Lord's glorious reign. "Sit at my right hand till I make your enemies your footstool." Jesus is at the right hand of the Father reigning over the nations of the earth. It is on that basis that He tells us to proclaim His Lordship to them.¹

¹ The two passages that do not explicitly refer to the coming reign of the Messiah are 2 Samuel 7 and Psalm 104. But, although the Messianic reign over the nations is not explicitly referred to in the first, it is certainly implied. This is the place where God promised David that one of his descendents would reign forever. Given how this promise was fulfilled in Christ, it is impossible to see this as limited to ethnic Israel. In Psalm 104, there is a glorious recital of God's providential oversight of the world He created. Given the thrust of the psalm, it is unthinkable that the Lord's rule could be understood as limited in any way. There is also one oblique

The pattern is clear in the first chapter of Hebrews, but this pattern also continues throughout the rest of the book. *Half* of the quotations in Hebrews come from a context where the Lord's dominion is very clearly set forth. One example from later in the book should be sufficient. In chapter 13:5, the author encourages his readers with this: "For He Himself has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.' " Now this is the type of verse you could easily find in a Christian bookstore in the poster section; it will probably have a sunset or a basket of kittens on it. But the original context of the verse was the invasion of Palestine under the armies of Joshua. It was the encouragement of the Lord to those who were about to go into *battle* for His Name. The author of Hebrews applies it because his readers were in the same situation.

The second reason for considering Hebrews in such detail is typological. After the Exodus, the Jews spent a little over forty-one years in the wilderness. There was about a year before the abortive invasion of Canaan, and then, forty years after *that* time, the conquest began under Joshua.

Jesus was crucified around 29 A.D. His church was born at Pentecost a few months later -- a spiritual exodus. A little over forty-one years later, Jerusalem was destroyed by the armies of Rome, and a major obstacle to the evangelization of the Gentiles had been removed. In addition, God made it very plain through this destruction that His blessing no longer rested on the Jews considered ethnically.

The first-century Christians were thus in a similar

reference to the Messianic Kingdom. It is found in verse 35: *May sinners be consumed from the earth, and the wicked be no more.*

situation as the Jews in the wilderness. The author of Hebrews was aware of this comparison and explicitly reminds his readers of this in chapters 3 and 4.

What are some of the parallels between Israel in the wilderness and the early church? Some of the more obvious are the following:

We have already mentioned the time covered. Both time periods were a little over forty-one years – which is basically one generation.

Both periods were times when God gave His Word to His people. He gave His law to Moses and the revelation surrounding the New Covenant to Christ and His apostles.

Both were times of apostasy and rebellion. Moses faced (among others) the rebellion of Korah. Paul faced the rebellion of Hymenaeus and Philetus (and we have already noted which Old Testament passage he quoted with regard to this rebellion in 2 Tim. 2:19).

Both were times when the people of God were being prepared for an invasion. The Jews were hardened into a people capable of conquering Canaan; the church was being prepared for the coming invasion of the world. In 1 Corinthians 10:6, Paul explicitly draws the parallel between ancient Israel and the current situation of the church. “Now these things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted.” Now when he says *us*, to whom is he referring? To all Christians, at all times? Or to a particular group of Christians? The answer is found in verse 11. There he says: “Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, on whom the ends of the ages have come.” The same *us* is referred to here, and it is comprised of those Christians on whom the ends of the ages had come.

If the fulfillment of the ages is the end of the world,

then the whole analogy of the wilderness experience that Paul is using here collapses. But if it refers to that generation of Christians who were to see the judgment of God on the Jewish nation, then Paul's point fits nicely.

This means that church history can be divided into two periods. The first was the Church in the wilderness; the second is the conquering Church. (This does not mean that the conquering church can have no difficulties. Just look at the book of Judges.) The first period ended with the destruction of Jerusalem. The second period has not yet ended; our book of Joshua is not yet completed.

The New Heavens and New Earth

In order for the new heavens and new earth to be established, the old order must first pass away. Two questions immediately present themselves. What is meant by the phrase "heavens and earth." When will (or did) the transition between the two orders take place?

With regard to the first question, we must immediately rule out a reference to the physical cosmos. The author of Hebrews tells us this:

See that you do not refuse Him who speaks. For if they did not escape who refused Him who spoke on earth, much more shall we not escape if we turn away from Him who speaks from heaven, whose voice then shook the earth; but now He has promised, saying, "Yet once more I shake not only the earth, but also heaven." Now this, "Yet once more," indicates the removal of those things that are being shaken, as of things that are made, that the

things which cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire (Hebrews 12:25-29).

The prophecy from Haggai, cited by the author of Hebrews, promised a *shaking* of the heavens and earth. This shaking, we are authoritatively told, indicates a *removal*. In other words, the earth and also the heavens were to be removed and replaced. What was to replace them? The answer is the kingdom that cannot be shaken, *i.e.* cannot be removed.

The kingdoms of men crumble. The kingdoms of the principalities and powers in the heavenly realms fall as well. The kingdoms of creatures are *shakable* kingdoms. The old order, the old heavens and earth, is that order which was toppled by the triumph of the Lord Jesus Christ. "Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, 'The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!'" (Revelation 11:15).

Notice that the author of Hebrews does not say that this unshakable kingdom is something we will receive by and by, at some distant point in the future. He says that they, the Christians of the first century, were receiving it then. And he says that the shaking of the old order was occurring *then*. That shaking was happening, and the removal would soon follow. The apostle Paul had the same triumphant expectation. "However, we speak wisdom among those who are mature, yet not the wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing" (1 Corinthians 2:6).

Note the import of that last phrase -- "who are coming to nothing."

Not only was God shaking their kingdoms down, but in His derision of their hatred of Him, He used their defiance and rebellion as the instrument of their destruction. "But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory, which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory" (1 Corinthians 2:7-8).

They are coming to nothing because the death of the Lord Jesus was not just the redemption price for His people; it was more. It was the blow which struck at the foundation of all God-hating empires, whether celestial or terrestrial. They were coming to nothing because Jesus died, and rose again, and triumphed over them in so doing. "Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it" (Colossians 2:15).

So then, the heavens and earth are a figure for the *kingdoms* of heaven and earth. The new heavens and the new earth are a figure for the glorious and ever-increasing reign of our Lord Jesus Christ. Consider this testimony:

But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved being on fire,

and the elements will melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells (2 Peter 3:10-13).

Many would want to argue that surely this, if nothing else, is referring to the destruction of the material universe. Not at all. There are three reasons to be found in the text which taken together prohibit such an application to the physical world.

First, Peter attaches these words to God's *promise*. The promise is found in Isaiah 65:17: "For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former shall not be remembered or come to mind." Also consider Isaiah 66:22: "For as the new heavens and the new earth which I will make shall remain before Me," says the Lord, "so shall your descendants and your name remain." This is where the promise, referred to by Peter, is given. Now when we carefully look at the terms of the promise given, we see that it cannot be referring to the eternal state; it must be referring to a period in human history. The question concerns when this time of great blessing is inaugurated. Some dispensationalists argue that the new heavens and new earth is a phrase that refers to the millenium -- which is the time when Christ will reign physically on earth for one thousand years. Others argue that it refers to the eternal state, which we have already addressed.

Some of the terms of the promise in Isaiah are these: we know that death will remain in the new heaven and new earth (65:20), home construction will continue (65:21), agriculture will continue (65:21), as will worship (66:23). The *new heavens and new earth* is therefore not a phrase which describes the eternal resurrection state.

Secondly, the word *element* does not have to refer to the physical elements at all. The word is *stoikion*, and appears in the New Testament only seven times. Paul uses it twice in Galatians 4, in verses 3 and 9. I have cited those verses here with some of the surrounding context.

Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world. But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons...But then, indeed, when you did not know God, you served those which by nature are not gods. But now after you have known God, or rather are known by God, how is it that you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements, to which you desire again to be in bondage? You observe days and months and seasons and years. (Galatians 4:3-5, 8-10)

What are the elements here? They are *not* the periodic table. The reference is to an old system of observing days, months, seasons, and years, which created a system of bondage. It involved serving, and being ruled by, entities which *by nature were not gods*. When the time for that rule was over, God sent His Son.

Paul also uses the word in Colossians 2:8,20.

Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ...Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why,

as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations...

The word *stoikion* is translated here as *basic principles*. Notice again the element of rule. The elements, here and in Galatians, are referring to the basic Judaic system. That bondage *ended* in Christ; in Him, it was set aside.

The word is used once with regard to the elements of the new order in Hebrews 5:12.

For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food.

Although this is referring to the new order, not the old, the element of authority is clearly seen. These elements are the basics of God's oracles.

The last two uses in the New Testament are in our passage in Peter. Given how the word is used elsewhere throughout the New Testament, the burden of proof is certainly on those who want to maintain that Peter is referring to the physical elements. Consistent with the usage elsewhere, I believe he is talking about the total dissolution of the Judaic age, by means of fire.

A few verses above, he has stated that the antediluvian world *perished in water*. That age abruptly ended. In the same way, he argues, the present heaven and earth will end in fire -- which it did in the cataclysm of 70 A.D.

Third, the New Testament requires us to hold that the new heavens and new earth were *shortly* to appear -- at *that* time, two thousand years ago. Peter, when he refers to the new heavens and new earth, anticipates their immediate

arrival. Those to whom Peter was writing were to be *looking for* and *hastening* the new heavens and new earth.

The phrase also occurs in Revelation 21:1. "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea." But John also tells us when to expect the fulfillment of his vision, for he tells us in the first chapter that the *time is near* (Rev. 1:3). He gave the revelation to His servants, and the revelation was about things *which must shortly take place* (1:1). There are the same sorts of expressions in the last chapter. The Lord speaks again and again. "Behold, I am coming quickly!" (22:7,12,20). "And the Lord God of the holy prophets sent His angel to show His servants the things which must shortly take place" (22:6b). Notice that the teaching here is not of an *imminent* return of the Lord, as dispensationalism teaches, but of His immediate return. He does not say: "Behold, I am coming sooner or later!"

Given the framework of the prophecy established by the prophet, the burden of proof is surely on those who want to maintain that the new heavens and new earth will not arrive for two thousand or more years. If we take the statements of God's Word at face value, then we should conclude that the first heaven and the first earth passed away and was replaced by the glorious reign of the Lord Jesus Christ.

"But," we say in our unbelief, looking around us, "why do we not see more evidence of His reign? Why is there still sin and suffering in the world?"

O little-faith servants, hear your Master. The kingdom of God is like yeast that works its way through the loaf. The kingdom of God is like a mustard seed, which begins by being small and inconspicuous, but which grows large and great, and the birds nest in the branches. The Lord *never* said that the kingdom of God was like the 82nd

Airborne, and we ought to stop looking for the invasion. And if we are impatient with how slowly the yeast seems to work, then perhaps we should check to see whether *our* unbelief is part of the problem.

Conclusion

The rule and reign of Jesus Christ is not something we see with our eyes. We are not privileged, as Stephen was, to see Him standing at the right hand of God the Father. But whether we see Him now or not, He is there, nonetheless, and He reigns, nonetheless. The fact that we do not see the King does not mean that the kingdom is ephemeral. We do not see His reign, but we most certainly see the *effects* of His reign.

To deny that His reign has a visible effect on history is to deny that His reign has *reality* in history. Jesus is seated at the right hand of God, and He will remain there until all His enemies (excepting death) have been brought under His feet. Now, does this truth make any *difference*? The way some Christians talk, the reign of Christ over the nations makes no difference to the nations -- it is a *spiritual* truth, they say. They say it is an invisible reign. Although correct this time, I would remind them that there is a clear difference between invisible and inconsequential.

So then, the God of this age, the Christian aeon in which we live, is the Lord Jesus Christ. The devil, the god of a prior age, has been defeated. Jesus, by His death, destroyed the one who had the power of death, that is, the devil. Therefore, God has exalted Him to the highest place, and has given Him a name over every other name, and He, the exalted One, shall reign forever and ever. Of the

increase of His government there shall be no end, and the earth will be as full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. Amen. May God's people soon come to believe it.

Chapter 3

Daniel's Seventy Weeks: Imposing An Impotent Atonement

Douglas Jones

The dispensationalists' interpretation of Daniel's prophecy of the seventy weeks (Dan. 9:20-27) is so central to the entire network of popular dispensationalist claims that if their understanding of this passage were to fail, then much of their eschatology would have to be rejected or radically revised. Dispensationalist¹ notions about end-times events -- the rapture(s), tribulation, Israel, antichrist, the millennium, etc. -- depend in part or wholly upon a peculiarly dispensationalist interpretation of Daniel's seventy weeks. This claim ought not to surprise the

¹ Despite the current convolutions within dispensationalist schools of thought (see Vern Poythress, *Understanding Dispensationalists* [Grand Rapids: Academie Books, Zondervan Publ., 1987], pp. 7-38), I will take dispensationalist to designate those who hold that: (a) history is divided into a number of redemptively discontinuous epochs [dispensations], (b) Israel and the New Testament church are separate bodies in God's plan, (c) the proper principle of biblical hermeneutics is "literalism," and (d) Christ's Second Coming will be premillennial, following a seven-year tribulation culminating in a literal Armageddon.

dispensationalist. In fact, leading dispensationalists emphasize the centrality of Daniel 9 in their system. For example, Alva McClain, who served as a member of the Scofield Reference Bible Revision Committee, wrote in his *Daniel's Prophecy of the Seventy Weeks*, "I am convinced that in the predictions of the seventy weeks, we have *the indispensable chronological key to all New Testament prophecy*....[A]part from an understanding of the details of the seventy weeks of Daniel, all attempts to interpret New Testament prophecy must fail in large measure."²

My claim is not only that the dispensationalist interpretation of Daniel's seventy weeks is a central pillar for dispensationalism, but, even more, that the dispensationalist view of Daniel 9 is dependent upon an unbiblical -- Arminian -- and, therefore, impotent view of Christ's atonement. For many, this point, if true, is interesting in that it provides another example of how deficiencies in one part of our beliefs will generally produce deficiencies elsewhere.³ More importantly, it shows that we can also work to aid in the collapse of dispensationalism by preaching the biblical gospel of Christ's *effectual* atonement.

Though preterists have raised many sound arguments against the dispensationalist interpretation of Daniel 9, I

²(Grand Rapids: Academie Books, Zondervan Publ., 1990), pp. 10,11. [McClain's emphasis].

³Of course, the Arminian dispensationalist will want to reverse the claim by arguing that the Reformed preterist has a similar link from soteriology to Daniel 9 to eschatology. I'm grateful this is true! Nevertheless, it doesn't work as a criticism since the Arminian view of the atonement is in far worse exegetical shape than their view of Daniel 9. But a detailed justification of this claim is outside the focus of my essay.

would like to focus just on the dispensationalist assumptions about Christ's atonement. I will begin by providing the context for Daniel 9 and then sketch the common dispensationalist understanding of Daniel's prophecy, focusing on the arguments of dispensationalists McClain and Hoehner for the supposed gap between the sixty-ninth and seventieth weeks. Then, since their prime argument for the eschatological "gap" is drawn from their low view of Christ's atonement, I will show that the New Testament very clearly teaches that what they say could not happen has happened. Hence, in principle, without their central pillar of Daniel 9, the ceiling of dispensational futurism has no support.

Background to Daniel's Seventy Weeks

Several hundred years before Daniel received his prophecy, the nation of Israel under Saul, David, and Solomon continued as a united kingdom. Following the reign of Solomon, in about 930 A.D., Israel split into two separate nations -- the northern kingdom, Israel, and the southern kingdom, Judah. Subsequently, as a result of continuing idolatry, the Lord exiled the northern kingdom in 722 B.C. to Assyria, giving Israel "into the hand of the plunderers, until He had cast them from His sight" (2 Kings 17:20).

Though the southern kingdom, Judah, was sometimes faithful, it also rebelled against God by turning to idolatry and never giving the land its required Sabbath rest (2 Chron. 36). The Lord used Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, to capture the people of Judah and carry them away into slavery. At the beginning of this exile, Jeremiah

received the prophecy:

“Yet you have not listened to Me,” declares the LORD, “in order that you might provoke Me to anger with the work of your hands to your own harm.... I will send to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, My servant, and will bring them against this land and against its inhabitants.... And this whole land shall be a desolation and a horror, and these nations *shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years*” (Jer. 25:7-11).

This prophecy of a seventy-year exile is repeated in Jeremiah 29 with instructions on proper living in Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar began enslaving Judah in about 605 B.C. and finished in 586. He destroyed the entire city of Jerusalem, including the temple.

Daniel was taken during this exile and served as God’s prophet in Babylon. At the point in time described at the beginning of Daniel 9, the seventy-years of Babylonian exile were nearly complete, and Daniel “observed in the books the number of years which was revealed as the word of the Lord to Jeremiah the prophet for the completion of the desolations of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years” (Dan. 9:2). Seeing that the time for release was near, Daniel turned to the Lord in prayer to confess Judah’s sins and plead for God’s mercy, based on His promises to Jeremiah. Yet, in the midst of his prayer, Daniel is interrupted.

[20] Now while I was speaking and praying, and confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my supplication before the LORD my God in behalf of the holy mountain of my God,

[21] while I was still speaking in prayer, then the man Gabriel;, whom I had seen in the vision previously came to me in my extreme weariness about the time of the evening offering.

[22] and he gave me instruction and talked with me, and said, "O Daniel, I have now come forth to give you insight with understanding.

[23] "At the beginning of your supplications the command was issued, and I have come to tell you, for you are highly esteemed; so give heed to the message and gain understanding of the vision.

[24] Seventy weeks have been decreed for your people and your holy city; to finish the transgression, to make an end of sin, to make atonement for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most holy.

[25] So you are to know and discern *that* from the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince *there will be* seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; it will be built again, with plaza and moat, even in times of distress.

[26] Then after the sixty-two weeks the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing, and the people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. And its end *will come* with a flood; even to the end there will be war; desolations are determined.

[27] And he will make a firm covenant with the many for one week, but in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering; and on the wing of abominations *will come* one who makes desolate, even until a complete destruction,

one that is decreed, is poured out in the one who makes desolate.”

Common Dispensationalist Understanding of the Passage

Dispensationalists view this passage as prophecy of Christ's first and final comings, along with a depiction of the final activities of *the Antichrist*. In a sketch, they understand the passage as follows: God reveals to Daniel that the Messiah will come in judgment and glory -- the Second Coming -- after a total of 490 years (Seventy weeks) [v. 24]. However, this period of 490 years will be divided into two significant periods: sixty-nine weeks (483 years) and one distant final week (one seven year period).⁴

The first period, sixty-nine weeks, designates very specifically, according to dispensationalists, the exact period between the decree to rebuild Jerusalem by Artaxerxes and the arrival of Christ in Jerusalem in 33 A.D. [v. 25]. After sixty-nine weeks (which is after sixty-two weeks), Christ will be cut-off, or crucified [v. 26]. Following the crucifixion, “*the people of the prince who is to come,*” the Roman legions, will destroy Jerusalem, as they did in 70

⁴The word *week* in Hebrew (*sha bu'a*) means *a unit of seven*. This may seem strange to us. The word *week* is used like the English word *dozen* which specifies *a unit of twelve*; the word *dozen* by itself doesn't tell us what the units are, but only that there are twelve of them. There could be a dozen cars, or employees, or eggs, or doughnuts. In reference to the *weeks* in the passage, many take the units in question to be years as opposed to days, normal weeks, or months. The phrase *seventy weeks*, then, is understood as seventy periods of seven years. The usual reason that years are chosen as the unit of time is that Jeremiah's prophecy speaks of years, and this is the prophecy that Daniel consults.

A.D. [v. 26].

The “prince who is to come,” however, does not designate the Roman leader in 70 A.D. but specifically designates a future Roman political leader who will arise as *the* Antichrist, establishing a covenant with modern day Israel, allowing them to rebuild the temple and begin animal sacrifices. Finally, this future Antichrist breaks this covenant and attacks modern Israel as allegedly depicted in Revelation 12 and 13.

What of the remaining week (seven years)? Dispensationalists claim that, for reasons discussed below, the final week had to be separated from the previous sixty-nine weeks and finally occurs in the future as the last seven-year period prior to Christ’s Second Coming. This final seven-year period is used as the grid for interpreting the book of Revelation and thus forms the necessary framework for the entire dispensationalist end-times scenario.

Though below I will note other serious deficiencies in the above dispensationalist interpretation, my primary focus is to evaluate the justification for the dispensational “gap” between the sixty-ninth and seventieth weeks. What arguments do dispensationalists give in defense of this odd, yet, for them, crucial gap?

Dispensationalist Arguments for the “Gap”

“There is a great parenthesis of time between these two [the sixty-ninth and seventieth weeks] which has already lasted for over nineteen hundred years, and therefore the seventieth week still lies in the future. At first sight...this will seem a very startling view....We must admit

immediately that the objectors are wholly within their rights in demanding some good reasons for this method of interpretation. And unless such reasons can be given, we should not expect men to accept it.”⁵ Well said. But what are the reasons? Since dispensationalists McClain and Hoehner⁶ provide some of the best attempts to justify the gap, I will focus on their arguments.

The arguments of McClain and Hoehner can be classified into three primary lines of thought.

“Natural Reading” Requires Gap

McClain maintains that “such a gap in time before the Seventieth Week is implied by the most natural reading of the prophecy.”⁷ He suggests that the reason we miss the gap is our “Anglo-Saxon passion for continuous chronology.” On a natural reading, we should ignore the seventy weeks “expression of verse 24...and notice the order of events”: sixty-nine weeks, death of Messiah, destruction of the city, and then the one week. Hence, “if we *follow the order strictly*, both the death of the Messiah and the destruction of Jerusalem are placed between the sixty-ninth and seventieth weeks of prophecy.”⁸

First, what is a natural reading? On the one hand, if it means literally, then he needs to give a cogent reason for

⁵*Daniel's Prophecy*, pp. 32,33.

⁶Harold Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ* (Grand Rapids:Zondervan, 1979).

⁷*Daniel's Prophecy*, p.33.

⁸*Ibid.*, p.34.

interpreting an apocalyptic passage as if it were a contemporary instruction manual.⁹ Moreover, a natural reading is especially odd since, as noted above, McClain himself describes the gap inference as a “startling view.” On the other hand, if natural means “follow the order strictly,” then McClain fails to keep his own standard since this would imply that Christ’s crucifixion and the destruction of Jerusalem occurred simultaneously.¹⁰

Second, even if we follow McClain’s natural reading, then, given the context of Jeremiah’s continuous chronology prophecy of the seventy-year exile, we should expect that whatever happens after the sixty-ninth week occurs during the seventieth week.

Third, McClain claims to reject a continuous chronology and yet his argument demands that we follow the order strictly. Couldn’t the latter be a deep-seated prejudice as well? How does he know, since he has abandoned contextual constraints? Furthermore, if we are following the order strictly or even naturally, then we ought not infer *any* time index separating the seventieth week, since none is given. Hence, seventieth week could, quite “naturally,” have occurred prior to the destruction of Jerusalem.

Fourthly, and most importantly, even if we grant McClain a strict order of events, his natural reading only produces a particular order of events not a gap conclusion

⁹For more on the ambiguities and problems with the whole dispensationalist appeal to literalism, see Vern Poythress, *Understanding Dispensationalists* (Grand Rapids: Academie Books, Zondervan, 1987), pp. 78-85:

¹⁰Notice that in order for the natural reading to work, we are asked to take the very unnatural step of ignoring verse 24.

of any sort!¹¹

Hoehner, following Gundry, argues that “it is very strange that the cutting off is said to be ‘after’ the sixty-nine weeks....Much more naturally the text would have read ‘during’ or ‘in the midst of’ the seventieth week....The only adequate explanation for this unusual turn of expression is that the seventieth week did not follow on the heels of the sixty-ninth”¹²

First, as in many dispensationalist interpretations, natural reading is often based on some personal intuition and omits any objective means of adjudicating the sense of a phrase. What do dispensationalists do when another interpreter’s intuitions regarding natural differ?

Second, again we have an interpreter appealing to natural readings and at the same time conceding that the passage involves an unusual turn of expression.

Third, the most devastating aspect of this form of the natural reading argument is that it is fallacious --- an argument from silence. We are supposed to draw the intended conclusion from the fact that several words *don’t* appear in the text.

Given these criticisms, I conclude that neither McClain nor Hoehner succeed in justifying any gap on the basis of the natural reading of the prophecy. They need another

¹¹Both McClain and Hoehner attempt to argue that such prophetic gaps are common in Scripture, citing such passages as Isaiah 9:6, 61:1-2, and Zechariah 9:9. Yet these attempts beg the question since they assume a dispensational system. Preterists will generally deny as McClain affirms, for example, that there is a nineteen hundred year gap in Isaiah 9:6 between “For unto us a child is born” and “the government shall be upon his shoulders.”

¹²*Chronological*, p.132.

argument.

Events in Prophecy Require Gap

Both McClain and Hoehner argue for a gap between the sixty-ninth and seventieth weeks by maintaining that several of the historical events predicted in the passage -- the crucifixion, destruction of Jerusalem, and final tribulation -- must occur prior to the seventieth week, yet these events are allegedly future.

Crucifixion & Destruction: McClain argues that “a gap in time between the sixty-ninth and seventieth weeks is demanded by the historical fulfillment of ...the death of the Messiah and the destruction of Jerusalem.”¹³ Similarly, Hoehner claims that “it is true that Jerusalem suffered destruction in A.D. 66-70 but Christ did not return in A.D. 70. In fact, the book of Revelation speaks of Jerusalem’s desolation as yet future.”¹⁴

First, McClain’s only ground for holding that Christ’s crucifixion and the destruction of Jerusalem occur prior to the seventieth week is his natural reading argument. But that argument failed, and hence, he has no justification for the timing of the events in this second argument.

Third, Hoehner’s appeal to the book of Revelation in order to interpret Daniel’s prophecy is egregiously circular, since his understanding of the structure of Revelation is

¹³*Daniel’s Prophecy*, p.34. To be thorough, Hoehner also includes in his list of “gap” arguments various concerns purporting to show that Christ could not be the person who confirms the covenant in Dan. 9:27. Though his claims are demonstratively false in this regard, they are irrelevant to his “gap” conclusion, so I will pass over them.

¹⁴*Chronological*, p. 133.

founded on Daniel 9.

Abomination of Desolation: Similarly, both McClain and Hoehner claim that “the abomination of desolation [referred to in Daniel 9:27] has not yet been fulfilled.”¹⁵ And McClain raises the stakes by concluding that “this is the interpretation of Christ Himself, and it should settle the matter; the seventieth week is still future.”¹⁶

In one sense McClain is right. Christ’s interpretation does settle the matter, but not in the manner suggested by dispensationalists. Christ claimed that there were “some of those who are standing here who shall not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom” (Matt. 16:28), and that “this generation will not pass away until all these things take place” (Matt. 24:34).¹⁷ Moreover, Christ told the apostles that “when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then recognize that her *desolation* is at hand...and Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles” (Luke 21:20,24). The parallel command in Matthew 24 describes this destruction as the “abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel the prophet.” Hence, the abomination of desolation is not future to us and thus cannot be used to place the seventieth week in our future. Nevertheless, the only reason we have for placing the seventieth week after the abomination of desolation is the natural reading argument.

¹⁵*Ibid.*

¹⁶*Daniel's Prophecy*, p.40.

¹⁷See Dickison, G., "Apocalypse Then: The Historical Doctrines of Matthew 24" for reasons why “generation” does not refer to race as the dispensationalists eisegete the passage.

Unfulfilled Redemptive Blessings Require Gap

The dispensationalists' most important, relatively unambiguous, non-question-begging argument for the "gap" is, as Hoehner argues, "to view the six things in Daniel 9:24 -- to finish the transgression, to make an end of sin, to make atonement for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most holy place -- as having been fulfilled in Christ's death at His first advent *is impossible*."¹⁸ Similarly, McClain notes that "the fulfillment of the tremendous events in verse 24 cannot be found anywhere in known history."¹⁹

Dispensationalists place these glorious redemptive blessings in the future for two reasons, one more and one less explicit. The first reason is that, in distinctively dispensational style, they maintain that these blessings can only come to national Israel because the prophecy is directed only to national Israel.²⁰

The second and more prevailing assumption is that Christ couldn't have accomplished these blessings in His first advent because His atonement only made salvation

¹⁸*Chronological Aspects*, p. 131.

¹⁹*Daniel's Prophecy*, p. 35.

²⁰The dispensationalist appeal to national Israel as the sole recipient of these redemptive blessings does not bear the weight of the argument from verse 24, in that dispensationalists also want to apply these blessings to the New Testament church in the millennial kingdom at the same time as national Israel receives them (cf. McClain, *Ibid.*, p. 66, 67). Hence, the claim that the prophecy is directed exclusively at national Israel is irrelevant in the dispensationalist case. Thus, the central question is, "Have we seen these blessings for Jew or Gentile anywhere in Biblical history?"

possible, not actual. Notice this low view of Christ's redemptive work in McClain's claim that "to make reconciliation for iniquity does not refer to the death of Christ, as some have assumed...[T]he sacrifice itself was not the reconciliation."²¹ Even more, in typical dispensational form, McClain glories in the alleged "great millennial Temple which will be concentrated as a place of worship and prayer for all nations," quickly qualifying that this temple "will no more detract from the present universality and spirituality of worship."²² Similarly, Hoehner minimizes the theological significance of Christ's work by noting that "Christ's death did render inoperative the animal sacrifices but did not cause them to cease

²¹ I cannot help noting that even when dispensationalists see these blessings fulfilled in their ultimate form, supposedly in their millennial era, they don't take these blessings "literally" in that sin is still present and strong in various ways during their millennium.

For those who may still be worried about the connection between Israel and the Church, the Preterist will generally see the Daniel 9 passage as directed to the tree of faithful ethnic Israel in the Old Covenant to which the faithful New Covenant gentiles are to be grafted (Rom. 11). The texts usually given in support of this connection between Israel and the Church are as follows:

(a) *Gentile inclusion into Israel*: (i) OT prophecy -- Amos 9:11-12 (cf. Acts 15); Is. 49:6; 54:2 (cf. Acts 13:44-48); Hosea 1:9,10; 2:23 (cf. 1 Pet. 2:10); Joel 2:28 (cf. Acts 2:16-17). (ii) NT teaching -- Matt. 21:43; Lk. 12:32; John 10:14-16; Eph. 2:11-13; Gal. 3:6-8, 14.

(b) *Israel and Gentiles as One People*: Eph. 2:12-21; Rom. 9-11; Gal. 3:26-29; Heb. 3:1-6; Rev. 21.

(c) *Interchange of Church-Israel Titles*: Gal 6:16; James 1:1 [Rev. 7:4]; 1 Pet. 2:9; Rev. 1:6; Titus 2:14; Phil. 3:3; Col. 2:11; Rom. 2:28,29; Gal. 3:29, 4:28; Acts 7:38; Heb. 2:12.

²²*ibid.*

immediately.”²³

Any theology that can glory in a supposed revival of Old Covenant temple shadows, ineffective sacrifices (even if “symbolic”), the “ministration of death” (2 Cor. 3:7), and can diminish Christ’s work of reconciliation and sacrifice is far from the heart of New Covenant theology.

What other option regarding Christ’s work does the dispensationalist have? In evangelical Protestantism, we find two predominant views of Christ’s redemptive work: the Arminian and the Reformed. The former view, most prevalent in twentieth-century evangelicalism and assumed in the dispensationalist interpretation of Daniel 9 is that though Christ died for *everyone*, this redemption is effectual only for those who express faith in Christ. In other words, Christ died to make salvation possible, but He didn’t actually redeem anyone. (In this view, if salvation were effectual and actual, then everyone in the world would be saved, but this is evidently false). On the Reformed view, Christ died as a substitute for *His people*, not every individual, and this redemption is actual and effectual for each of His people. Scope and effectiveness are the two dividing points between these views: the Arminian has an all-inclusive scope and no effective salvation, and the Reformed view has a particular scope and genuinely effective salvation.²⁴

Instead of adjudicating this dispute in its traditional and

²³*Chronological Aspects*, p. 133.

²⁴Among others, the following texts are commonly used to justify the Reformed view of Christ’s effectual, sacrificial substitute for His people: Matt. 1:21; Rom. 5:10; Tit. 2:14; Eph. 5:25,26; John 6:35-40; 10:11,14-18; 17:1-11; 20,24-26; Acts 20:28, etc.

important details, I would like to counter the dispensationalist argument from Daniel 9:24 by comparing the language of the redemptive blessings in that passage with New Testament testimony that describes those blessings as part of Christ's accomplished work. I and other preterists maintain that the comparisons are so powerful that though dispensationalists may not abandon their guiding Arminian assumption, they ought at least to cease claiming that the blessings of Daniel 9:24 make up the heart of the Christian gospel. I will now turn to justify this claim by examining types of redemptive work depicted in Daniel 9:24 and then demonstrate that the New Testament claims these types for itself.

Types of Redemptive Work Depicted in Daniel 9:24

To review, the promises of Daniel 9:24 are as follows:

Seventy weeks have been decreed for your people and your holy city; to finish the transgression, to make an end of sin, to make atonement for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most holy.

Though we find six, distinct actions in this list, the six are organized in a more interesting manner than a mere register. The six items are organized into two, three-membered sentences.²⁵ The first three items take account of the

²⁵C.F. Keil, and F. Delitzsch, *Ezekiel and Daniel: Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988 [reprint]), p. 341.

propitiatory aspect of redemption -- the glorious consequences of removing sin. Moreover, "in both classes, the three members stand in reciprocal relation to each other: the fourth statement corresponds to the first, the fifth to the second, the sixth to the third -- the second and the fifth present even the same verb."²⁶ The reading gives us the following schema:

(a) Finish the transgression ---- (d) Bring in everlasting righteousness.

(b) Make an end of sin ---- (e) Seal up vision and prophecy.

(c) Make atonement for iniquity ---- (f) Anoint the most holy.

(a) *Finish the transgression*: *Transgression* here designates the strongest sense of sin, an apostate rebellion. The *finishing* pictured in these terms is not the perfection of the eternal state, but rather a holding in prison or arresting of sin -- to shut up sin. "To arrest the wickedness or shut it up does not mean to pardon it, but to hem it in, to hinder it so that it can no longer spread about."²⁷

(b) *Make an end of sin*: Having the same verb as "seal up vision and prophecy," this promise builds upon the previous prison image by *sealing* sin in prison for heightened security. For example, in Daniel 6:17, Darius

²⁶*Ibid.* I am following Keil and Delitzsch in the subsequent interpretations of the phrases.

²⁷*Ibid.*, p. 342.

first imprisons Daniel and then seals the den “so that nothing might be changed.” In our context, this promise signifies that sin will not only be hemmed in, but it will also be securely set aside by God Himself.

(c) *Make atonement for iniquity*: This last phrase of the first set focuses on pardoning, cleansing, and forgiving of sin by means of a sin offering. Sin is not only to be securely imprisoned but covered and forgiven so that reconciliation takes place. All of the categories of Old Covenant sacrifices, in one way or another, point to reconciliation through atonement. This term for atonement/reconciliation is used to describe the work of Ezekiel’s future prince/priest who will “provide the sin offering, the grain offering, the burnt offering, and the peace offering, to make *atonement* for the house of Israel” (Ezek. 45:17).

(d) *Bring in everlasting righteousness*: This phrase forms the corresponding counterpart to (a). As sin will be hemmed in, an unceasing righteousness will be brought in. This righteousness is produced by God and is characteristic of His Servant: “I will cause a *righteous* branch of David to spring forth; and He shall execute justice and righteousness on the earth” (Jer. 33:15,16).

(e) *Seal up vision and prophecy*: Though the figure of sealing is commonly used for confirming a writing (1 Kings 21:8; Jer. 32:10), the structure of this passage requires that we take the meaning of this phrase from its prior counterpart (b). Hence, “vision and prophecy” in general (since there is no article) will be securely arrested and set aside. As sin is certainly restrained, so will prophecy cease: “when sin is thus so placed that it can no longer operate, then prophecy also may come to a state of rest; when sin comes to an end in its place, prophecy can come to an end

also by its fulfillment, there being no place for it after the setting aside of sin.”²⁸

(f) *Anoint the Most Holy*: Many have taken this phrase to refer to the anointing of Christ, but the title “Most Holy thing” is never applied to the Messiah, though some titles come close. Overwhelmingly, this phrase applies to various temple *objects*: altars (Ex. 30:10,29), incense material (Ex. 30:36); the shew-bread (Lev. 24:9), and more pertinently, the whole area encircling Ezekiel’s temple (Ezek. 43:12), along with the temple itself (Ezek. 45:3). Moreover, if we remember this phrase’s counterpart -- “make atonement for iniquity”-- then Christ’s anointing does not make for a clear supplement, since the atoning presupposes His anointing.

More fitting is the notion that as atonement for sins and reconciliation between God and His people is accomplished, God dwells with His people by consecrating or anointing a new place for His presence, a new sanctuary.

Daniel’s Types Accomplished in the New Covenant

The redemptive blessings promised to God’s people are, as McClain grossly understates them, “tremendous events.” Nevertheless, the glory of it all is that the Lord has accomplished and is accomplishing these very promises.

Finish the transgression: The writer of Hebrews glories in the New Covenant truth that “now once at the consummation of the ages He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself” (Heb. 9:26). Similarly, at the opening of Christ’s ministry, John the

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 344.

Baptist speaks of Christ's arresting of sin: "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (Jn. 1:29). Christ Himself describes His establishing of the Kingdom of God in terms of imprisoning the chief agent of sin: "If I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. Or how can anyone enter the strong man's house and carry off his property, unless he first binds the strong man?" (Matt. 12:38,39). (Though unpersuasive to dispensationalists, preterists will note that this imprisonment imagery characterizes Christ's current reign as described in Revelation 20: "I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the keys of the abyss and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold of the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years.")

Moreover, Christ's work in "finishing the transgression" is seen for believers individually and collectively. Individually, Christ put away sin in that He "condemned sin in the flesh" so that, with sin imprisoned, "we should no longer be slaves to sin" and it "shall not be master over" us (Rom. 8:3;6:6,14). Collectively, sin's imprisonment in the New Covenant guarantees that unlike Old Covenant believers who rebelled and "did not continue in My covenant," New Covenant believers will have God's "Spirit within [them] and cause [them] to walk in [His] statutes" so much so, that "all shall know Me" (Heb. 8:11).

Make an end of sin: Christ's sacrifice did not only arrest sin, but it did so conclusively. "Having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, [He] sat down at the right hand of God" (Heb. 10:11). By this secured, setting aside of sin, believers "have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus" (Heb. 10:19) and the assurance that nothing can separate them from the love of God (Rom. 8:38,39).

Furthermore, sin has been sealed securely away because Christ, having “all authority...in heaven and earth” (Matt. 28:18), has publicly “triumphed over” principalities and powers (Col. 2:15) and now sits at God’s right hand “far above all rule and authority” (Eph. 1:21) “until He has put all enemies under His feet” (1 Cor. 15:25). Surely, when the King of kings has conquered sin, then we are indeed supremely assured that not even the gates of hell can withstand His church (Matt. 16:18).

Make atonement for iniquity: Dispensationalists may cling to an impotent, merely possible, atonement and reconciliation, but the Scripture declares that “while we were sinners, Christ died for us,” and so, “having been justified by His blood” (Rom. 5:9) and “having been reconciled” (Rom. 5:10; cf. Col 1:21,22) we glorify God. Even more, “God, who through Christ reconciled us to Himself....That is God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself” (1 Cor. 5:18). And so with confidence Paul may declare that “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us” (Gal. 3:13; cf. Col 1:1; 1 Pet. 2:24; Tit. 2:14). The writer of Hebrews knows nothing of ineffectual atonement when he declares that Christ “entered into the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption” (Heb. 9:12).

Bring in everlasting righteousness: By the sin of the first Adam, “death reigned,” but through the second Adam, Christ, “righteousness will reign in life,” and “many will be made righteous” (Rom. 5:17,19). Christ came to “fulfill all righteousness” (Matt. 3:15) and, long before, the Lord had revealed through Jeremiah that “I will cause a righteous branch of David to spring forth; and He shall execute justice and righteousness on the earth” (Jer. 33:15,16). And Paul, when reflecting upon the contrasts of the Old and

New Covenants, describes the New Covenant as the “ministry of righteousness” (2 Cor. 3:8). Even more gloriously, the prophets declare that Messiah will bring in everlasting righteousness, for there will be “no end to the increase of His government or of peace” (Is. 9:6,7), and that “He will speak peace to the nations; and His dominion will be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth” (Zech. 9:10). “In Christ the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles” (Gal. 3:14), and, “all the nations of the earth shall be blessed” (Gen. 22:18).

Seal up vision and prophecy: Since all Old Testament prophecy and visions looked forward to Christ as their goal (Jn. 5:39), once Christ arrived and securely sealed away sin, He then became the focal and end point of all prophecy and vision: “God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son” (Heb. 1:1,2).

Anoint the Most Holy: If we understand this, as discussed above, as referring to God’s consecration and anointing of His new sanctuary where He dwells in communion with His people, then the Scripture is replete with support for this glorious truth.

First, this union and communion of God with His people -- “I will be your God, and you shall be My people” -- is the central hope and promise from Genesis to Revelation (Gen. 17:7; Ex. 6:6,7); Lev. 11:45; Deut. 4:20; 29:13; 2 Sam. 7:24; Ezek. 34:24; Zech. 2:11; 8:8; Heb. 8:10; 2 Cor. 6:16; Rev. 21:3).

Second, the new sanctuary or temple in the New Covenant is no longer the temporary, shadow-building of the Old Covenant; instead it is Christ Himself (John 2:21; Matt. 12:6; 1 Cor. 12:12ff.) identified with His Church: “We are the temple of the living God; just as God said, ‘I

will dwell in them and walk among them; I will be their god and they shall be My people” (2 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:21).

Third, Revelation 21 magnificently ties together God’s promised communion with His people, the new sanctuary, and the church in the clearest fulfillment of “anointing the most holy.” “I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, ‘Behold the *tabernacle* of God is among men, and He shall dwell among them, and they shall be His people and God Himself shall be among them....Come here I shall show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.’ And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem....And I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God, the Almighty, and the Lamb, are its temple. And the nations shall walk by its light, and the kings of the earth shall bring their glory into it” (Rev. 21:2,3,10,22,24).²⁹ This goal is the splendor that the Lord points to through David.

We got to this point by considering the primary dispensationalist argument for imposing a gap in Daniel’s seventy weeks: the claim that the New Testament knows nothing of the finishing of transgression, sealing up sin, making atonement for iniquity, bringing in everlasting righteousness, sealing up prophecy, and anointing the Most Holy. On the contrary, the New Testament very clearly takes the six promises of Daniel 9:24 as the very core of the gospel. How do dispensationalists miss this? They miss all these powerful gospel truths by assuming an impotent and

²⁹See "Biblical Pictures of the New Cosmos," Douglas Wilson, in this volume.

ineffectual understanding of Christ's redemptive work, and from that assumption conclude that it was impossible for Christ to accomplish these things at His first advent. How deeply tragic.

One question does remain: what sort of interpretation of Daniel's seventy weeks can the preterist offer? Consider the following sketch as a parallel to the dispensationalist sketch offered earlier: ³⁰After nearly seventy years in exile for covenant-breaking, Israel is about to be released from bondage again. God reveals to Daniel that not only will He free Israel from its temporal bondage, but He will, in time, provide the greatest freedom from bondage imaginable through Messiah. Messiah will accomplish His work after a long period of time; the numbers involved, seventy-sevens, are not intended to be taken in narrow, chronological fashion, but rather highlight Messiah's work, in that 490 years point to the coming Jubilee of jubilees (49 times 10; cf. Lev. 25) -- the era at which Messiah "proclaim[s] release to the captives" (Lk. 4:18) and imprisons sin, effectually redeems His people, and establishes the blessings of redemption.

Prior to the coming of Messiah, a ruler (Cyrus)³¹ will

³⁰I will intentionally fill in the later historical specifics which Daniel didn't apparently receive, though a strict grammatical-historical sketch might only focus on what Daniel might be expected to understand. I take the latter to be the same sketch written in general terms.

³¹Most agree that the decree of Daniel 9:25 is either that of Cyrus in 538 B.C. or Artaxerxes in 445 B.C., but there is much disagreement on which. Dispensationalists generally defend the Artaxerxes decree (Neh. 2) since that is the only decree that mentions the rebuilding of the city, and secondly, because it is about 483 years from the time the decree was made to the crucifixion of Christ - an apparent fulfillment of the prophecy,

decree that Jerusalem will be rebuilt, and it will be rebuilt even in troubled times. From a purely human perspective, near the end of the seventy weeks Messiah will be executed and subsequently another prince (Titus Vespasian in 70 A.D.) will come and destroy Jerusalem.

The same events from the divine perspective have the *he* of v.27, the Messiah,³² confirm God's covenant and will by

though they all omit significant calendar questions which preclude their "accuracy."

There are several problems with the Artaxerxes view. First of all, according to Daniel 9 the decree is to rebuild the city, but by Artaxerxes's time Jerusalem was already inhabited. There were already houses (Neh. 3), a plaza (Ezra 10:9), and the work on the temple had begun.

Second, in 2 Chron. 36:22-23 we read: "in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia -- in order to fulfill the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah -- the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus the king of Persia, so that he sent a proclamation throughout his kingdom, and also put it in writing, saying 'Thus says Cyrus king of Persia, The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and He has appointed me to build Him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever there is among you of all His people, may the Lord his God be with him, and let him go up!'"

Third, the Lord prophesied that Cyrus himself would build both the temple and the city. In Isaiah 44:28, the Lord declared that: "Cyrus, he is my shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure: even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; and to the temple; Thy foundations shall be laid," and in Isaiah 45:13, speaking of Cyrus, that "he will build my city."

Fourth, as to plausible contextual concerns, Cyrus's decree took place soon after Daniel's prayer, but Artaxerxes's decree was nearly a hundred years later.

Hence, these considerations ought to count against Artaxerxes's decree and for Cyrus's decree.

³²Most preterists argue that the *he* in v. 27 can only refer to the Messiah of the preceding verse since the *prince* is not the required grammatical subject. Hoehner also argues against this *he* designating the

divine decree and man's injustice, fulfill the covenantal promises as the Lamb of God, thereby removing the theological reality of the Old Covenant sacrificial system. Subsequently, Messiah will (while preserving faithful New Covenant Jews and Gentiles) bring divine judgment on Jerusalem, the center of apostate Jewish ceremonies.

The above is obviously a sketch, however, and my aim has been primarily critical of the dispensationalist case for the "gap." As we've seen, their argument from "natural reading" is ambiguous, subjective, inconsistently applied, and ultimately irrelevant to the conclusion. The second argument for the "gap," the necessity of intervening historical events, failed because it begged the question at several points and crucially depended for its success upon the failed "natural reading" argument. Finally, and most importantly, the primary dispensationalist argument for their seventieth week "gap" is that the redemptive blessings of verse 24 could not have occurred at Christ's first advent. In response, I hope to have demonstrated that each of the six redemptive promises not only could have occurred, but, according to the core of New Testament gospel teaching, did most wondrously occur. Though the disputes between preterists and dispensationalists are at times long and detailed (though worthy of evaluation), preterists ought to be assured that they can still aid in disabusing our dispensationalist brethren of their system by preaching "nothing among you, except Jesus Christ, and Him

Messiah since (a) "at no time in Christ's ministry did He confirm an already-existing covenant" - but this is simply insisting upon dispensational discontinuity, and (b) "if Christ did confirm a covenant, when did He break it?" -- this is just strange; the text doesn't refer to or even imply that a covenant is broken.

crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2), since that gospel feeds "the church of the Lord which he obtained for himself with His own blood" (Acts 20:28).

Chapter 4

Apocalypse Then: The Historical Doctrines Of Matthew 24

Gregory C. Dickison

The topic of this symposium is preterism, and the issue with which this paper deals is the timing of the fulfillment of the events described in Matthew 24 and the other apocalyptic accounts in the gospels. The thesis is that a proper reading of Matthew 24, in the context of the rest of Scripture, requires the conclusion that the events there prophesied by Jesus Christ came to pass shortly after His death and resurrection, and within the lifetime of His contemporaries. In other words, the Bible teaches that the doctrines of the end of the age, the great tribulation, and the Lord's Second Coming are not matters of eschatology, but matters of history.

The Evidence

The passages describing the end of the age, the great tribulation, and the Lord's Second Coming are found in three places in the gospels: Matthew 24, Mark 13, and

Luke 21. In order to understand the context, I would recommend reading all three of these passages beginning at Matthew 21:23 (read this section through chapter 25), Mark 11:27, and Luke 19:45. For the sake of brevity, all the relevant references herein will be to Matthew 24.

The Lord's prophesies in these passages were given in response to a question put to Him by the disciples. They were showing Him the splendor of the temple, and He put the object of their sight-seeing tour into its cosmic perspective.

And Jesus said to them, "Do you not see all these things? Assuredly, I say to you, not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down" (Matt. 24:2).

This naturally aroused the curiosity of the disciples, and they questioned Jesus about what He said.

Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?" (Matt. 24:3)

One of the significant aspects of His answer, at least for the purposes of this discussion, is to whom the answer is directed. He does not give His warnings to some then non-existent future generation (i.e. - "when these things come, those who are around at the time will have to watch for..."). He directs His response and the warnings to the disciples who asked the question.

And Jesus answered and said to them: "Take heed

that no one deceives *you*” (Matt. 24:4).

And *you* will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that *you* are not troubled.... (Matt. 24:6).

Then they will deliver *you* up to tribulation and kill you, and *you* will be hated by all nations for My name’s sake (Matt. 24:9).

Therefore when *you* see the ‘abomination of desolation’, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place.... (Matt. 24:15).

And pray that *your* flight may not be in winter or on the Sabbath (Matt. 24:20).

Then if anyone says to *you*, “Look, here is the Christ!” or “There!” do not believe it (Matt. 24:23).

See, I have told *you* beforehand (Matt. 24:25).

Therefore if they say to *you*, “Look, He is in the desert!” do not go out.... (Matt. 24:26).

So *you* also, when *you* see all these things, know that it is near, at the very doors (Matt. 24:33).

Therefore *you* also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when *you* do not expect Him (Matt. 24:44).

There is no suggestion in these verses that the temporal objects of the Lord’s exhortation are other than the disciples

to whom He was speaking. As if to nail down this point, Jesus set a time limit for the fulfillment of His prophecy.

Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things are fulfilled (Matt. 24:34).

Two objections immediately arise. First, couldn't the word *you*, as it is used in these verses, be referring to Christians in general, whenever they happen to be alive? No, for two reasons. First, this isn't the natural or contextual sense of the word. It was the disciples who asked the question, and it was the disciples to whom the answer was addressed. Second, for those who like to go to the Greek, the words rendered as *you* in the New Testament are *humeis* or *su*. They are the personal pronouns of the second person, plural or singular. The Lord was talking to the people with Him, and not absent and future third parties.

The second objection arises over the word *generation*. Couldn't this word be rendered as *race*, as implied by the footnote to verse 34 in the *New International Version*? Again, the answer is no. The only apparent point of raising this question is to give the prophecies of Matthew 24 more time in which to come to pass. If the word is *race*, then there is still time as long as there is a race of nominal Jews extant. The Greek word is *genea*, which denotes successive members of an age or genealogy. The word has a chronological connotation, rather than ethnic. If *race* had been what the Lord meant, then the much more accurate word would have been *ethnos* (translated *nation*), as in Matthew 24:7, 9, and 14.

Another phrase that occasions confusion in this passage is the phrase *end of the age*.

Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age? (Matt. 24.3)

Much of the Lord's prophecy is concerning this "end of the age." The *King James Version* renders the verse as "end of the world" instead of "end of the age." In the modern mind, this naturally conjures up visions of the late, great planet Earth exploding in a cataclysmic destruction.

The Greek word used is *aion*, and, like the word *genea*, it has a chronological connotation. It signifies a time period rather than a geological or physical thing, and is more properly rendered as *age* or *era* than *world*. Thus, when Christ talks about the end of the *aion*, He is not necessarily talking about the cataclysmic and final end of the world, but is talking about the end of a particular period of time. The end of the physical world could coincide with the end of the age, but the language of the passage does not require such a conclusion. If the Lord had meant to describe the end of the physical world, there are words in the Greek, such as *ge* (physical world) or *oikoumene* (inhabited world), which would have better communicated that meaning.

The Greek word here rendered as *end* is *scholazo*. It literally means "to take a holiday" or "to be at leisure". It is related to the word *schole*, which, for some bizarre reason, is where we get the word *school*. It does not mean "cataclysmic destruction" or "absolute finale" (although we have all sometimes felt that way about school).

Thus, the phrase is better understood as it is rendered in the Revised Standard Version, "the close of the age", or as it appears in the New International Version, as "the end of the age." In interpreting these passages, therefore, we should be looking for an end of something within history,

rather than the end of history itself.

The word *end* is used in yet another way in other verses in these passages, and failure to understand the meaning there also adds to the confusion. In Matthew 24, the word *end* appears three more times in verses which are often given the same interpretation as verse 3.

And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet (Matthew 24:6).

But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved (Matthew 24:13).

And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come (Matthew 24:14).

Here, the Greek word for *end* is *telos*, and it signifies a culmination of events or a goal. For example, the *telos* (end) of exercise is to be in good physical condition. In Matthew 24, the series of warning events will end or culminate (*telos*) in the end or holiday (*scholazo*) of the age. There is no reason to assume the word signifies a cataclysmic destruction unless that interpretation is warranted by other parts of the passage, which it is not.

Another reason that the passage is interpreted as foretelling the end of the physical world is the phrasing of verse 29.

Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers

of the heavens will be shaken (Matt. 24:29).

Again, to the modern reader, this is proof positive that the *end* spoken of in these passages is cataclysmic. This is a natural reaction, but it is not required by the rhetoric employed. This can be seen by turning to the account in Acts 2 of the first Pentecost after Christ's ascension. In that passage, Peter stands before the people and quotes from the prophet Joel.

And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your young men shall see visions, your old men shall dream dreams. And on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days; And they shall prophesy. I will show wonders in heaven above and signs in the earth beneath; blood and fire and vapor of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the coming of the great and notable day of the Lord. And it shall come to pass that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved(Acts 2:17-21).

Peter declared that this prophecy was fulfilled in what the people were witnessing: the wonderful works of God being preached in the various tongues of those who were present (Acts 2:1-13). Obviously, there was no cataclysm at that time, yet the language is almost identical to that in Matthew 24:39, which is said to definitely point to a cataclysm.

This language is also used by other prophets in the Old Testament to signify judgment. James B. Nance details this

point in his paper on Old Testament Pictures of Judgment, so I will refer the reader there for the comparison rather than repeat his arguments here. Suffice it to say that, when looking for the fulfillment of the prophecy in Matthew, we should be looking for a judgment and a work of God, but not necessarily an astronomical or cataclysmic event. What we find in these apocalyptic passages are the foretelling of the destruction of the temple (Matthew 24:2) and a weather forecast to show the disciples when to expect it and what to do to prepare. The Temple was destroyed by the Romans in 70 A.D. As there is currently no temple in Jerusalem, it is impossible that these events have yet to be fulfilled (unless, as some believe, a new temple is going to be built). The temple of the Lord's time is long gone, and also the signs and events that accompanied its destruction.

It is one thing to interpret the language of these prophecies and to show that they point to a fulfillment relatively recently after they were made. But a further question remains. Why? What purpose would that have served? These events accomplished the final act in the transition from the Old Covenant to the New; the last step from Moses to Christ, and from the law to grace: the destruction of the Temple and of Jerusalem and of the continuous animal sacrifices for the atonement of sins.

The Argument

The narrative beginning at Matthew 21:23 starts with Jesus entering the temple, the house for the Name of the Lord God (1 Kings 5:5), and teaching the people. As He taught, He was confronted by the chief priests and elders, who challenged His authority. Jesus caught them in their hypocrisy and refused to satisfy them. He then went on the

offensive, and told parables to illustrate the true spiritual condition of his accusers.

The first parable compared the Jewish leaders to tax collectors and harlots, with the tax collectors and harlots coming out more favorably (Matt. 21:28-32). This must have come as quite a blow to those who prided themselves on the fact that they sat in Moses' seat (Matt. 23:2). Jesus further emphasized His point with a second parable, which compared the chief priests and Pharisees to wicked and rebellious vinedressers (Matt. 21:33-46).

This second parable and its interpretation are worth closer examination. The landowner is God, and the vineyard he planted is Israel (Ps. 80:8-9; Is. 5:1-2, 7). The servants whom the landowner sent are the prophets (Matt. 23:37), and the landowner's son is Jesus Christ. The wicked vinedressers are the Jewish leaders, who killed Jesus out of jealousy because the people turned to Him for salvation rather than to them (Matt. 27:15-18). They wanted to seize Christ's inheritance. Jesus asked what the landowner would do, and the Pharisees pronounced their own judgment: "He will destroy those wicked men miserably, and lease his vineyard to other vinedressers who will render to him the fruits in their seasons" (Matt. 21:41). The Lord responded in kind: "Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it" (Matt. 21:43). The lesson taught here is important. The Jews were God's chosen people, and had been made the keepers of His law (Romans 3:1-2). However, when it came to understanding the law, the Jews fell short. They looked to the law for salvation, but neglected to go beyond the requirements of the law to see what the law taught about whence salvation would come (John 5:39). They also enjoyed the position they held of being the administrators

of salvation by works (Matthew 23:4-7). They were envious of Jesus and the gospel of grace (Acts 13:45). Thus, when salvation came by grace, they rejected it. As a consequence, the kingdom was taken from them.

This is not the first place in Scripture where the parable of the vineyard appears. It appears in the prophecy of Isaiah to foretell God's judgment of Israel for its oppression and wickedness (Isaiah 5:1-7). It also appears in Psalm 80, where the vineyard (Israel) cries out under the weight of God's judgment. In Matthew 21, Christ again uses the picture of the vineyard to foretell a judgment of Israel, and the Pharisees took it personally. They knew exactly what He meant.

In Matthew 22:1-10, Jesus uses another parable to describe the kingdom of heaven: a wedding. The interpretation of this parable is also important. The king is God, and the son is Jesus. Those who were bidden were the Jews. The servants were the prophets and apostles sent to call them to the kingdom of heaven. But the Jews would not come, and treated the servants shamefully. As a result, they were destroyed, *and their city was burned*. Others, Gentiles, were brought to the wedding instead.

Here, we see a picture of Israel rejecting the gospel. The New Testament is full of examples of vehement denial of the gospel by the Jews. The Book of Acts describes how some of the Jews went out of their way to turn people away from God's grace (Acts 14:1-20). In the wake of their rejection, the gospel was preached to the Gentiles, who readily responded (Acts 13:45-48). As for the Jews, they were destroyed and their city was burned. The city of the Jews was Jerusalem, and it was destroyed in 70 A.D.

In Matthew 23, the Lord turns to the multitude and explains that the scribes and Pharisees are to be obeyed, for

they sit in Moses' seat (Matt. 23:1-3). But He warns the people not to follow the behavior of these authorities as an example, and also condemns the Pharisees for their hypocrisy and disobedience (Matthew 23:3-36). The last woe he pronounces on them is especially important in the present discussion.

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous, and say, 'If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets.' Therefore you are witnesses against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers' guilt. Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of hell? Therefore, indeed, I send you prophets, wise men, and scribes: some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from city to city, that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. Assuredly, I say to you, *all these things will come upon this generation.*

Anyone who has read the Old Testament, as well as the Book of Acts, knows what kind of a reception God's prophets and wise men were given by the Jews. This, then, is quite a condemnation that Christ pronounces. All of that shed blood was to be avenged, and it was to be avenged on the generation to whom the Lord was speaking.

Immediately after pronouncing this judgment, the Lord laments over Jerusalem, the city of the Jews.

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! See! Your house is left to you desolate; for I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!'

After this, Jesus leaves the temple in the company of His disciples, who direct his attention to its magnificent buildings (Matthew 24:1). Jesus' response is that "not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down" (Matthew 24:2). He then proceeds to answer their questions about when these things will be.

The destruction of Jerusalem, and the accompanying fulfillment of the Lord's prophecy, makes sense in the context of the transition from the Old Covenant to the New. After the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, there was no longer any need for the blood of bulls and goats. The everlasting sacrifice made them obsolete. "For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified" (Hebrews 10:14). "For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins" (Hebrews 10:4). Neither was there any more need for the priesthood, or for the continual attendance of the priest at the altar. Jesus has become "High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek" (Hebrews 6:20).

The superseding of the Old Covenant by the New was foretold by God through His prophets in the Old Testament.

Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah — not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the LORD. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people (Jeremiah 31:31-33).

The New Testament makes it clear that the New Covenant **replaced** the Old Covenant, and that it is impossible to go back. “For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins...” (Hebrews 10:26). “[A] man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ... for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified (Galatians 2:16). And having begun in the Spirit, we cannot be made perfect by the flesh (Galatians 3:3).

The New Testament also shows what a stumbling block the temple and what it stood for proved to be to the early Christians. Thus, not only was the destruction of the temple a judgment upon Israel, it was necessary to make the complete break between the Old and New Covenants, and to prevent people from going back. Some who insist that Matthew 24 and the synoptic passages speak of events which are still in the future also insist that a new temple will be built, and that it is God’s will that such a thing be done. A rebuilt temple, however, would serve absolutely no purpose. There is nothing which can be done in it. Not only

can we not go back to performing the rites and functions associated with the temple, but the Bible clearly teaches that it would be sin to do so. It creates a very real problem to say that God will rebuild something He utterly destroyed when it became completely obsolete.

Conclusion

I stated earlier that these passages did not point to a cataclysmic end to the physical world. But that does not mean the events prophesied were not cataclysmic in any sense. The historians Josephus and Tacitus both record the sack of Jerusalem, and it is not something anyone could wish to experience. Josephus, especially, goes into great detail about the terrible siege that preceded the final assault. In his account, the fulfillment of the Lord's prophecies can be clearly seen.

The existence of this record comes as a surprise to most people, but that is a failing of our modern ideas of education. Rarely do Sunday school classes on the New Testament involve the study of history. Since we have never heard of such momentous events coming to pass, we naturally tend to assume that they are still yet to come.

It is important that this gap in our knowledge be filled in. The misinterpretation of Scripture on this point is not a harmless error, for it leads to a false assumption: that the church of today stands in the same relation to the Lord's return as did the church at the time of the apostles. Thus, we see continual predictions that great world events are "the beginning of the end," and that the Lord's return is just around the corner. As we all know, these predictions have yet to prove true. What is worse, these failed predictions lead to the doctrine of the Lord's return being ignored, and

even to doubts that “the predictions of the New Testament were ever intended to have a literal or historical fulfillment.”

The question of where we stand in history is of fundamental importance. Are we to prepare for the Kingdom of God, as the apostles did? Or are we to operate within the Kingdom of God, as the apostles prepared us to do? Looking at it this way, it seems that a right understanding of the doctrine of the Lord's return is fundamental to the church's role as the obedient bride of Christ.

Chapter 5

A Reasonable Look At Revelation

Chris Schlect

A wise teacher once wrote, "Of making many books there is no end" (Eccl. 12:12). This is a perceptive statement coming from one who never browsed the prophecy section of an evangelical Christian bookstore. Anyone who has done so can no doubt appreciate his understatement. The volumes written on Revelation are more than those written about any other book of the Bible. One list of English works on the apocalypse was compiled in 1910 -- it was nearly fifty-four columns in length.¹ A comprehensive study of the available scholarship on the Apocalypse would be impossible, for there is more than a lifetime's worth of material to wade through. One writer's observation deserves restatement: "The name of the number of volumes that have been written on and about the Book

¹Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* [1910], 7 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), vol. I, p. 826.

of Revelation is LEGION.”²

While no other book of the Bible seems to have captured the imagination of so many, rash speculators have scared many others away from it. Sixteen centuries ago Jerome commented on the difficulty of the book, saying, “As many words as many mysteries.”³ Martin Luther once remarked, “Nobody knows what is in it.” Ulrich Zwingli refused to take any doctrinal proof text from Revelation, and it is the only book in the Bible on which John Calvin did *not* write a commentary.

Given all this, it is granted that any work on the Apocalypse must be treated with great caution. This short paper is not definitive, as probably no exposition on the subject could possibly be. A good deal of worthy scholarship is not considered, and much of the book itself is left untouched. What is discussed here are merely some principles which ought to guide us as we approach the Apocalypse. Application, which is very important, is left up to the reader.

²Henry Schulze, preface to William Hendricksen, *More Than Conquerors*; cited by Kenneth Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell* (Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), p. 9.

³Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 1, p. 826.

So Many Interpretations

Imagine interviewing different witnesses of an athletic contest. The coach of the winning team may report that it was a fine match all around, whereas the team captain of the losing side might dwell on the poor officiating. A gambler is concerned with the margin of victory, while a cold, rain-drenched spectator complains about the game being drawn out too long. Each of these witnesses have models for interpreting the contest. The spectator evaluates the match in terms of his comfort and entertainment, coaches and team members consider success to be the important factor, and the gambler is most concerned about beating the odds. Different bases for interpretation yield different outlooks on the contest.

Similarly, different hermeneutical models will yield widely dissimilar outlooks on prophecy. Like different witnesses to an athletic contest, two exegetes can look at the same verse and arrive at totally different opinions of its meaning. The reason for this isn't that the text is vague, but that the two exegetes approach the text with different presuppositions -- they each come to the text with a particular agenda already in mind. That is, they tend to see in the text what they expect to see. A futurist will *assume* that the events recorded in the prophecy have not yet taken place, and a preterist will *assume* that they have already happened. The purpose of this paper is to assess which assumption is the biblical one.

Faulty Assumptions

There are two common unbiblical assumptions that have an impact on prophetic interpretation. Naturally, they result in unnecessary exegetical problems. One of these assumptions is that prophecy will be clearly understood after the prophesied events occur in history, and the other is the presumption of hyper-literalism.

The first is commonly employed when making conclusions about the Apocalypse. Hal Lindsey, citing the late dispensationalist C.I. Scofield, asserts that Revelation "is so written that as the actual time of these events approach, the current events will unlock the meaning of the book."⁴ While this assumption may sound reasonable, it is not biblical. If the prophesied events have already taken place, it is said, then the prophecy would be clear to everyone. Futurists sometimes use this as an argument against preterism. The reasoning follows like this: If prophesied events have already occurred, then there would be no confusion about the prophecy. Therefore, a primary reason for the confusion surrounding the Apocalypse is that the events described therein have not yet taken place.

One problem with this assumption is that it renders the Apocalypse and many other prophecies irrelevant to those who first heard them. If anything, the contrary should be assumed. The intended audience is stated, or at least understood, in most books of the Bible. The farther away we get from biblical times, the more careful we need to be in avoiding the imposition of current paradigms over the

⁴Hal Lindsey, *There's A New World Coming* (Santa Ana: Vision House, 1973), p.21.

text. John Walvoord falls into this trap when he writes, "As history unfolds and as prophecy is fulfilled in the future, much will be understood that could be only dimly comprehended by the first readers of the book."⁵ Despite Walvoord's view, we can be sure that God did not deliver cryptic enigmas to the early church about which we now have a much better understanding.

A second and more important problem with this assumption is that it holds no textual support. John's gospel teaches us that the disciples, even after witnessing Christ's resurrection, did not understand the Old Testament prophecy regarding His resurrection.⁶ The passing of the prophesied event didn't clear up the confusion about the prophecy.⁷ Consider also the Incarnation, one of the most thoroughly prophesied events in history. Volumes have been written on the many Old Testament predictions of Christ's coming. But when Christ did come, very few people knew that biblical prophecy had been fulfilled. Those who were most familiar with the Scriptures were especially misled about the coming

⁵John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1966), p.8.

⁶John 20:9.

⁷An exception is the one way that fulfillment *does* serve toward understanding prophecy -- by awakening the memory of those who heard the prophecy. We see in Luke 24, for example, that Mary Magdalene and Mary, mother of James, are reminded of Christ's prophecy of His crucifixion and resurrection when they witness the empty tomb and the two men in shining garments (vv. 4-8).

of the Messiah. When their precious Messiah came, they crucified Him.

It is certainly true that the meaning of Old Testament prophecies were made more clear after Christ's coming. The reason for this is not simply that the event came, but that further revelation came with it. This is the implication of 1 Peter 1:10-12, where we read that the prophets of old looked forward to the sufferings of Christ. Long ago they understood that Christ would suffer, but the time and the circumstance was not revealed until the first century. Clarification of the Old Testament prophets' message came in the first century only because new revelation came at that time.

In the cases of the Olivet Discourse and John's Apocalypse, the fulfillment of these prophecies was not accompanied by further revelation. Unless further divine revelation comes, we won't ever be able to understand Matthew 24 or Revelation any better than we can today. The mere passing of time does not affect our understanding of biblical prophecy.

The point here is not that prophecies are still confusing after they are fulfilled. The point is that *they are basically clear even before they are fulfilled*. Confusion over prophecy results from poor exegesis, not an indifference to the "signs of the times" in the daily news.⁸ This is seen in

⁸There is an instance (documented in Matt. 16:3 and Luke 12:56) in which Christ rebukes the Pharisees and Sadducees for their inability to interpret the signs of the times. Notice that Christ does acknowledge their true ability to observe and interpret current events (Matt. 16:2-3a, Luke 12:54-55). Failure to recognize the fulfillment of prophecy is neither a problem of journalism nor of historical study, but of exegesis.

Christ's rebuke of the Sadducees, who misunderstood the general resurrection. They were not in error because they couldn't recognize certain events taking place, but because they didn't know the Scriptures.⁹ Biblical prophecy is intended to be understood by those who receive the prophecy, not just those who see its fulfillment. Consider Christ's usage of prophecy in John's gospel: "Now I tell you before it comes, that when it does come to pass, you may believe that I am He" (v. 13:19; cf. 14:29). The Lord intended that his hearers understand what was yet to take place, even though it had not yet occurred. When it finally occurred, it testified to Christ's deity. This is the same understanding of prophecy taught in Isaiah 42:9, 44:6-7; 45:20-21; 48:3. These verses indicate that prophecy should be understood before it comes to pass.

The second problematic assumption is hyper-literalism, the idea that biblical prophecies will be fulfilled in a strict, word-for-word sense and almost never in a figurative or poetic sense. Until recently, a "literal" hermeneutic simply referred to the grammatico-historical approach: interpreting the Bible as it presents itself. This was a biblical reaction to the allegorical approach of many early church fathers (e.g., Origen). Today it has come to mean in prophecy that the things predicted in the Bible will literally come to pass.¹⁰ Out of deference to the traditional meaning of *literal*, the new approach will be called *hyper-literal* in this paper.

⁹Matthew 22:29.

¹⁰Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, third ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1970), p.241.

Hyper-literalists see prophecy as *history written beforehand*, as if prophets actually witness future events being carried out. There are two problems with this view.

The first is a philosophical problem. It is impossible to witness the future because future events have not yet occurred. God knows the future and makes all things come to pass,¹¹ but this divine foresight does not indicate that the future is the same as the present.¹² A prophet does not see the future, but merely a present-time representation of the future. For this reason, prophetic passages cannot be approached the same way as historical passages.¹³

The second problem with the futurist hermeneutic applied to prophecy is an exegetical one. Biblical prophecy often does not present itself in a way which permits literal interpretation. Consider the implications of a literal hermeneutic when applied to fulfilled Old Testament prophecy. The Pharisees employed a literal hermeneutic to Old Testament prophecy regarding the Messiah. They looked for a literal king to deliver them, one who physically

¹¹Cf. Psalm 139:16; Isaiah 42:9, 44:6-7; 45:20-21; 48:3.

¹²There is a major theological problem with the view that all time is present to God, as if God views time as we look at a map. If this is God's relationship to time, then Christ is still — and always will be — on the cross. This undermines the Gospel. Christ's death and resurrection, even from God's perspective, have already happened; they are not taking place in the present.

¹³See Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, n.d.), pp.407-408.

sat on David's throne. Hence, they rejected the King of kings. Their rejection of Christ was consistent with their literalism. Hyper-literalist Jesse Silver maintains that "Every prophecy pointing to the first advent of Christ was literally fulfilled to the letter in every detail."¹⁴ How does he understand the prophecy of Isaiah 40:3-5?

Make straight in the desert a highway for our God.
Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain
and hill shall be made low . . .

If he remains consistent, he will deny that the Lord could have been referring to John the Baptist's ministry (*cf.* Matt. 3:3, Luke 3:2-6), but rather to a literal excavation project for a huge road. Such absurd conclusions must be affirmed by hyper-literalists who remain true to their premise. Fortunately, most of them are not consistent.

Context: Revelation 1:1-8

The foundation for interpreting the Apocalypse is laid in its first eight verses. There we discover the setting, theme, author and intended audience of the book, all of which have an impact on the hermeneutic that should be employed when venturing on to subsequent chapters. As these verses unfold, we see that great violence is done to the text by the suggestion that the events described in the Apocalypse were in the distant future from the author's

¹⁴Jesse F. Silver, *The Lord's Return*, 209; cited in Loraine Boettner, *The Millennium* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1957), p.83.

perspective. Quite the contrary: the author, John, wrote that they were imminent. They describe an event that was soon to happen.

The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants — things which must shortly take place (Rev. 1:1).

The first verse of the book affirms that the prophecies contained therein must “shortly” (Gk. *τάχει*) take place. Such plain language is often watered down by futuristic commentators. Walvoord, for instance, believes the word *τάχει* to mean “ ‘quickly or suddenly coming to pass,’ indicating rapidity of execution after the beginning takes place. The idea is not that the event will occur soon, but that when it does, it will be sudden.”¹⁵ This interpretation stands against the scholarship of lexicographers and translators who agree that the meaning of this Greek word is *soon* or *quickly*. This view is held by Thayer, Arndt and Gingrich, and Hort, among others. It is also affirmed by every prominent English translation of the Bible. Laymen would have to agree with these scholars after considering the other places in the New Testament where *τάχει* is used (Luke 18:8; Acts 12:7, 22:18, 25:4; Rom. 16:20; Rev. 22:6).¹⁶

¹⁵Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, p.35.

¹⁶Walvoord’s interpretation of *τάχει* would suggest a nonsensical translation of Acts 12:7 that might read, “And, behold, the angel of the Lord came upon [Peter], and a light shone in the prison; and he struck Peter on the side and raised him up, saying, ‘Whenever you get around to

Perhaps due to the lexical evidence against them, other futurists grant that the events of the Apocalypse were indeed to take place shortly. Yet they go on to cite 2 Peter 3:8 and assert that Revelation 1:1 does not teach *shortly* in the sense that we tend to think of *shortly*.¹⁷ For *shortly* to God might be a very long time to men, they say. Mounce, a futurist, believes this to be untenable.¹⁸ Here he is correct. Proponents of this view must admit the term *shortly* to be at best meaningless, and probably misleading to God's creatures. If humans have no concept of God's timing, then references to time in the Bible could possibly mean just about anything to us. The first verse shows that God's servants are the intended audience of the Apocalypse. Surely He did not intend to befuddle His audience by using a word that would miscommunicate His intended message.

Denials of the clear meaning of "these things must shortly come to pass" are built upon faulty hermeneutical constructions that are brought to the text well before it is opened. This is even admitted by responsible futurists such as Robert H. Mounce, who confesses that the "most satisfying solution is to take the word in a straightforward

rising, do so suddenly.' And his chains fell from his hands." Similar parodies could easily be made of Acts 22:18 and 25:4.

¹⁷Three prominent commentators who promote this view are Marvin R. Vincent, Leon Morris, and Henry Swete.

¹⁸Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1977), p.65.

sense.”¹⁹ Because the simple meaning of this verse does not fit consistently within a futuristic framework, many perform exegetical gymnastics in their attempts to undermine that which would be obvious to an honest reader. David S. Clark’s comment is appropriate:

“Shortly” can mean nothing else but close at hand or very soon. With all allowance for linguistic flexibility and comparative lengths of periods, it would be stretching language to the breaking point to make shortly mean several thousands of years. Such interpretations are only trifling with words, and the word of God.²⁰

After reading the first verse of the Apocalypse, one should assume that the prophecies which follow were fulfilled “shortly” after the time of writing. Revelation 1:1 should start the reader thinking like a preterist.²¹

Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near. John, to the

¹⁹*Ibid.*

²⁰David S. Clark, *The Message From Patmos* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1989), p.22.

²¹A more thorough discussion of the *taxos* word group can be found in Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *Before Jerusalem Fell* (Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), pp.134-140.

seven churches which are in Asia (Rev. 1:3,4a).

Here we have a blessing invoked upon those who read (or hear) and keep the things which are written in the Apocalypse. Immediately following this beatitude, the intended audience is identified. These seven churches are mentioned by name in verse 11: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. It is worth noting that most of the imperatives in the Apocalypse which are directed toward the reader are given in the second and third chapters, in the letters to these churches. These imperatives address specific situations and mention particular individuals. Their intent is obviously to address the circumstances that these churches were facing at that time. Churches today would do well to heed the counsel and warnings given in chapters 2 and 3, but the Apocalypse is written *to* the seven churches in Asia — *not* to the twentieth-century church in the West. While God designed the Apocalypse to be relevant to believers in all ages, he specifically directed it to these first century churches. It addresses *their* circumstances and it prophesies events that are near to *them*, for it is said to *them* that “the time is near.”

Futurists attempt to evade the first-century relevance of these verses in two ways. One is to undermine the meaning of the word *near* (or *at hand*) in much the same way they do with *shortly* in verse 1. The other is to construct a futuristic identity of the seven churches.

In the phrase “the time is *near* (or *at hand*),” the Greek word from which *at hand* is translated is ἐγγύς, which is used thirty times in the New Testament. Each reference uses the word to mean *in close proximity to* with respect to either time or to space. The context of Ephesians 2:17

defines ἐγγύς clearly: "And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who are *near*." The juxtaposition of ἐγγύς against *afar off* shows that it must be rendered *near*. Arndt and Gingrich agree, offering a one-word definition of ἐγγύς: *near*.²² Thayer's definition is more thorough: "of Time; concerning things imminent and soon to come to pass."²³ The usage of the word with respect to time is seen in John 2:13, where we learn that the "Passover of the Jews was *at hand*."²⁴ Ἐγγύς here could mean nothing other than *near* or *soon to come to pass*.

Mounce and Walvoord insist that these events which were *at hand* in the first century wouldn't take place until two-thousand years later. Walvoord's defense of this view is disappointing: "The expression *at hand* indicates nearness from the standpoint of prophetic revelation, not necessarily that the event will immediately occur."²⁵ His discussion is too brief to discuss what he means by "the standpoint of prophetic interpretation." Whatever that standpoint may be, he admits that it is superimposed over the text. This is not

²²W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), p.213.

²³From Joseph Henry Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, cited in Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, p.140.

²⁴This sense of the word is also expressed in Jn. 6:4, 7:2, 11:55; Heb. 8:13.

²⁵Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, p.37.

sound exegesis and should not be tolerated by responsible theologians.

Dispensationalists have accused their opponents of not interpreting many parts of Scripture literally. But when it comes to passages that don't fit their system, they often abandon their literalism and adopt a nonliteral interpretation in order to accommodate their system. Above we have seen how the clear meanings of *shortly* and *at hand* are ignored. Another example of their departure from literalism is their identification of the seven churches. As they are the first audience of the Apocalypse, these churches deserve some discussion.

In the *Ryrie Study Bible*, Charles Ryrie notes that the seven churches in Asia should be understood as *more* than just the seven churches in Asia. He writes, "they also represent types of churches in all generations."²⁶ Now it follows that a book written primarily to a first-century audience would prophesy events relevant to that audience. Here we see Ryrie's disappointing attempt to evade this implication by reassigning the audience. C.I. Scofield's attempt is much more involved, and does not even bear a close resemblance to a "literal" hermeneutic.

The messages to the seven churches have a prophetic application, as disclosing seven phases of the spiritual history of the church from, say, A.D. 96 to the end. It is incredible that in a prophecy covering the period there should be no such foreview. These messages must contain that

²⁶Charles C. Ryrie, commentary on Revelation 2:1 in *The Ryrie Study Bible* (Chicago: Moody Bible Institute, 1986), p.1721.

foreview if it is in the book at all; for no church is mentioned after 3:22. These messages do present an exact foreview of the spiritual history of the church and in this precise order. Ephesus gives the general state at the date of the writing; Smyrna, the period of the great persecutions; Pergamos, the church settled down in the world "where Satan's throne is," after the conversion of Constantine, say A.D. 316. Thyatira is the Papacy, 500 to 1500 A.D. Sardis is the Protestant Reformation whose works are not "fulfilled." Philadelphia is whatever bears clear testimony to the Word and Name in the time of the self satisfied profession represented by Laodicea. It would seem from this that Laodicea represents the present day of lukewarm and indifferent church membership, and being the last of the seven, we are therefore at the end of the age in dire apostasy.²⁷

Few dispensationalists today would go as far as Scofield. Walvoord, for example, admirably warns against such rash speculation. Nonetheless, he still affirms that the seven churches of the Apocalypse symbolize the increasing apostasy of the church through history, culminating in the lukewarm Laodicean church age which is our modern time.²⁸

The letters in the second and third chapters of the

²⁷C.I. Scofield, *The Scofield Study Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1917), pp.1331-2.

²⁸Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, p.53.

Apocalypse are similar to other letters in the canon. They refer to specific individuals and particular concerns just as Paul, Peter, and John typically do in their epistles. Because these letters present themselves in this way, they should be interpreted in the same manner as other letters in the New Testament. They are written to specific audiences, and the counsel offered in them is addressed to those audiences. We should apply the apostles' counsel to present-day situations remembering that their epistles are *for* us and not *to* us. Note this comment from J. Stuart Russell:

It is scarcely necessary to say that there is not the slightest foundation for the preposterous theory which represents these delineations of the spiritual condition of the seven churches as successive states or phases of the Christian church in so many future ages of time. Such a hypothesis is incompatible with the express limitations of time laid down in the context, as well as inconsistent with the distinctive individuality of the several churches addressed. Everything shows that it is of the present, and the immediate future, that the Apocalypse treats. The first readers of these epistles must have felt that they came expressly to them, and not to other people, in other times. It is, no doubt, true that these epistles describe types of character which may be repeated, and are repeated continually, in successive generations; but this does not alter the fact that they had a direct and personal application to the churches

specified, which they can never have to any other.²⁹

The dispensational view of the seven churches shows an unfortunate departure from their characteristic literalism. This departure comes in a place where the “plain sense” of the words ought to be employed, as chapters 2 and 3 of the Apocalypse are not prophetic; they are didactic.

Grace to you and peace from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever (Rev. 1:4b-6).

These verses are packed full of theology; their exposition could fill libraries. The subject is our savior: “Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth.” It is worth noting that the work of Christ which is most important is that which He accomplished during his incarnation, or what is commonly (but incorrectly) called his *first* coming. The Christian hope is not founded on what is yet to take place, but rather on *what has already taken place*.

In His incarnation, Christ was the *Immanuel*, the God-with-us; “He who has seen Me has seen the father,” he

²⁹J. Stuart Russell, *The Parousia* [1887] (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1983), pp.382-3.

says (Jn. 14:9). He is therefore, as our text reveals, the only "faithful witness." After His death, He went to the place of the dead, Hades,³⁰ and returned to life three days later as the "firstborn from the dead." Later in chapter 1, Christ says, "Behold, I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and Death" (v. 18). Christ took away the sting of death by rising from the dead, thus the Christian's resurrection hope is grounded in the historical fact that a resurrection has already taken place. For the One who rose from the dead holds the keys of Hades and Death; through His resurrection from the dead, He therefore became the guarantor of our future hope. The focus of these verses in the Apocalypse is not on Christ who is *yet to come* but on Christ Who has *already come*.

Futurists (particularly dispensationalists) tend to build their theology around Christ's Second Coming, which is not the proper starting point for theology. Dave Hunt and Hal Lindsey have gone so far as to suggest that the imminence of the church's rapture is the primary motivator for evangelism.³¹ Biblical evangelism is based not on a look forward into the future, but on a look back to Christ's death and resurrection. As many futurist writings demonstrate, if our hope is grounded only in what is yet to come then our

³⁰I Peter 3:18-20, Ephesians 4:9. See Douglas Wilson, "Heaven, Hades, and Man Between," *The Forgotten Heavens* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, n.d.), pp.21-28.

³¹This is the basic thesis of Dave Hunt's book, *Whatever Happened to Heaven*, and most all of Lindsey's works.

eyes will turn to prophecy charts more than to the cross.³²

Verse five describes Christ as the ruler over the kings of the earth, and the next verse says that He has made us kings and priests. Again we have attention focused on what has already taken place, not what has yet to take place. Futurists have taught that the earth is growing in its rebellion — a rebellion that will advance until it is suddenly and unexpectedly halted. In the face of this understanding, Scripture teaches that Christ's present reign is not restricted to heaven. He has been given all authority not only in heaven, but also on earth.³³ Christians, as kings and priests, can "*therefore* go and make disciples of all nations" because of what has already been accomplished, and *we can expect success*. With John, *today* we can say, "To Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen" (v. 6). We do not have to wait for a future dispensation to proclaim this as truth.

The basis for the Christian hope is in the historical fact that "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again on the third day according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:3-4). This is

³²This does not mean that we have no hope in the future. The point is that our hope in the future is based upon the past (1 Cor. 15:12-19). Also, the fear of a future, everlasting damnation is a biblical reason to turn to Christ (the psalmist uses such a threat in Ps. 2:12). But both future hope and future damnation are grounded in Christ's work on the cross. In the preaching of the Gospel, the cross should always be central, never peripheral. In our theology, Christ's future coming must not supplant His work on the cross.

³³Matthew 28:18.

central to the Apocalypse, as stated in verses five and six of the first chapter. If the Gospel was fundamentally grounded in a future advent of Christ, then preterism weakens the message. But that is not the nature of the Gospel; it is based upon the first-century ministry of Christ, especially in His work on the cross.³⁴

Verses five and six prepare us for the fourth and fifth chapters of the Apocalypse. In these chapters we see the throne room in Heaven filled with spectacular glory surrounding the Lamb. This Lamb, Christ, opens the book of life. The narrative demonstrates Christ's authority in the events described in subsequent chapters. It is not surprising that futurists place the fourth and fifth chapters of the Apocalypse in the future, even though the text points toward Christ's finished accomplishment on the cross (5:9-10).

Behold, He is coming in the clouds, and every eye will see Him, and they also who pierced Him. All of the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen (Rev. 1:7).

A number of commentators have understood this verse to be the theme of the Apocalypse, as it encapsulates the prophetic event which is about to be described. "He is coming in the clouds." Naturally, futurists take this as a reference to the Second Coming. This seems to be based on the popular assumption that the only coming of Christ we

³⁴See Robert L. Dabney, "Theology of the Plymouth Brethren," in *Discussions: Evangelical and Theological* [1891], 2 vols. (London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1967), vol. 1, pp.169-228.

will ever read of in New Testament prophecy is His last one. This assumption stands against the nature of prophecy. In the Old Testament, for example, many different divine comings are prophesied that are not comings *in flesh*. God has made frequent practice of coming to visit temporal judgment on a people or nation, and such is the nature of His comings *in clouds*. Gentry explains the Bible's usage of the phrase "coming in the clouds."

The Old Testament frequently uses clouds as indicators of divine judgment. God is said to be surrounded with thick, foreboding clouds as emblems of His unapproachable holiness and righteousness (Gen. 15:17; Ex. 13:21-22; 14:19-20; 19:16-19; Deut. 4:11; Job 22:14; Psa. 18:8ff.; 97:2; 104:3; Isa. 19:1; Eze. 32:7-8). He is poetically portrayed as coming in clouds in historical judgments upon men (Psa. 18:7-15; 104:3; Isa. 19:1; Joel 2:1, 2; Nah. 1:2ff.; Zeph. 1:14, 15).³⁵

When God comes in the clouds in the Old Testament, we understand it as a sign of judgment on a people, city or nation. It makes little sense to cast this understanding aside when approaching the New Testament. There is no biblical warrant for associating such language with the end of the world.

When we come to verse seven, we must ask ourselves the question, upon whom is the judgment coming? The answer follows in the text: those who pierced Christ (v. 7).

³⁵Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, p.123.

Both Christ and the apostles held the Jews to be more culpable than the Romans, or anyone else, for his murder. Let us again cite Gentry.

The biblical record is quite clear: the Jews are the ones who sought His death (John 11:53; Matt. 26:4; 27:1), who paid to have Him captured (Matt. 26:14-15, 47; 27:3-9), who brought false witnesses against Him (Matt. 27:59-62), who initially convicted Him (Matt. 27:65-66), who turned Him over to Roman authorities (Matt. 27:2, 11, 12; Acts 3:13), and who even arrogantly (and disastrously!) called down His blood upon their own heads (Matt. 27:24-25). John even tells us in his Gospel that the Roman Procurator, Pontius Pilate, sought to free Jesus, finding no fault in Him (John 18:38; 19:12; *cf.* Acts 3:13). But the Jews demanded that the robber Barabbas be released instead of Christ (John 18:39, 40), and that Christ be immediately crucified (John 19:6,15). They even subtly threatened Pilate's tenuous Roman procuratorship by affirming "we have no king but Caesar" (John 19:14-15), suggesting that Pilate was allowing Christ to supplant Caesar. And Jesus Himself, during the course of these events, specifically pointed out to Pilate: "he who delivered Me up to you has the greater sin" (John 19:11).³⁶

Verse seven does indeed offer the theme of Revelation.

³⁶*Ibid.*, p.124.

Christ is coming in judgment, and this judgment will come upon the Jews. This, of course, happened in 70 A.D. when the Romans sacked Jerusalem under general Titus.

The first eight verses of the Apocalypse offer several considerations which cannot be accounted for in the futurist system of prophetic interpretation. The phrases, *these things must shortly come to pass*, and, *the time is at hand*, prepare the reader to expect that the prophecies which follow actually occurred in history shortly after they were written. Furthermore, verse seven reveals that the prophecies concern judgment on the Jews and their apostasy. Literalists and futurists who concoct strange interpretations of chapters 2 through 21 do not follow the context laid down at the beginning of the book.

This context is confirmed in the last chapter where again those in the seven churches are told of *the things which must shortly come to pass* (22:6). Also, three different times the Lord says, "Behold, I am coming quickly!" (22:7, 12, 20).³⁷ Chapters 2 through 21 are sandwiched between an introduction and conclusion which lend themselves to a preterist interpretation. They make no allowance for futurist constructions.

Date of the Apocalypse

The question of the book's date is quite relevant in this discussion. Many have asserted that the Apocalypse was written during the reign of Domitian (c. 96 A.D.). Because

³⁷The Greek words for *shortly* and *quickly* are the same as those discussed in the analyses of vv. 1 and 3.

many of the events described in the Apocalypse present themselves as future at the time of writing, an 96 A.D. date would alone be testimony sufficient to dismiss the preterist position. Futurists such as Dave Hunt have argued this way, and the argument is valid. However, the major premise is not true. The Apocalypse was written years before Domitian's reign.

Late-date (96 A.D.) advocates herald a statement by Irenaeus (130-202 A.D.) which indicates that John received his apocalyptic revelation "at the close of Domitian's reign."³⁸ Many since Irenaeus have looked upon this statement as sufficient proof for a late date. This ignores the early testimony of Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Epiphanius, *The Shepherd of Hermas*, and the Muratorian Canon.³⁹

More important than the external evidence, of course, is the internal evidence. A thorough discussion on the dating question is offered in Kenneth L. Gentry's *Before Jerusalem Fell*. Internal evidence such as Nero's identity as the beast (the sixth king in Rev. 17:10 who *is*.) is compelling, and Gentry's discussion of external evidence is also impressive. The arguments he presents are sound,⁴⁰ yet too cumbersome

³⁸Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, C.F. Cruse, trans. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), p.102.

³⁹Greg Bahnsen and Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *House Divided* (Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), pp.257-8.

⁴⁰Gentry, Russell, and others devote a good deal of space arguing that the integrity of the temple (assumed in Rev. 11:1-2) is a strong evidence that Revelation was written before the temple's destruction. They don't

to be repeated. Perhaps Terry's summary will suffice here.

If we adopt the early date, and the terrible catastrophe of the Apocalypse is understood of the ruin of that great city where the Lord was crucified, and on which the Lord himself charged the guilt of all the righteous blood of martyrs from Abel to Zechariah (Matt. 23:34-37), this prophecy has great force and significance in claiming to foretell things of the near future. The statements are thus seen to be true and appropriate. But it is impossible, without subjecting the language to the most unnatural treatment, to explain these time-allusions as referring to events which were not to take place until centuries after the book was written.⁴¹

While the internal evidence is the most important evidence to consider in the dating question, it is also the most involved. It requires sound exegesis of more than the first eight verses of the Apocalypse, and that work has been done by others.⁴² William Hendricksen asserts that "one

consider that Ezekiel was commanded to measure the temple (Ez. 40) fourteen years *after* the temple was burned by the Babylonians (2 Ki. 25:9). Despite this weakness, Gentry's overall thesis is ably defended.

⁴¹Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Apocalypics* [1898] (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1988), p.259.

⁴²In addition to Gentry, consider David Chilton, David S. Clark, and J. Stuart Russell.

cannot find a single really cogent argument in support of the earlier date."⁴³ His statement is misleading, for it ignores the evidence and the many able proponents of an early date.⁴⁴

Biblical Images

After being confronted exegetically with the veracity of preterism, one may still find himself unsettled by the catastrophic language found in New Testament prophecy. Did the sun turn black, and the moon red, and did the stars fall from the sky in 70 A.D.?⁴⁵ Did a blasphemous beast rise from the sea and deceive all but the elect at that time?⁴⁶ Literalists use these examples as arguments against preterism, and those who are unfamiliar with Old Testament prophecy may be tempted to listen.

Word pictures like those mentioned above do not appear

⁴³William Hendricksen, *More Than Conquerors* (Grand Rapids, Baker Book House, 1982), p.14. This rash statement is followed by two disappointingly brief and shallow paragraphs in defense of a late date.

⁴⁴Kenneth Gentry names over one hundred prominent scholars who believe the Apocalypse to have been written before 70 A.D. in *The Beast of Revelation* (Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), pp.83-4.

⁴⁵Revelation 6:12ff.

⁴⁶Revelation 13.

for the first time in the Apocalypse. They were used in the Old Testament, which is where their meaning is found. The Apocalypse, like all other books in the canon, must be interpreted in light of other Scripture. Consider Chilton's comment:

*Revelation is the most "Biblical" book in the Bible. St. John quotes hundreds of passages from the Old Testament, often with subtle allusions to little-known religious rituals of the Hebrew people. In order to understand Revelation, we need to know our Bibles backward and forward.*⁴⁷

The key to understanding the symbols and images in the Apocalypse is found in the Bible, not on the six o'clock news.

It would consume far too much space to cover each instance of Old Testament imagery that is found in the Apocalypse. Only two brief examples will be offered here.

First, the *collapsing cosmos* language (sun darkening, stars falling, *etc.*) is commonly understood as a sign of judgment on particular peoples, nations or cities in the Old Testament. Such language is used in foretelling the destruction of Babylon (Is. 13:10), Egypt (Ezek. 32:6-9), Israel (Joel 2:30-31, fulfilled in Acts 2; Amos 8:9), and Edom (Is. 34:4). Similar language in the Apocalypse should be taken as a sign of judgment on Israel or Jerusalem (*e.g.*, Rev. 6:12ff.).

Second, a ten-headed beast is described in Daniel 7. The

⁴⁷David Chilton, *Days of Vengeance* (Ft. Worth: Dominion Press, 1987), p.xi.

description of this beast is strikingly similar to the beast of Revelation 13. In Daniel, this fourth beast is said to be the symbol of a kingdom which tramples the whole earth (7:23). The accepted identity of the fourth beast of Daniel is the Roman Empire. But when turning to Revelation 13, many futurists scrap this understanding. Some believe it to be a literal ten-headed beast, while more careful futurists admit that it refers to Rome. Yet they go on to say, as they do with the temple, that this beast is a future, *revived* Rome.⁴⁸ Identifying the beast of Revelation 13 as the Roman Empire that dominated western civilization centuries ago is the only reasonable conclusion warranted in the text, confirming what we are taught from Daniel 7. Assigning any other identity to the beast comes not from the Bible, but from an unbiblical assumption about the setting of the Apocalypse.⁴⁹

A huge volume could be filled with the Old Testament images that appear in the Apocalypse. Some are obvious, such as the lamb as a symbol of Christ, while others require a good deal of Bible study to decipher.

Many who are trained according to the literal hermeneutic, or who aren't well-versed in Old Testament prophecy, are taken aback when introduced to preterism. First-century Christians who first read the Apocalypse were quite familiar with Old Testament prophetic language.

⁴⁸Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, pp.197-8.

⁴⁹A more thorough discussion of the identity of the beast is offered in Gentry, "The Role of Nero Caesar," in *Before Jerusalem Fell*, pp.193-219.

Through deeper study in the Scriptures, the difficult passages of the Apocalypse will become more clear to twentieth century Christians as well.

The Apocalypse has long held the reputation for being the most difficult book to understand in the canon. Because of this, centuries of wild speculation about its meaning have been tolerated in the church. This speculation has led many to presume that they will be confused when they look to the book themselves. Thus, many attempt to decipher the substance of the book before understanding the context. The frequent result is a misunderstanding of the book's basic message.

The immediate context of the Apocalypse is laid down in its first eight verses. Unfortunately, many do not find their first exposure to the book in its opening lines. If the context that is established in these verses were understood before venturing on to other parts of the book, then much of the rash speculating could be prevented. Sound exegesis prevents a multitude of conjectures.

The first and last chapters of the Apocalypse show that the prophecy given therein describes events that occurred shortly thereafter. It portrays the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., not the destruction of the world at the end of history.

Chapter 6

The Anti-Christ And The Beast

James Nance

Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour (1 John 2:18).

The beast I saw resembled a leopard, but had feet like those of a bear and a mouth like that of a lion. The dragon gave the beast his power and his throne and great authority (Revelation 13:2).

Some years ago I attended a seminar in which one of the speakers gave an overview of the various viewpoints of eschatology within the Christian church. After the presentation, someone asked the question: "Is there any biblical evidence to show that the Antichrist of John's epistles and the beast of Revelation are the same person?" Many students of New Testament prophecy do not even consider this question, but rather begin their studies assuming that the Antichrist and the beast are one, and then build their eschatologies upon that foundational assumption. In this essay I will show that the Antichrist and the beast are not the same person. The Bible describes them clearly

and in very different ways.

Attributes of the Antichrist

Antichrist is a term found in two books in the New Testament: 1 John and 2 John. Many people are surprised to find that the word antichrist does not appear at all in the book of Revelation; but it is a term unique to John's first two epistles, with a very specific definition.

The term *antichrist* was used two ways: it identified a heresy which denied some basic doctrines about Jesus of Nazareth, and it identified a person or persons who adhered to that heresy.

Considered as a heresy, the spirit of the antichrist denied two basic truths about Jesus: 1) that He had come in the flesh, and 2) that He was the Christ.

Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world (1 John 4:1-3).

Antichrist is described here as a spirit that was working through false prophets that had gone out into the world. These false prophets taught that Jesus Christ had not come in the flesh. In this they denied the doctrine of the Incarnation, the belief that God became a man, a physical,

human male who walked, ate, slept, bled, and died.

Who is the liar? It is the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a man is antichrist – he denies the Father and the Son (1 John 2:22).

An antichrist denied that Jesus of Nazareth was the Christ, the unique Anointed One who was predicted in the Old Testament and anticipated by the Jewish nation. In denying this truth about the Son, an antichrist denied the Father as well, because the Father had made His Son Jesus the Christ.

The people who followed this heresy are called antichrists (1 John 2:18, 2 John 7). How does John describe these antichrists? They are characterized by four attributes.

First, we see that these antichrists were John's contemporaries who were at work during the first century. John states clearly that the spirit of antichrist "even now is already in the world" (1 John 4:3). Those who would assert that the antichrist is still yet to come must explain why John was teaching the early church how to recognize it. The whole context of John's letters shows that he was dealing with a problem that the first-century church was having or was about to encounter. In 1 John 2:18 quoted above, John calls his own time "the last hour" because these false prophets had already come, just as Jesus himself prophesied in Matthew 24:10-11. "At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people."

Second, we know that the antichrists were religious leaders who went out from the Christian church.

They went out from us, but they did not really

belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us (1 John 2:19).

The antichrist heresy began with false teachers inside the church, and as such was the devil's instrument to battle the church from within. The antichrists' departure from the church was evidence that they did not truly belong to the church. Even so, they continued to try to lead the believers in the church astray (1 John 2:26). This same problem is addressed in John's second epistle.

Many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist...do not take him into your home or welcome him. Anyone who welcomes him shares in his wicked work. (2 John 7, 10-11)

This leads us to a third attribute: the antichrists worked by deception. The false teachers came in sheep's clothing, but they were really ferocious wolves. And like false teachers today, they did not come to the door saying, "Hi, my name is elder Jones, and I would like to lead you astray." Rather, to the undiscerning believer they looked like spiritual teachers proclaiming truth.

Fourth, and finally, we can see that the antichrists were recognizable. The discerning believer would be able to examine the teachings of antichrists and distinguish the false from the true. This was John's purpose for writing about them: so that the believers of his day could recognize these false teachers by his clear description of them, and avoid

them.

The antichrist heresy was apparently an early form of gnosticism, which was a system of belief opposed to orthodox Christianity and prevalent in the second and third centuries. Gnosticism generally taught that matter was evil, that the Incarnation was an illusion, and that Redemption was by way of enlightenment or gaining knowledge.

There were various forms of gnosticism and many Gnostic heretics. Church history records that the arch-heretic of John's day was a man named Cerinthus. Church historian Philip Schaff relates a meeting between the apostle John and the heretic Cerinthus as recorded by Irenaeus:

On meeting in a public bath at Ephesus the Gnostic heretic Cerinthus, who denied the incarnation of our Lord, John refused to remain under the same roof, lest it might fall.

In 1 John 2:18, John states that "the antichrist is coming" and "many antichrists have come." If John had one particular man in mind as the Antichrist, it is possible that that man was Cerinthus. Cerinthus was a religious leader of John's day, who denied that Jesus Christ had come in the flesh.

Attributes of the Beast

In the book of Revelation the apostle John vividly describes a personage which he calls "the beast." Just as the antichrist of John's epistles had a general identity as a heresy and a specific identity as an adherent or adherents of that heresy, so the beast of John's Revelation has a general

and a specific identity.

Generally, a beast is used in the Bible as an apocalyptic symbol of an empire.

And I saw a beast coming out of the sea. He had ten horns and seven heads, with ten crowns on his horns, and on each head a blasphemous name. The beast I saw resembled a leopard, but had feet like those of a bear and a mouth like that of a lion. The dragon gave the beast his power and his throne and great authority (Rev. 13:1-2).

The first-century believer was more familiar with the Old Testament than his modern counterpart and would readily see the similarities between the beast described by John and the four beasts of Daniel's apocalyptic visions recorded in Daniel 7. In verse 17 Daniel learned that "the four great beasts are four kingdoms that will rise from the earth." These four kingdoms were parallel to the four levels of Nebuchadnezzar's statue in Daniel 2, and they represented the empires of Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome. Thus, the intended reader of Revelation would recognize John's beast as also representing a kingdom, a political realm.

But the beast of Revelation can also have a specific identity as a man.

This calls for wisdom. If anyone has insight, let him calculate the number of the beast, for it is a man's number. His number is six hundred sixty-six (Rev. 13:18).

What other attributes does John use to describe the beast

so that this empire and man can be identified? Revelation 13:2 asserts that the dragon, which represents Satan (12:9), gave the beast his power, throne, and authority. This power behind the empire of the beast was a satanic power.

The beast was given a mouth to utter proud words and blasphemies and to exercise his authority for forty-two months. He opened his mouth to blaspheme God, and to slander his name and his dwelling place and those who live in heaven. He was given power to make war against the saints and to conquer them. And he was given authority over every tribe, people, language, and nation. All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast—all whose names have not been written in the book of life belonging to the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world (Rev. 13:5-8).

The satanic empire of the beast used its power and authority to make war against the saints of God, the Christian church, with some outward success. As such, the beast was Satan's instrument to battle the church from outside the church.

The beast's authority extended over the whole world, "authority over every tribe, people, language, and nation." This phrase echoes Daniel 5:19, in which we are told that "all the peoples, nations, and men of every language feared king Nebuchadnezzar." Yet Nebuchadnezzar's empire did not extend far beyond the Fertile Crescent, an area somewhat smaller than the Greek or Roman Empires. Thus, although the language used is universal, it can have a limited application to the known political world of the writer's time. Paul uses similar language in Romans 1:8,

when he writes that the faith of the Roman church was "being reported all over the world," meaning all over the Roman Empire.

Using this same kind of language, John recorded that "all inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast," just as in Daniel 3:7 "all the peoples, nations and men of every language fell down and worshipped the image of gold that king Nebucadnezzar had set up." The people within the beast's empire worshipped the beast. Revelation 13:4 says that men worshipped the beast because of his military strength. "Who can make war against him?" In verse 8 we read that the redeemed did not worship the beast, and so they were beheaded (*cf.* Revelation 20:4).

In chapter 17, verses 9 and 10, the angel describes a woman who sits upon the beast.

The seven heads are seven hills on which the woman sits. They are also seven kings. Five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; but when he does come, he must remain for a little while.

In the world of John's day the city famous as the city on the seven hills was Rome. Dr. Kenneth Gentry says, "The Roman writers Seutonius and Plutarch make reference to the first century festival in Rome called Septimontium, i.e. the feast of the 'seven hilled city.' Archaeologists have discovered the Coin of Vespasian (emperor 69-79 A.D.) picturing the goddess Roma as a woman seated on seven hills. The famed seven hills of Rome are mentioned time and again by ancient pagan writers..." The empire symbolized by the beast of Revelation is obviously the Roman Empire.

The seven heads of the beast are also seven kings of the

Roman Empire, reigning in succession. John says of those kings that "five have fallen, one is." John apparently wrote his Revelation during the reign of the sixth emperor of Rome, which dates his writing easily within the first century. From this we can finally conclude that the beast was the Roman Empire of the first century, under which Christ was crucified, and under which a great, imperial persecution of the Christian church took place.

The Roman Empire of the first century has all of the attributes we have identified for the beast. Rome was a very powerful empire which extended over the known world. The power of Rome was used to make war upon the Christian church (the first imperial persecution took place during the reign of Nero Caesar in 64 A.D., and intermittent persecution occurred until the early fourth century). Each of the emperors in first-century Rome was worshipped to some degree, the Caesars Gaius and Nero actually demanding worship from their subjects.

If any one man can be identified as personifying the beast which was the Roman empire, it has to be Nero Caesar. Nero began a furious persecution of the Christian church in November of 64 A.D., which claimed the lives of many Christians, notably both the apostles Peter and Paul. This persecution lasted until the death of Nero in June of 68 A.D., or almost exactly forty-two months, the amount of time which the beast was to "exercise his authority" (Revelation 13:5). Nero "made war against the saints...to conquer them."

But a question must be addressed, briefly, at this point. Can the number of the beast, six hundred sixty-six, apply to Nero? Yes, it can. If the name Nero Caesar is written in the Hebrew, represented here by the English letters NRWN QSR, the sum of the numbers which match each Hebrew

letter add up precisely to 666, as follows:

$$\begin{array}{r} N = 50 \quad R = 200 \quad W = 6 \quad N = 50 \\ Q = 100 \quad S = 60 \quad R = 200 \end{array}$$

$$50 + 200 + 6 + 50 + 100 + 60 + 200 = 666.$$

John exhorts his intended readers within the early church to have “wisdom” and “insight” so that they may “calculate the number of the beast, for it is a man’s number.” He obviously expected the Christians at that time to be able to do this. What would have been the purpose of frustrating readers for two millennia who could not possibly identify a twentieth-century (or later) beast? Isn’t it far more reasonable to assume that John’s original readers understood him very well in his identification of the beast, and that we modern Christians who don’t know our ancient history or our Old Testament can’t recognize the existing evidence?

The beast of Revelation was the Roman Empire, personified in the emperors which attacked the Christian church, most notably Nero.

Concluding Thoughts

We have seen some of the biblical evidence which identifies the antichrist of John's epistles and the beast of John's Revelation. The attributes of each are summarized below.

Attribute	Antichrist	Beast
Location	1, 2 John	Revelation
General description	Heresy	Empire
Specific	Heretics	Emperor
Authority type	Religious	Political
Attacked the church	From the inside	From the outside
Form of attack	Leading astray	Putting to death
Contemporary of John?	Yes	Yes
General identity	Proto-Gnosticism	Roman Empire
Specific identity	Cerinthus	Nero Caesar

There is very little evidence to suggest that the Antichrist and the beast are identifiable as the same person, and a wealth of biblical evidence to show that they are not. Their names and descriptions come from one author to identify them for his readers.

In our study of prophecy, as in all our studies of Scripture, we must examine our basic assumptions. We must make certain that our assumptions develop from an understanding of the biblical record and an unbiased weighing of the evidence before us.

Chapter 7

The Harlot

T. J. Morin

One of the testimonies to the inspiration of Scripture is the unity of the multibook revelation. The unity of the Bible, as revelation, is manifested in several ways. One of them is the presence of a biblical corpus of theological themes, images, and symbols which are made use of by many inspired writers. Some of the themes are of agricultural origin, others of domestic or astronomical origin. The exegete who, when encountering such images, ignores the connection of the particular image with other uses of it does so at his peril, or at least at the peril of his scholarship. And nowhere is there more evidence of perilous scholarship than in most commentaries on the Apocalypse of the Apostle John.

One theological symbol used throughout the Scriptures regarding the relationship between God and His covenant people is that of sexual fidelity in the context of the marriage covenant. It is a picture used from the Books of Moses to the Apocalypse of John. Symbolism of sexual faithfulness and unfaithfulness is used to picture, among other things, the obedience and disobedience of God's covenant people. There are close to ninety references to harlots and harlotry used as such symbols in the first sixty-five books of the Bible. Given the testimony of these books, the symbolism of the harlot of Revelation 17 and 18 should

be unmistakable. It is also a good illustration of the self-interpretive character of the Scriptures.

In giving the sense of Revelation 17 and 18 the expositor must consider primary and secondary internal testimony to discover the identity and nature of the Harlot. Primary internal testimony is that found in the verses and chapters in the immediate context, that is, "What does John say about the harlot?" The secondary internal testimony is that found in other New Testament and Old Testament books. Consideration of the internal testimony, in this paper, proceeds in the order in which the material is arranged in Scripture, roughly chronological. Because of the placement of the Apocalypse in the canon, this order of presentation has the advantage of considering the harlot text of the Apocalypse from within a good understanding of the biblical imagery as a whole.

In close to ninety places in the Old Testament, the author uses the term *harlot* or *harlotry*, either in a statement of warning against certain behavior or in an accusation against a city or people. Although the statements may be found throughout the Old Testament canon, they occur with greatest frequency in the books of Ezekiel, Jeremiah, Isaiah, and Hosea.¹ The references may be sorted out according to the following: "To whom is the reference directed?", and "What does the reference mean?"

The first question is easily answered. With two exceptions², the references concern God's covenant people

¹Sixty-four of the eighty-six references to *harlot* or *harlotry* are in these four books.

²Isaiah 23:15,16, referring in an oblique way to Tyre, and Nahum 3:4, referring to Assyria, are the exceptions.

in the wilderness³, in the period of the judges⁴, during the divided monarchy⁵, in the northern kingdom of Israel⁶, and in the southern kingdom of Israel⁷. These references all have in view the treachery of a people pledged to faithfulness. The idolatry and cultic immorality of the Gentiles is never, in a general or consistent way, described in terms of harlotry.

Isaiah's cry, "How the faithful city has become a harlot!", speaking of Jerusalem, captures and expresses the meaning of the imagery of the harlot theme in the Old Testament. What then is the nature of this unfaithfulness, and why do the prophets, from Moses to Ezekiel, refer to it as harlotry? First, as to the nature of the unfaithfulness, it seems that what was in view was a critical disloyalty, a fundamental betrayal of the covenant between God and His people. In chronological order the book of Hosea is the first clear statement of the sort of unfaithfulness called harlotry. The book abounds in graphic portrayal of a comprehensive departure from the Lord. Hosea's ministry is roughly dated from the death of Jeroboam II (753 B.C.) to the early years of Hezekiah (*ca* 710 B.C.). His blast is aimed at the

³Exodus 34:15,16; Leviticus 17:7, 19:29, 20:5,6; Numbers 15:39, 25:1; Deuteronomy 31:16.

⁴Judges 2:17, 8:27,33.

⁵1 Chronicles 5:25; 2 Chronicles 21:11,13.

⁶Jeremiah 3:6,8; Ezekiel 20:30; 23:3,5,7,8; Hosea 1:2; 2:4,5; 3:3; 4:10-15,18; 5:3,4; 6:10; Amos 7:17; Micah 1:7.

⁷2 Chronicles 21:11,13; Isaiah 1:21; 23:15,16; 57:3; Jeremiah 2:20; 3:1,6,8,9; 13:27; Ezekiel 6:9; 16:1-63; 23:1-49; 43:7,9; Joel 3:3.

northern kingdom, but manages to sideswipe the kingdom of Judah in several places. The God of Israel, through Hosea, characterizes the betrayal in the following terms.

1. The harlot of Hosea is symbolic of departure, of leaving the Lord.

When the Lord began to speak by Hosea, the Lord said to Hosea, "Go take yourself a wife of harlotry and children of harlotry, for the land has committed great harlotry by departing from the Lord."⁸

2. The harlot of Hosea is symbolic of an idolatrous ingratitude with respect to God's provision for the needs of His people.

For their mother has played the harlot; she who conceived them has done shamefully. For she said, "I will go after my lovers, who give me my bread and my water, my wool and my linen, my oil and my drink."⁹

3. The harlot of Hosea is symbolic of a general breakdown of respect for the law of God.

Hear the word of the Lord, you children of Israel, for the Lord brings a charge against the inhabitants of the land: "There is no truth, or mercy, or knowledge of God in the land. By swearing and

⁸Hosea 1:2.

⁹Hosea 2:5.

lying, stealing and killing and committing adultery, they break all restraint, with bloodshed after bloodshed.”¹⁰

4. The harlot of Hosea is symbolic of idolatrous sexual practices.

My people ask counsel from their wooden idols, and their staff informs them. For the spirit of harlotry has caused them to stray, and they have played the harlot against their God. They offer sacrifices on the mountaintops, and burn incense on the hills, under oaks, poplars, and terebinths, because their shade is good. Therefore your daughters commit harlotry, and your brides commit adultery. I will not punish your daughters when they commit harlotry, nor your brides when they commit adultery; for the men themselves go apart with harlots, and offer sacrifices with a ritual harlot. Therefore people who do not understand will be trampled.¹¹

A few words are in order on the nature of ritual prostitution. The modern materialist, making as he does a fundamental though inconsistent distinction between what he does with his body and what comes out of his head, must be reminded of the biblical connection between sexual immorality and intellectual idolatry. The connection was perfectly clear to the Canaanitic worshipers of the Baals.

¹⁰Hosea 4:1,2.

¹¹Hosea 4:12-14.

Prostitution first became a serious problem through confrontation with the fertility cults, in particular the Baal cult. Baal's "relationship to the earth was that of a *hieros gamos* [a sacred marriage]; he is the mythical regenerative power that fructifies the earth by means of the sperm of the rain. Human beings share in his fertilising power by entering this mystery and imitating it." (Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, I, 1962, 22). This took place through intercourse with a prostitute in the sanctuary, which was supposed to bring man into cosmic harmony. Since this religion was not simply—as has often been falsely assumed—concerned with gross sensuality but with sensuality in a particular "spiritual" form, it had a strong attraction for the educated Israelites. The prostitutes in the sanctuary were respected women.¹²

5. The harlot of Hosea is symbolic of idolatrous political and military alliances.

Ephraim also is like a silly dove, without sense—they call to Egypt, they go to Assyria.¹³

For they have gone up to Assyria, like a wild

¹²*The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1975), vol. 1, p.498.

¹³Hosea 7:11.

donkey alone by itself; Ephraim has hired lovers.¹⁴

The later uses of the imagery by Jeremiah and Ezekiel are in the context of the prophets' warnings of judgment to come on the southern kingdom. Ezekiel in particular describes the harlotry of Judah in a lewdness unparalleled in the rest of the Scriptures.¹⁵ The five basic elements of Hosea's accusation are present in the prophet's words to Judah and Jerusalem.

The prophetic imagery is applied by the Lord Jesus Christ to the apostate shepherds of national Israel.¹⁶

Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered, saying, 'Teacher, we want to see a sign from you.' But He answered and said to them, 'An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign...'

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee, first cleanse the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of

¹⁴Hosea 8:9.

¹⁵Ezekiel 16 and 23 are generally treated with great delicacy in English translations and commentaries.

¹⁶Matthew 12:39; 23:25-39; implied in John 8:7-9.

dead men's bones and all uncleanness. Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous, and say, 'If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets.' Therefore you are witnesses against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. Fill up then the measure of your fathers' guilt. Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of hell? Therefore, indeed, I send you prophets, wise men, and scribes: some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from city to city, that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. Assuredly, I say to you, all these things will come on this generation. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her!

With this development of the harlot theme in mind, we turn to the Apocalypse of John, chapters 17 and 18. The woman described in 17:1-19:6 has the following characteristics.

1. She is referred to as the "great harlot", and as "the

mother of harlots.”¹⁷

2. She is identified as a fornicator, and as one who corrupted and intoxicated the earth with her fornication.¹⁸ The language used here parallels that of Ezekiel.

3. She is identified with a beastly consort, on which she is said to sit.¹⁹ The contrast here between the harlot/beast pair and the bride/lamb pair is marked.

4. She is identified with a golden cup, the inside of which is full of the uncleanness of her fornication.²⁰ These words are similar to those of Christ to the scribes and Pharisees in Matthew 23.

5. She is held responsible for the blood of the prophets, saints, martyrs, and of all those slain on the earth.²¹ The accusation of the murder of the prophets is perhaps the strongest primary testimony identifying the harlot as the Judaic travesty of biblical religion. The language here is a striking parallel to the Lord’s words to the teachers of Israel in Matthew 23:35.

...that on you may come all the righteous blood shed

¹⁷Rev 17:1,5.

¹⁸Rev 17:2; 18:3; 19:2.

¹⁹Rev 17:3,7.

²⁰Rev 17:4.

²¹Rev 17:6, 18:20,24, 19:2.

on the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar.

6. She will be stripped naked, attacked by agents of her consort, and burnt.²² This language is nearly identical to that of Ezekiel 16:39-42; 23:46-49.

There are two sets of images in use here. The first is the continuation of the harlot-theme applied to apostate Judaism, and the second is a developing contrast between the lewd and lascivious harlot and the chaste and faithful bride. Isaiah's statement, "How the faithful city has become a harlot!" reaches its fullest realization in the condition of Judea and Jerusalem in the apostolic period. To this author, the continuity of the theme is clear and compelling. The internal testimony of both secondary and primary contexts identifies Jerusalem, the center of apostate Judaism, as the Great Harlot of John's Apocalypse.

²²Rev 17:16,17.

Chapter 8

Who Cares?

Douglas Wilson

Why does eschatology matter? Why can't Christians just agree to preach the gospel, instead of concentrating on and differing over their various eschatological views?

Of course, the objection urged upon us is itself built upon a certain eschatological view. It is not possible to say that eschatology doesn't matter without knowing its relative importance – and we cannot know its relative importance without knowing the position itself. To say that something is insignificant presupposes knowledge about it; an assertion that eschatology is not important cannot be validly derived from the premises of eschatological agnosticism.

Given the array of eschatological options, we should perhaps consider some of the ways in which this issue makes a difference.

Short Term/Long Term?

Our objector asks why we cannot leave all this alone and preach the gospel. One of the reasons we cannot is that our assumed eschatology affects *the nature of our evangelism*. If an evangelist is motivated to share the gospel because Saddam Hussein is in the process of starting the battle of Armageddon, then that assumption will affect *how*

he does evangelism. He shares the good news of the cross, it is true, but it is good news set in an unbiblical context. It is what can be called a “man the lifeboats” evangelism. The object is to get as many people saved as possible before the Rapture. But if the timing of the Rapture is wrong, and we don’t all vanish in a few months, then what has suffered in the meantime?

There are two problems that result from this kind of mentality, and they are both manifestations of short-term thinking. When I was in the Navy, I would periodically see sailors with what was called a “short-timer’s attitude.” The one afflicted knew how many *hours* he had left in the Navy, and it was extremely difficult to get a short-timer to work diligently with due regard to the long-term needs of the ship. In the same way, many Christians are short-timers. “We are all going up to Heaven; who cares what happens here?” The work that *is* done is in the area of evangelism, *i.e.* we try to get other people to become short-timers too. There is not a strong emphasis on teaching disciples, *i.e.* training the new Christians to live in a Christian fashion for the next sixty years, including teaching them how to reach their descendants for Christ over the next six hundred years. In this view, there isn’t going to be another *six* years. For example, my parents knew a couple around the time of the Second World War who refused to have children because the end of the world was at hand. They were wrong; and their barrenness was a fitting picture for their theology.

In a very similar way, Christians also tend not to establish institutions which have a long-term vision. Why build a Christian school which your grandchildren could attend, if you believe you are not going to *have* grandchildren? If all that matters is getting individuals saved and into the lifeboat, then we are not going to seek

to establish godly patterns for future generations for our schools, cities, churches, etc. All that is evanescent, we think, and time's a wasting! Souls are perishing! Consequently, by concentrating on individuals, we reach far fewer individuals. Men were built by God to live in societies, both large and small, and it is our duty to teach them how to live there *as Christians*. If we concentrate on saving their souls, to the exclusion of all else, then we save far fewer souls, and we endanger the souls of those we do seek to save. We must never forget the fact that Jesus told us to disciple *nations*.

Discipled Priorities

Common sense is not authoritative. It seems to make good sense to us not to make a big deal out of eschatology, which is admittedly a difficult subject. But does the Bible place a different value on the subject?

When we are talking about eschatology, we are talking about the nature, extent, and fulfillment of *the kingdom of God*. Now when Jesus and His apostles preached, they preached the kingdom of God. How many modern evangelists preach the kingdom of God? Not many. "Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe the gospel'" (Mark 1:14-15). Note that phrase well – *the gospel of the kingdom of God*. One of the reasons our preaching is so deficient today is that *we have lost the message*.

What does Paul say in Acts 19:8? What was his message? "And he went into the synagogue and spoke

boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading concerning the things of the kingdom of God.”

It is very simple. If something was at the heart of Christ's message and was at the heart of Paul's, I find it hard to be sympathetic with pleas to leave it out of mine. In other words, this issue is important and should be *preached* because that is what the Bible requires.

Ethics

Finally, we must consider the ethical side of the issue. We all understand that it is possible to have, as William Gurnall put it, a sound head and a rotten heart. Not all the orthodox are regenerate. At the same time, we must derive our practice from the pattern of Scripture and *not* from the pattern of hypocrites. The biblical pattern is one of doctrine received, understood, and *then* applied. Those who hurry off to application before they have understood their orders are a nuisance to their master. “He who sends a message by the hand of a fool cuts off his own feet and drinks violence” (Proverbs 26:6). There have been many fool's errands in the history of Christendom which could have been prevented with a little careful exegesis.

The Bible teaches that a biblical understanding of our resurrection hope has a purifying effect... “and everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure” (1 John 3:3). There has been more than one individual who through sinful eschatological calculations has concluded that he may “*beat the male and female servants, and...eat and drink and be drunk*” (Luke 12:45). It is our responsibility to be faithful and obedient. Down through history, there have been many who have been

disobedient through perseverance in foolishness. I speak of those who have sold their homes with wild expectancy, those who sat on mountains or rooftops with bated breath, those who figured out that Hitler or Kissinger or Napoleon or Anwar Sadat were the Antichrist, those who have diligently reckoned the esoteric significance of each one of Nebuchadnezzar's toes, those who have managed to get Daniel's seventy weeks into the configuration of a double helix, and those who have marked their calendars and who have watched their charts and the sky more than their wretched hearts.

A Select Bibliography

Adams, Jay. *The Time Is At Hand*. Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1966.

Chilton, David. *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation*. Ft. Worth, TX: Dominion Press, 1987.

Clark, David S. *The Message from Patmos: A Postmillennial Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (Reprint). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1989.

Gentry, Kenneth L. Jr. *The Beast of Revelation*. Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989.

_____. *Before Jerusalem Fell: Dating the Book of Revelation*. Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989.

Kik, J. Marcellus. *An Eschatology of Victory*. Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1971.

Russell, J. Stuart. *The Parousia* (1887). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1983.

Terry, Milton S. *Biblical Apocalyptic* (1898). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988.

_____. *Biblical Hermeneutics* (Reprint). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, n.d.

Index

- abomination of desolation 47, 65
antiChrist 5, 16, 36, 41, 42, 108-112, 118, 133
atonement 36-38, 40, 48, 51-54, 56, 58, 70
Bahnsen 5, 102
beast 5, 102, 104-106, 108, 112-118, 127, 134
Chilton 103, 105, 134
clouds v, 13, 14, 98, 99
Cyrus 59, 60
Daniel vii, 1, 36-41, 43, 46-54, 58-60, 65, 105, 106,
113-115, 133
Day of the Lord 9, 10, 29, 69
dispensationalist 36-38, 41, 42, 44, 45, 48, 50, 51, 58,
59, 61, 81
Domitian 101, 102
elements vii, 29-32, 125
end of the age v, vi, 18, 19, 63, 64, 66, 67, 93
futurism 1, 38
gap 11, 38, 42-46, 48, 58, 61, 76
generation v, vii, 12, 19, 26, 27, 47, 64, 66, 73, 125,
126
Gentry 4, 5, 79, 89, 91, 99, 100, 102-104, 106, 115, 134
gnosticism 112, 118
grammatico-historical 1-3, 84
harlot 5, 119-124, 126-128
hermeneutic 2, 84-86, 92, 106
historicism 1
hyper-literalism 81, 84
Isaiah 10, 11, 13, 30, 45, 60, 72, 84-86, 120, 121, 128
Jerusalem v, 4, 9-14, 25, 27, 39-41, 43, 44, 46, 47, 58,

	60, 61, 70, 72, 74, 76, 79, 89, 91, 99, 101, 102, 105-107, 121, 125, 126, 128, 134
literalism	36, 44, 81, 84, 86, 92, 95
Nero	102, 106, 116-118
new earth	18, 27, 29, 30, 32, 33
new heavens	18, 27, 29, 30, 32, 33
rapture	16, 36, 96, 130
Revelation	vii, 3, 8, 11, 14, 26, 28, 33, 42, 46, 55, 57, 58, 78, 79, 81, 82, 83, 86-89, 91-93, 100, 102, 104-106, 108, 109, 112, 113, 114-120, 134
Roman Empire	12, 106, 115-118
Rome	12, 25, 106, 113, 115, 116
seven heads	113, 115
seven hills	115
seventy weeks	36-38, 40, 41, 43, 51, 58-60, 133
shortly	32, 33, 63, 87-90, 92, 101, 107
Titus	11, 21, 49, 60, 101
tribulation	16, 36, 46, 63, 65, 68
week	40-47, 61
Westminster Confession	3