



The Sword & The Plow

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Commentary on Matthew

Chapter Three

The Eschatology of John the Baptist

by
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1- In those days

We learn from Luke that this was the fifteenth year of Tiberius Caesar (Lk. 3:1). Roman emperors dated their reigns by calendar years, or from January 1 to December 31 following their accession (the “non-accession” method). Augustus Caesar, who was the reigning emperor when Jesus was born, died August 19, A.D. 14. Thus, the first regnal year of Tiberius would have been the calendar year A.D. 15, making his fifteenth year the calendar year A.D. 29.¹

¹ Jack Finegan, *Handbook of Biblical Chronology* (1998 Revised ed., Hendrickson), p. 329, 340.

came John

It was customary among the Jews to name their sons at the time of the child’s circumcision, the eighth day after birth. Custom dictated that the child be named after his father or other family member. Thus, when the family and neighbors of Zechariah and Elizabeth gathered together for the child’s circumcision, they called the child Zechariah after his father (Lk. 1:58-63). However, Gabriel had instructed the couple to name the child John, which therefore became his name (Lk. 1:13). The name John is from the Hebrew *Johanan*. The Greek form of the name is *Ioannas*; the Latin *Iohannes*; the French *Jean* (old French, *Jehan*); and the Irish *Sean*, derived from the Norman French.

The name occurs as early as the reign of David or Solomon (I Chrn. 6:9, 10).

the Baptist,

So called after the identifying feature of his ministry. The first announcement of the gospel began and ended with baptism. John came baptizing as a way to prepare men for Christ, and the Lord's final instruction to his disciples when he ascended into heaven was to continue the work of preaching and baptizing in his name (Matt. 28:19; Mk. 16:15, 16). John's baptism called men to repentance and to believe on the Messiah to come, but did not evoke any name over the subject. In contrast, Christian baptism evokes the name of Jesus over the subject for remission of sins (Acts 2:38; 8:16; 10:48; 19:5; 22:16). Following Jesus' ascension, those baptized with the baptism of John were charged to be re-baptized in Jesus' name (Acts 19:1-5). The word "baptize" is from the Greek βαπτίζω, and means *to dip repeatedly, to immerse, submerge; to cleanse by dipping or submerging.*² Accordingly, the examples of baptism we find in the New Testament involve immersing the repentant believer in water.³ Precedent for baptism may be found in the Old Testament and its many washings to purify the flesh, but whose real purpose stood as object lessons regarding the holiness of God and man's defilement from sin. The priests, upon their first consecration to office, and the high priest, before entering into the Holy of Holies, were to wash their flesh in water (Ex. 30:20; 40:12; Lev. 8:6; 16:4); and for defilement associated with the generation of children, men and women were to bathe in water (Lev. 15:5, 21). Naaman, to be cleansed from his leprosy, was told by Elisha to dip himself seven times in the Jordan (II Kng. 5:10, 14). Josephus reports that the Essenes required those who sought entrance into their order to undergo purification by bathing in cold water.⁴ But there is no scriptural or period evidence that would allow us to conclude there was a general practice among the Jews, which required the

² Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon*, in loc.

³ Baptism entailed *water* (Acts 8:36); *much water* (Jn. 3:23); *going down into the water* (Acts 8:38); *coming up out of the water* (Matt. 3:16; Mk. 1:10; Acts 8:39); *a burial* (Rom. 6:4; Col. 2:12); *a planting* (Rom. 6:5); *a washing* (Acts 22:16).

⁴ Josephus, *Wars*, 2.8. 5, 7.

baptism of proselytes for admission into the covenant community.⁵ Indeed, the very fact that Josephus mentions the practice among the Essenes shows that it was unique to that sect and not common to the Jews as a whole. Hence, John's baptism marked the dawn of a new day and the sunset of circumcision as the rite of passage into the assembly of God's people.

Preaching in the wilderness

Jewish convention required that men attain thirty years of age before undertaking active, public teaching. John was six months older than our Lord (Lk. 1:24, 26, 56), and thus began his ministry six months earlier. This was according to the word of the prophet Malachi, who foretold John's coming to prepare the way before Christ:

"Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold: he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts. But who shall abide the day of his coming? And who shall stand when he appeareth? For he is like a refiner's fire, and like fuller's soap...And I will come near to you to judgment; and I will be swift witness against the sorcerers, and against false swearers, and against those that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow, and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger from his right, and fear not me, saith the Lord of hosts." Mal. 3:1, 2, 5

Malachi is among the prophets whose message bypassed the redemptive work of Christ and focused instead upon the eschatological aspects of the Messiah's appearance (cf. Joel; Haggai): There was a time of wrath coming upon the world, and the Jewish nation in particular, as Christ took up his reign from the right hand of God in heaven and began to rule the

⁵ John Gill (1697-1791), *A Body of Practical Divinity, Bk. V, A Dissertation Concerning the Baptism of Jewish Proselytes*. Tertullian thought John's account of the pool named Bethesda, by the sheep market in Jerusalem, into which the first man stepping when the waters were troubled by an angel, was cured of his disease (Jn. 5:1-9), prefigured baptism. Tertullian, *On Baptism*, V; Ante-Nicene Fathers Vol. 3, 671, 672.

nations with a rod of iron (Ps. 2; 110; Heb. 1:3; 10:12, 13; Rev. 2:27; 12:5). The eschatological events that would overtake the nation were a prominent part of John's preaching, which urged men to repentance, baptism, and faith in Christ in order to escape the wrath to come.

Of Judaea,

Herod the Great ruled over Judea, Idumea, Samaria, Perea, Galilee, and the north east quarters of Palestine, including Iturea, and Trachonitis. At his death, Augustus Caesar divided Herod's kingdom between his surviving sons, making Archelaus ruler of Judea, Idumea, and Samaria (See comments at Matt. 2:21, 22). For his cruel and tyrannical deeds, Archelaus was banished to Vienna of Gaul in A.D. 6. Josephus says this was the tenth year of his reign and the thirty-seventh year from Augustus' victory over Antony at Actium (31 B.C.).⁶ Herod had been given authority from Caesar to appoint a successor to his kingdom or to distribute it in parts to his sons,⁷ and it seems clear that before his death they began to share in his government.⁸ Hence, we conclude that Josephus numbers four years of Archelaus' reign from his first entrance upon the government with his father, rather than from Herod's death in spring of 1 B.C. With the banishment of Archelaus, Judea was joined to the province of Syria and ruled by a Roman procurator, in which it continued until the nation was destroyed, except for a brief period when it was returned to a kingdom by Caius Caesar under Herod Argippa I (A.D. 41-44) (Acts 12).

"Now Cyrenius, a Roman senator, and one who had gone through other magistracies, and had passed through them till he had been consul, and one who, on other accounts was of great dignity, came at this time into Syria, with a few others, being sent by Caesar to be a judge of that nation, and to take an account of their substance; Coponius also, a man of the

⁶ Josephus, *Antiquities*, 17.13.2; 18.2.1.

⁷ Josephus, *Antiquities*, 15.4.5.

⁸ "When the affairs of Herod were in the condition I have described, all the public affairs depended upon Antipater." Josephus, *Antiquities*, 17.2.4; Whiston ed. If Antipater shared the rule with his father, we may assume his brothers had some part as well.

*equestrian order, was sent together with him, to have the supreme power over the Jews. Moreover, Cyrenius came himself into Judea, which was now added to the province of Syria, to take an account of their substance, and to dispose of Archelaus's money."*⁹

The taxing here mentioned by Josephus must be distinguished from the registration of 2 B.C. under Cyrenius and Saturninus, which brought Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem at Christ's birth (see comments at Matt. 2:1). This tax incited the revolt of Judas of Galilee, which Josephus names as the fourth philosophic sect of the Jews and blames as bearing the seeds which ultimately brought the nation to destruction.

*"For Judas and Sadduc, who excited a fourth philosophic sect among us, and had a great many followers therein, filled our civil government with tumults at present, and laid the foundation of our future miseries, by this system of philosophy, which we were before unacquainted withal; concerning which I shall discourse a little, and this the rather, because the infection which spread thence among the younger sort, who were zealous for it, brought the public to destruction."*¹⁰

The Roman governors of Judea, from the banishment of Archelaus until the nation's destruction in A.D. 70, are as follows: Coponius (A.D. 6-9), Marcus Ambivius (A.D. 9-12), Annus Rufus (A.D. 12-15), Valarius Gratus (A.D. 15-26), Pontius Pilate (A.D. 26-36), Marcellus (A.D. 36-37), Marullus (A.D. 37-41), Fadus (A.D. 44-46), Tiberius Alexander (A.D. 46-48), Ventidius Camanus (A.D. 48-52), Albinus (62-64), Gessius Florus (A.D. 64-66), Flavius Vespasianus (sent by Nero to prosecute the Jewish war) (A.D. 66-70).

2 – And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

There are different conceptions of the kingdom. Some of the early fathers supposed there would be a millennial reign of Christ on earth, a school of interpretation that came to be known as *chiliasm*, after the Greek term *χιλια*, a *thousand*. This school is

⁹ Josephus, *Antiquities*, 18.1.1; Whiston ed.

¹⁰ Josephus, *Antiquities*, 18.1.1; Whiston ed.

marked by an overly literal interpretation of the prophets:

But He, when He shall have destroyed unrighteousness, and executed His great judgment, and shall have recalled to life the righteous, who have lived from the beginning, will be engaged among men a thousand years, and will rule them with most just command...Then they who shall be alive in their bodies shall not die, but during those thousand years shall produce an infinite multitude, and their offspring shall be holy, and beloved by God; but they who shall be raised from the dead shall preside over the living as judges...About the same time also the prince of the devils, who is the contriver of all evils, shall be bound with chains, and shall be imprisoned during the thousand years of the heavenly rule in which righteousness shall reign in the world, so that he may contrive no evil against the people of God...Throughout this time Beasts shall not be nourished by blood, nor birds by prey; but all things shall be peaceful and tranquil. Lions and calves shall stand together at the manger, the wolf shall not carry off the sheep, the hound shall not hunt for prey; hawks and eagles shall not injure; the infant shall play with serpents.¹¹

This sort of approach betrays the most fundamental misunderstanding of the *usus loquendi* (Lat. “manner of speaking”) of the prophets. The language of the prophets was figurative and poetic; they used metaphors and similes to describe spiritual truths and events in the political world of men. The kingdom, rather than signifying a political reign of Christ on earth, is best understood as Christ’s dominion over the nations from the right hand of God *in heaven* (Ps. 110). Christ received the kingdom at his ascension (Dan. 7:13; *cf.* Ps 2). The *coming* of the kingdom was eschatological and would occur within the lives of the disciples (Matt. 16:27, 28; Mk. 9:1). The kingdom came *in power* in the events that witnessed the destruction of the Jewish nation and the “year of four emperors,” the civil wars that destroyed Rome and Italy following the death of Nero. These terrible judgments avenged the blood of Christ and his faithful martyrs as Jesus took up his reign and put his enemies beneath his feet. John thus urges the Jews to faith and

¹¹ Lactantius, *Divine Institutes*, XXIV; Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. VII, p. 219

repentance because the time of reckoning had drawn near and was at hand (Gk. ηγγικεν).

3 – For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.

The original prophecy in Isaiah may have had a double meaning. It follows the prophet’s word to Hezekiah that Judah would go into captivity in Babylon, and seems to describe Cyrus’s highway in the desert by which the captivity would return.

“Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the Lord’s hand double for all her sins. The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain: and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.” Isa. 40:1-4

If the prophecy has a dual meaning, the glory of the Lord would refer to the return of the captivity and revival of the Jewish nation upon its land. However this may be, the Messianic dimension of Isaiah’s prophecy looked beyond the return of the captivity to Judah unto the coming of Christ. The crookedness of sin and every uneven way was to be purged, and men were to prepare a straight way and level road by which the Lord might be received into every heart. All flesh – the men of every nation – would see the Lord’s salvation by the gospel.

4 – And the same John had his raiment of camel’s hair, and a leathern girdle about his lions;

Sackcloth was made of camel’s hair (Rev. 6:12; Zech. 13:6); sackcloth was donned at times of great calamity (Gen. 37:24; II Kng. 6:30) and was oftentimes accompanied by rending one’s clothes, fasting, throwing dust in the air or upon one’s head, and sitting in ashes (I Kng. 21:27; Job 2:8; Ezek. 27:30). These were outward tokens of great personal anguish and grief, affected to as a means of afflicting oneself and

entreating heaven's mercy. Elijah donned sackcloth in warning of divine wrath and to call Israel to repentance (II Kng. 1:8). Elijah's dress created such a lasting impression upon the collective psyche of the nation that it was adopted as a means of gaining recognition as a prophet (Zech. 13:4). After John's arrest by Herod the tetrarch, Jesus asked his disciples

"What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? Behold, they that wear soft clothing are in kings' houses. But what went ye out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say unto you, and more than a prophet. For this is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee...And if ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come." Matt. 11:7-14

The soft raiment of kings living in pleasure in palaces is here set in contrast to John, who was clothed with rough garments and dwelt in the desert. The kings of Israel were great violators of God's law and persecuted the prophets. This was especially true in the time of Elijah and the prophets of his day, whom Jezebel sought to slay, but were hidden in a cave by Obadiah (I Kng. 18:13), and Elijah fled into the wilderness (I Kng. 19:1-3). John's preaching in the wilderness of Judea, may have been to elude Herod the tetrarch, whose jurisdiction was confined to Galilee, Judea then being under the government of Pontus Pilate. Jesus' reference to John being the "Elijah to come" hales back to the prophet Malachi, who foretold of one who would come in the spirit of Elijah before the destruction of the Jewish nation:

"For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch...Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord: and he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse." Mal. 4:1, 5, 6

Scripture records numerous "days of the Lord." By consulting and comparing these examples, we find that the phrase signifies a time of divine wrath and judgment upon men and nations (Isa. 13:1-18, *Babylon*; 34:1-10, *Edom*; Ezek. 30, *Egypt, Ethiopia,*

Libya, Lydia, Chub; Zeph. 1, *Judea*). The "day of the Lord" foretold by Malachi and preached by John was not the end of the cosmos, but the end of Jewish state and polity. This may be seen by comparing Malachi with the prophet Joel.

"Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in my holy mountain: let all the inhabitants of the land tremble: for the day of the Lord cometh, for it is nigh at hand. A day of darkness and of gloominess, a day of clouds and of thick darkness, as the morning spread upon the mountains: a great people and a strong; there hath not been ever the like, neither shall be any more after it, even to the years of many generations...the earth shall quake before them; the heavens shall tremble: the sun and the moon shall be dark, and the stars shall withdraw their shining: and the Lord shall utter his voice before his army: for his camp is very great: for he is strong that executed his word: for the day of the Lord is great and very terrible; and who can abide it?" Joel 2:1, 2, 10, 11

Joel's exclamation, saying, the "day of the Lord is great and terrible and who can abide it" mirrors Malachi who asked "who may abide the day of his coming?" (Mal. 3:1, 2). Peter quoted Joel on Pentecost, saying Joel's prophecy was hastening toward fulfillment upon *that generation* (Acts 2:16-21, 40; cf. Matt. 23:36; 24:34). It seems apparent that John and Peter warned of the same impending judgment upon the Jewish nation, and that Malachi and Joel likewise therefore foretold the same.¹² God bore with much longsuffering the rebellious nation; many times God had suffered the nation to be subjugated by its enemies because of its rebellion and sin. Although he brought the nation back from captivity in Babylon, still they refused and rebelled. For rejecting Christ and persecuting his church, the Jews "filled up" the measure of their fathers (Matt. 23:32; Rev. 6:11), and God finally and irrevocably took biblical Israel and

¹² Joel's prophecy had a double meaning and fulfillment: there was day of judgment in the form of famine induced by drought and locusts "at hand" when Joel wrote, but which served as a type of the nation's final day of judgment by God at the hand of Rome. As further evidence of this double meaning, John employs the imagery of Joel in Revelation to describe the Jewish war with Rome and the successive invasions of Zealots, Idumeans, and Roman legions that brought Jerusalem to its end (Rev. 9).

Judah away in the cataclysmic judgments of A.D. 66-70.

And his meat was locusts and wild honey.

After the universal deluge, every manner of food and meat was permitted man without distinction, except they were prohibited to eat flesh with the blood, which was set aside as sacrosanct (Gen. 9:3, 4; Lev. 17:10, 11). In constituting the covenant people as a single nation and body politic, the law of Moses introduced dietary restrictions, which deemed certain foods “unclean” (Lev. 11). Locusts were among the clean foods Jews were permitted to eat (Lev. 11:22); honey was prohibited to be offered upon the altar (Lev. 2:11), but was otherwise clean. The purpose of this legislation was to isolate Israel from her pagan neighbors by preventing table-fellowship. Circumcision (Acts 10:28; 11:3), laws against mixed marriages (Deut. 7:1-6), and laws against the admixture of things different in kind (Deut. 22:5, 9-11) seem to have served this same purpose and lesson, that God’s people were to be separate from sin and the world around them. The dietary laws and restrictions of the Mosaic law were done away by the gospel, and the Noahide laws permitting all manner of foods, save blood, are again in force (Acts 10:9-16; I Tim. 4:3-5; cf. Gal. 2:11, 12).

We can only conclude that Matthew mentions John’s diet because it was unusual and severe. Does John’s dress, diet, fasting (Mk. 2:18) and habit of dwelling in the desert (Lk. 1:80) indicate he was an ascetic? Asceticism is the doctrine that one can obtain spiritual perfection and approval with God through severe self-denial and mortification, as if God found merit in men for abstaining from certain foods and living in self-imposed austerity. Jesus’ comments about fasting in Mark’s gospel assign it to the age that was then passing (Mk. 2:18-22); like a garment worn and old, it was not to be patched with the teaching of Christ, but laid aside as no longer useful. Paul warned against all forms of asceticism, stoicism, and law-keeping, as systems of self-justification, which are according to the “rudiments of the world” – the stuff of childhood ignorance that cannot justify or save (Col. 2:18-23). Christians should practice self-control in all things, but true asceticism today is to abstain from sin, to do acts of mercy and charity, and to sacrifice on behalf of the gospel.

5 – Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judea, and all the region round about Jordan,

Jesus’ first disciples (Andrew, Peter, Philip and Nathaniel, Jn. 1:40, 41, 43, 45; 21:2), and more than half of the twelve apostles, including James, John, and Matthew himself, are known to have been from Galilee. Why Matthew should thus omit mention of the Galileans who came to John’s baptism is unclear. John grew up in the deserts and hill country of Judea (Lk. 1:39, 80), and it was in Judea and the Jordan that John’s ministry was centered. It is therefore probable that, of those who responded to John’s preaching the great majority were from the areas named and are thus mentioned, although men also came from Galilee and other areas as well.

6 – And were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins.

The response to John’s preaching was very great (“all Judea, and all the region round about Jordan”), and underscores the eschatological nature of his message and the urgent expectation the people were under. John’s appearance had been preceded by over four hundred years of prophetic silence, which served to emphasize the momentous events even then unfolding as the heavens broke silence and urged men to repent. The prophets had provided indicia by which it might be known when Christ would appear. Daniel had announced Christ would appear four hundred eighty-three years (“seven weeks and three score and two weeks”) from the commandment to restore and rebuild the wall of Jerusalem (Dan. 9:24-27). Nehemiah received permission to rebuild Jerusalem’s walls in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes (Neh. 1:1). Archbishop Ussher dates Artaxerxes reign from 474 B.C. when he was made viceroy with his father, Xerxes. The twentieth year of Artaxerxes would therefore have been 454 B.C., and it is from here that Daniel’s seventy prophetic weeks take their start.¹³ Four hundred eighty-three years from 454 B.C. brings us to A.D. 29 (483 - 454 = 29), which was the fifteenth year of Tiberius. It was then that Jesus was baptized, shortly before his thirtieth birthday (Lk. 3:1, 21, 23). Given Daniel’s prophetic timeline, all men were in great expectation of

¹³ James Ussher, *Annals of the World* (2003 ed.), pp. 146, 152, §§ 1177, 1228.

Christ's appearance, and the response to John's preaching was therefore very profound.

7 – But when he saw many of the Pharisees

The term "Pharisee" denotes "separatist." The Pharisees and Sadducees grew up during the inter-testamental period, following the return of the captivity, between the close of the Old Testament canon and the opening of the New Testament. Josephus first mentions them during the time of John Hyrcanus, who left the Pharisees and became a Sadducee.¹⁴ The Pharisees set oral tradition in equal or greater authority than the written law.¹⁵ Their blind adherence to tradition brought stinging rebuke from Jesus, who charged them with negating the commandments of God by their traditions (Matt. 15:1-9). Regarding the Pharisees holding to tradition, Josephus said:

"The Pharisees have delivered to the people a great many observances by succession from their fathers, which are not written in the law of Moses; and for that reason it is that the Sadducees reject them, and say that we are to esteem those observance to be obligatory which are in the written word, but are not to observe what are derived from the tradition of our forefathers."¹⁶

The Pharisees also believed in the resurrection of the dead, which the Sadducees did not. However, based upon the hypothetical question about the resurrection posed to Jesus by the Sadducees, the Pharisees' conception of the resurrection apparently involved a return to earthly life, including marriage, instead of being raised to life in heaven (Matt. 22:23-33). Josephus says concerning the Pharisees:

"Now, for the Pharisees, they live meanly, and despise delicacies in diet; and they followed the conduct of reason; and what that prescribes to them as good for them, they do; and they think they ought earnestly to strive to observe reason's dictates for practice. They also pay a respect to such as are in years; nor are they so bold as to contradict them in anything which they

¹⁴ Josephus *Antiquities*, 13,10.6.

¹⁵ The oral law was reduced to writing between the second and fifth centuries in what is known as the Talmud.

¹⁶ *Ibid*; Whiston ed.

have introduced; and, when they determine that all things are done by fate, they do not take away the freedom from men of acting as they think fit; since their notion is, that it hath pleased God to make a temperament, whereby what he will is done, but so that the will of men can act virtuously or viciously. They also believe that souls have an immortal vigour in them, and that under the earth there will be rewards or punishments, according as they have lived virtuously or viciously in this life; and the latter are to be detained in an everlasting prison, but that the former shall have power to revive and live again; on account of which doctrines, they are able greatly to persuade the body of the people; and whatsoever they do about divine worship, prayers, and sacrifices, they perform them according to their direction.; insomuch that the cities have great attestations to them on account of their entire virtuous conduct, both in the actions of their lives and their discourses also."¹⁷

And Sadducees

This sect is thought to derive its name from Zadok, who was high priest in the time of Solomon (I Kng. 2:35). They represented the Jewish aristocracy and were a priestly caste, which came to the fore during the Maccabean war. The Sadducees are charged with the spread of Hellenism through Jewish culture; the high priests, Jason and Onias, who led the nation into apostasy in the time of Antiochus Epiphanes, were probably members of this party.¹⁸ The distinguishing characteristic of the Sadducees was their rejection of the oral tradition of the Pharisees, and the resurrection of the dead. Concerning the Sadducees, Josephus says:

"The doctrine of the Sadducees is this: That souls die with the bodies; nor do they regard the observation of anything besides what the law enjoins them; for they think it an instance of virtue to dispute with those teachers of philosophy whom they frequent; but his doctrine is receive by a few, yet by those still of the greatest dignity; but they are able to do almost nothing of themselves; for when they become magistrates, as they are unwillingly and by force sometimes obliged to be, they addict themselves to the notions of the

¹⁷ Josephus, *Antiquities*, 18.1.3; Whiston ed.

¹⁸ II Mac. 4; Josephus, *Antiquities*, 12.5.1.

Pharisees, because the multitude would not otherwise bear them."¹⁹

Come to his baptism,

John's gospel indicates that priests, Levites, and Pharisees came from Jerusalem to demand of John whether he was Christ, or Elijah whom Malachi foretold, or the prophet foretold by Moses (Jn. 1:19, 25). When asked by Jesus whether the baptism of John was from heaven or of men, the chief priests and elders said they could not tell (Matt. 21:23-27). Luke says that the lawyers and Pharisees "*rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized*" by John (Lk. 7:30). Hence, if some few consented to be baptized, the great majority of the rulers did not.

He said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee

Their appearance at his baptism surprises John, who expresses amazement that they should be sensible of their impending doom and thus make provision for safety. Few of the religious leaders believed; we must imagine that their motive in coming to John was to entangle him in his speech or seek grounds for a charge of heresy or sedition. Such was their malignant nature that it evoked John's biting condemnation as a brood of vipers. Jesus said regarding the chief priests and elders, "*Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and harlots go into the kingdom of heaven before you. For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not: but the publicans and harlots believed him: and ye, when ye had seen it, repented not afterward, that ye might believe him*" (Matt. 21:31, 32).

From the wrath to come?

Daniel's seventy prophetic weeks (four hundred-ninety years) foretold the destruction of the Jewish state: "*Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon the holy city*" (Dan. 9:24). "*For the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured out upon the desolate*" (Dan. 9:27). Four hundred eighty-three years from the commandment to rebuild Jerusalem's wall brought us

¹⁹ Josephus, *Antiquities*, 18.1.4; Whiston ed.

to Jesus' baptism (see comments are verse six, above). One week of years remains. The first half consisted of Jesus' earthly ministry. The week experienced a gap when Christ was "cut off," and did not resume again until he returned in vengeance upon the nation. The latter half of Daniel's final prophetic week was fulfilled in the Jews' war with Rome. The three and a half year war (February, A.D. 67 – August, A.D. 70), would witness the death of over 1.1 million Jews, many of whom starved to death in the siege.

The Jews were divided into three factions: John of Gischala, Simon, son of Gioras, and Eleazar, the son of Simon, who together did more to destroy the nation than the Romans.²⁰ After the Romans subdued Galilee, the Zealots and robber bands fled to Jerusalem. When they tried to take over the city, they were set upon by the high priests and elders of the Jews, who shut them up in the temple like a prison. However, the Zealots were able to send to the Idumeans to assist them. The Idumeans responded with an army twenty thousand strong. The Jews responded by shutting the gates of the city against them. That night, a great storm of preternatural proportions descended with great winds, continual lightning, thundering, and earthquakes.

*"For there broke out a prodigious storm in the night, with the utmost violence, and very strong winds, with the largest showers of rain, and continual lightning's, terrible thunderings, and amazing concussions and bellowings of the earth, that was in an earthquake. These things were a manifest indication that some destruction was coming upon men, when the system of the world was put into this disorder; and anyone would guess that these wonders foreshewed some grand calamities that were coming."*²¹

The violence of the storm allowed the Zealots to escape their prison unnoticed. The Zealots then let Idumeans into the city, who proceeded to make a general slaughter of the citizens, including the high priests, until twenty-thousand were slain, including the priests and those here mentioned by John:

But the rage of the Idumeans was not satiated by these slaughters; but they now betook themselves to the city, and plundered every house, and slew everyone they

²⁰ Josephus, *Wars*, 5.1.1-6.

²¹ Josephus, *Wars*, 4.4.5; Whiston ed.

*met; and for the multitude, they esteemed it needless to go on with killing them, but they sought for the high priests, and the generality went with the greatest zeal against them; and as soon as they caught them they slew them, and then standing upon their dead bodies, in way of jest upbraided Ananus with his kindness to the people, and Jesus with his speech made to them from the wall. Nay, they proceeded to that degree of impiety, as to cast away their bodies without burial, although used to take so much care of the burial of men, that they took down those that were condemned and crucified, and buried them before the going down of the sun. I should not mistake if I said that the death of Ananus was the beginning of the destruction of the city, and that from this very day may be dated the overthrow of her wall, and the ruin of her affairs, whereon they saw their high priest, and the procurer of their preservation slain in the midst of the city...cast out naked, and see to be the food of dogs and wild beasts.*²²

8 – Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance:

True faith and repentance will bear fruit answerable to itself; a changed heart will produce a changed life. So James: *“Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works...For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also”* (Jm. 2:18, 26).

9 – And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father:

As the lineal descendants of Abraham, the Jews were the covenant people. However, whatever advantages this carried, including possession of the land, were merely conditional: Sin and rebellion would bring wrath and ejection from the land. However, through various devices, the Jews tried to cling to the idea that they were somehow secure in the land and immune to national destruction. Prior to the Babylonian captivity, the Jews thought that God would not suffer the nation to be destroyed because they were the descendants of Abraham, saying, *“Abraham was one, and he inherited the land but we are many; the land is given us for an inheritance”* (Ezek. 33:24). However, God answered them, *“Ye eat with the blood, and lift up your eyes toward your idols, and shed blood: and shall ye possess the land?”* (v. 25). In the same way, John

warns the men of his day that physical descent from Abraham afforded no shelter to those who rejected his message and God’s proffered grace.

For I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.

Their hearts were hard and impenetrable as adamant. The very stones themselves were more ready to hear and to obey than the elders of the Jews. The true children of Abraham are not his physical, but spiritual descendants. Ishmael and the offspring of Abraham’s concubines were not sons or heirs (Gen. 25:5, 6). Isaac was deemed Abraham’s only begotten son and heir (Gen. 22:2; Heb. 11:17). Jesus told the Jews

“If ye were Abrahams’s children, ye would do the works of Abraham. But now ye seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth, which I have heard of God: this did not Abraham...Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do,” Jn. 8:39, 40, 44

Paul told the Romans *“He is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh. But he is a Jew which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God”* (Rom. 2:28, 29). Paul said, moreover,

“They are not all Israel, which are of Israel: neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called. That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed.” Rom. 9:6-8

The children of the promise are the children of faith and obedience. All who come to God in faith through baptism are received by him and made the heirs of the Abrahamic promise:

“For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ’s then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.” Gal. 3:26-29

10 – And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees:

²² *Ibid*, 4.4.2; 4.5.1, 2; Whiston ed.

Trees are used numerous times in scripture as symbols for nations (Ezek. 17:1-10, *Judah*; Ezek. 31:3-18, *Assyria, Egypt, and the nations of Palestine and the Mediterranean*). They are represented as flourishing, spreading their roots and branches, and growing to great height as the nations they represent prosper and extend their power. They are represented as being felled or cut down as they lose power, their armies are defeated, and they are subjugated by their enemies. The ax that fells them is a conquering nation; the tree-faller its king. Thus, Isaiah describes the king of Babylon as a faller, who conquered nations as a man might fell trees, at whose fall the nations rejoiced:

“Take up this proverb against the king of Babylon, and say, How hath the oppressor ceased! The golden city ceased! The Lord hath broken the staff of the wicked, and the scepter of the rulers. He who smote the people in wrath with a continual stroke, he that ruled the nations in anger, is persecuted, and none hindereth. The whole earth is at rest, and is quiet: they break forth into singing. Yea, the fir trees rejoice at thee, and the cedars of Lebanon, saying, Since thou are laid down, no feller is come up against us.” Isa. 14:4-8

Malachi warned Israel that it would be burned “root and branch” if it failed to amend its ways and repent of its sins (Mal. 4:1). John, who was the Elijah of Malachi’s prophecy, here warns the Jews that the day of judgment is fast upon them – already the ax of Rome was laid to the root of Israel’s national tree.

Therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit

Like a man who has an orchard and cannot permit useless or harmful trees to take up valuable ground, so the Lord requires men and nations to bear fruit, or else be removed. Jesus thus warned the Jews that except they repent, they would all likewise perish, and then gave the following parable as instruction:

“A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none. Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground? And he answering said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it: And if it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down.” Lk. 13:6-9

is hewn down, and cast into the fire.

In the last days of the Jewish nation, from John the Baptist until its destruction by Rome, the nation’s condition deteriorated: the land was full of robber bands, false pretenders, assassins, and seditions. Famine and all manner of disasters overtook the nation in continual succession:

- Caius Caesar ordered his image to be installed in the Jerusalem temple, almost bringing the nation to war;²³
- A great famine overtook the nation in the days of Claudius Caesar;²⁴
- As many as twenty thousand Jews were trampled to death in a tumult that arose when a Roman soldier exposed himself in mockery from the temple cloisters while the multitude was celebrating Passover;²⁵
- The whole nation was thrown into disorder and rose up when a soldier, finding a copy of the law, tore it to pieces and cast it a fire;²⁶
- When Cumanus, the procurator, was corrupted by money not to avenge the murder of a Galilean slain by the Samaritans on his way to Jerusalem, the Jews took up arms and marched upon the country of the Samaritans, burning villages and making great slaughters;²⁷
- A group of assassins called the *Sicarii* murdered the high priest, Jonathan, and began daily assassinating many men;
- Feigning divine inspiration, false pretenders deceived the multitude to follow them into the wilderness where they promised God would give them a signal of national liberty;
- An Egyptian false prophet got together thirty-thousand men and attempted to storm Jerusalem to overthrow the Romans, but was

²³ Josephus, *Antiquities*, 18.8; *Wars* 2.10

²⁴ Josephus, *Antiquities*, 20.2.5

²⁵ Josephus, *Antiquities*, 20.5.3; *Wars*, 2.12.1

²⁶ Josephus, *Antiquities*, 20.5.4; *Wars*, 2.12.2

²⁷ Josephus, *Antiquities*, 20.5.4; *Wars*, 2.12.3-8

defeated in an armed battle at the Mount of Olives.²⁸

Josephus summarizes the state of Judea in those times, saying:

“Now when these were quieted, it happened, as it does in a diseased body, that another part was subject to an inflammation; for a company of deceivers and robbers got together, and persuaded the Jews to revolt, and exhorted them to assert their liberty, inflicting death on those that continued in obedience to the Roman government, and saying, that such as willingly chose slavery ought to be forced from such their desired inclinations; for they parted themselves into different bodies, and lay in wait up and down the country, and plundered the houses of the great men, and slew the men themselves, and set the villages on fire; and this till all Judea was filled with the effects of their madness. And thus the flame was every day more and more blown up, till it came to a direct war.”²⁹

11 – I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I,

John came bringing a message of warning; Jesus would come and *execute* divine wrath. Here we see that no appreciable period is contemplated between Jesus’ earthly ministry as servant, and his coming in judgment as king. John was not warning of far distant events. The Old Testament prophets did not distinguish between Christ’s earthly ministry and his second advent, but treated them as a single, historical unit or event. No one reading the Old Testament prior to the writing of the New Testament could have known or anticipated there was more than one advent of Christ. It is only by reading the New Testament we learn that the appearance of the Messiah was briefly interrupted by his crucifixion and ascension to heaven to receive his kingdom and return again to put his enemies beneath his feet. So close would be his coming, that John omits entirely mention of his earthly mission, focusing instead upon the horrible events hastening upon the nation, heralding its doom. Jesus told his disciples they would not have time to preach in all the

²⁸ Josephus, *Antiquities*, 20.8.6; *Wars*, 2.13.5

²⁹ Josephus, *Wars*, 2,13.6; Whiston ed.

cities of Israel before he came in wrath (Matt. 10:23; 16:27, 28)

Whose shoes I am not worthy to bear:

It would have fallen to the lowliest slave in the master’s house to remove the shoes of his master and wash his feet (I Sam. 25:41; Jn. 13:4-10). Though John was the voice of a moral giant, urging men to forsake all sin and receive baptism; still he was a sinner whose conscience bore witness of his need for salvation (*cf.* v. 14).

He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire.

John gives a clear indication of Christ’s divinity, for no one can baptize with the Spirit of God, save God alone. The gift of the Holy Ghost had been prophesied by Joel and was among the signs preceding the “great and terrible day of the Lord.”

“And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit. And I will shew wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and terrible day of the LORD come. Joel 2:28-31; cf. Acts 2:14-21

Blood, fire, and pillars of smoke, refer to the murders, slaughters, and civil uprisings that overtook the nation in its final days, in which the nation was filled with constant tumults and bands of robbers filled the countryside, burning estates and villages, whose smoke blackened the sun by day and made the moon like blood by night, while they attempted to bring the nation to revolt from Rome. While these things were happening, and conditions in Judea deteriorated past all remedy, the gospel was proclaimed and miracles were wrought by the power of the Holy Spirit. Those who neglected the signs of divine grace would be consumed by the fire of divine wrath.

12 – Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor,

Before modern agriculture, wheat was harvested by hand with a sickle, a crescent shaped knife about two feet long. The stalks were then bound in sheaves and left standing in the field to be gathered later. Gleaners would go behind the harvesters to collect stray stalks of

wheat. Once the field was cut, the sheaves were then gathered and brought to the threshing floor, which was a large open area where the ground was level and hard. The wheat was then threshed to separate the grain from the stalk and papery husk. Threshing could be accomplished by beating the sheaves with sticks or staves, or by the hooves of oxen, which were made to tread upon the sheaves. Micah describes this last method, saying, God's people would thresh their enemies with "hooves of brass" (Mic. 4:11-13). Another method was for oxen to pull a heavy sledge equipped with sharp teeth or wheels over the sheaves to cut them small into chaff. The sheaves were piled in great heaps and an ox or donkey led round and round, until the stalks were cut small and the heap lay in a great circle flat upon the ground. Isaiah mentions this type of threshing instrument:

"Behold, I will make thee a new sharp threshing instrument having teeth: thou shalt thresh the mountains, and beat them small, and shalt make the hills as chaff. Thou shalt fan them, and the wind shall carry them away, and the whirlwind shall scatter them: and thou shalt rejoice in the Lord, and shalt glory in the Holy One of Israel." Isa. 41:15, 16

Different grains were threshed in different ways (Isa. 28:27, 28). Once the grain was threshed, it was then winnowed by tossing it in the air with a winnowing fork or shovel, or a fan, which was shallow basket that allowed the winnower to toss the grain in the air, so the wind could carry the chaff (the stubble and husks) away. The grain was then shifted, to clean it of dirt, sand, or small stones and pebbles. The "floor" in John's description is the world, which Christ inherited at his ascension (Ps. 2:6-8; 110:1). Men and nations are gathered before him like sheaves, and winnowed to separate the wheat from the chaff.

And gather his wheat into the garner;

The term "gather" here carries the idea of an agricultural harvest and occurs in several parables about the time of the end, in which the wicked and unbelieving were separated from the righteous; the wicked are gathered and burned; the righteous inherit glory (Matt. 13:36-43; 49). Obeying the gospel made men wheat; rejecting the gospel made men chaff. "Burning up the chaff" involved the death of the wicked, here principally Jews who rejected the gospel of Christ. Similarly, "gathering the wheat into the garner" involved the death of the righteous; viz., bringing the saints to glory by martyrdom.

The end of the pre-messianic era was a time of crisis for both the righteous and the wicked. Daniel foretold

a time of trouble unlike anything the world had seen before (Dan. 12:1). Jesus said that *"Except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elects' sake those days shall be shortened"* (Matt. 24:22). Just before his crucifixion, Jesus told the disciples *"They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service"* (Jn. 16:2). Scripture describes two periods of persecution that overtook the first saints. The first was the great persecution under Caiaphas, Pilate, and Saul (Paul), which arose over Stephen and occurred shortly after Jesus' ascension. This persecution lasted three and a half years (A.D. 34-38) and is described in Acts 7-9 and Rev. 12. This persecution collapsed when Pilate was commanded to answer charges in Rome before emperor Tiberius concerning his handling of a tumult that arose among the Samaritans. At the same time Pilate left office, Vitellius, the president of Syria, removed Caiaphas from the High Priesthood.³⁰ The final blow to the persecution came with the conversion of Saul (Acts 9:31).

The second persecution was greater still and was world-wide, and is the subject of the book of Revelation and various prophecies foretelling the rise of Antichrist. This was the persecution under the emperor Nero, but which was instigated and driven world-wide by the Jews. It also lasted three and a half years (A.D. 64-68). This persecution is famous even today for the cruel tortures invented to punish Christians.

"Nero substituted as culprits, and punished with the utmost refinements of cruelty, a class of men, loathed for their vices, whom the crowd styled Christians. Christus, the founder of the name, had undergone the death penalty in the reign of Tiberius, by sentence of the procurator Pontius Pilate, and the pernicious superstition was checked for a moment, only to break out once more, not merely in Judea, the home of the disease, but in the capital itself, where all things horrible or shameful in the world collect and find a vogue. First, then, the confessed members of the sect were arrested; next, on their disclosures, vast numbers were convicted, not so much on the count of arson as for hatred of the human race. And derision accompanied their end: they were covered with wild beasts' skins and torn to death by dogs; or they were fastened on crosses, and when daylight failed were burned to serve as lamps by night. Nero had offered his Gardens for the spectacle, and gave an exhibition in his Circus, mixing with the crowd in the habit of a charioteer, or mounted on his car. Hence, in spite of a

³⁰ Josephus, *Antiquities*, 18.4.1-3

guilt which had earned the most exemplary punishment, there arose a sentiment of pity, due to the impression that they were being sacrificed not for the welfare of the state but to the ferocity of a single man."³¹

Although heaven permitted its enemies to destroy the saints' bodies, Christ would not suffer the least grain of wheat to be lost: each soul would be tenderly gathered into the garner where they would inherit eternal bliss. John describes the harvest of the saints by martyrdom under Nero and the Jews, saying:

"Another angel, a third, followed them, saying with a great voice, If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives a mark on his forehead, or on his hand, he also will drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is prepared unmixed in the cup of his anger. He will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb. The smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever. They have no rest day and night, those who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name. Here is the patience of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus. And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from the labours; and their works to follow them. And I looked, and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud one sat like unto the Son of man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle. And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to him that sat on the cloud, Thrust in thy sickle, and reap: for the time is come for thee to reap; for the harvest of the earth is ripe." Rev. 14:13-15

Here we see that the saints were called to bear patiently their tribulations, even unto death, but they were comforted by the promise of blissful rest in the next life. Although they were slain under the beast (the Neronean persecution), they are portrayed as being harvested by Christ.

but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.

The Jews were the special object of Christ's wrath; they were enemies of the gospel (Rom. 11:28); vessels of wrath fitted for destruction, which God had borne with much longsuffering and patience (Rom. 9:22). Heaven's wrath stored up for the rebellious nation had

been the recurring theme of the prophets. Even Moses, the nation's founder, had foretold the Jews' destruction in the verses of a song:

"And he said, I will hide my face from them, I will see what their end shall be: for they are a very forward generation, children in whom is no faith. They have moved me to jealousy with that which is not God; they have provoked me to anger with their vanities: and I will move them to jealousy with those which are not a people; I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation. For a fire is kindled in mine anger, and shall burn unto the lowest hell, and shall consume the earth with her increase, and set on fire the foundations of the mountains. I will heap mischiefs upon them; I will spend mine arrows upon them. They shall be burnt with hunger, and devoured with burning heat, and with bitter destruction: I will also send the teeth of beasts upon them, with the poison of serpents of the dust. The sword without, and terror within, shall destroy both the young man and the virgin, the suckling also with the man of gray hairs." Deut. 32:20-25

Although the Jewish nation was the special object of heaven's wrath, judgment was not confined to the Jews: Rome also suffered terrifying plagues and strokes as heaven exacted punishment for the persecution of the saints. Following the conspiracy of Piso (A.D. 65), Nero's reign of terror witnessed the destruction of many leading Romans, including Seneca, Lucan, and many senators and members of the nobility. As they thirsted after the blood of the saints and prophets, so God gave them blood to drink to the full:

*"Meanwhile, however, the city was filled with funerals, and the Capital with burnt offerings. Here, for the killing of a son; there, for that of a brother, a kinsman, or a friend; men were addressing their thanks to Heaven, bedecking their mansions with bays, falling at the knees of the sovereign, and persecuting his hand with kisses."*³²

As the end grew near, the condition of the empire deteriorated; calamity followed calamity. A fire at Lyons, France destroyed most of the colony; the disaster was so pronounced, Seneca devoted a letter to the fire, declaiming the fickleness of fortune and the transitory nature of life.³³ A pestilence decimated Rome (A.D. 65) leaving thirty-thousand cut down behind it. The pestilence was followed by a hurricane in Campania:

³² Tacitus, *Annals*, XV, lxxi; Loeb ed.

³³ Epistle XLI

³¹ Tacitus, *Annals*, XV, xli; Loeb ed.

“Upon this year, disgraced by so many deeds of shame, Heaven also set its mark by tempest and by disease. Campania was wasted by a whirlwind, which far and wide wrecked the farms, the fruit trees, and the crops, and carried its fury to the neighbourhood of the capital, where all classes of men were being decimated by a deadly epidemic. No outward sign of a distempered air was visible. Yet the houses were filled with lifeless bodies, the streets with funerals. Neither sex nor age gave immunity from danger; slaves and the free-born populace alike were summarily cut down, amid the laments of their wives and children, who, themselves infected while tending or mourning the victims, were often thrown upon the same pyre.”³⁴

With the death of Nero in A.D. 68, the empire was thrown into a series of civil wars (A.D. 68-70). There were five emperors in the space of one year and twenty-two days,³⁵ dividing the Roman people and laying waste the empire. Plutarch describes the empire following Nero’s death, saying,

“Many terrible events, especially those that befell the Romans after Nero’s suicide...show in exemplary fashion that a state should fear above all armed forces subject to untrained and irrational impulses...The Roman empire was overtaken by disasters and upheavals like those caused by the Titans of mythology, at one and the same time being torn into many pieces and collapsing in on itself in many places.”³⁶

Josephus reports that over eighty thousand Romans died in the battle between the forces of Vitellius and Vespasian alone; Dio Cassius gives the number at one hundred thousand.³⁷ Tacitus described of the battle between the forces of Vitellius and Vespasian in the city of Rome:

“The populace stood by watching the combatants, as if they were at games in the circus; by their shouts and applause they encouraged first one party and then the other. If one side gave way and the soldiers hid in shops or sought refuge in some private house, the onlookers demanded that they be dragged out and killed; for so they gained a larger share of booty, since the troops were wholly absorbed in their bloody work

³⁴ Tacitus, *Annals*, XVI, xiii; Loeb ed

³⁵ Dio Cassius, LXVI, 17, 3-5

³⁶ Plutarch, *Life of Galba*.

³⁷ Josephus, *Wars of the Jews*, 4.11.3-4; cf. Dio Cassius, *Roman History*, LXIV, xv, 2; LXIV, xix, 3

of slaughter, while the spoils fell to the rabble. Horrible and hideous sights were to be seen everywhere in the city: here battles and wounds, there open baths and drinking shops; blood and piles of corpses, side by side with harlots and compeers of harlots. There were all the debauchery and passion that obtain in a dissolute peace, every crime that can be committed in the most savage conquest, so that men might well have believed that the city was at once mad with rage and drunk with pleasure. It is true that armed forces had fought before this in the city, twice when Lucius Sulla gained his victories and once when Cinna won. There was no less cruelty than now; but now men showed inhuman indifference and never relaxed their pleasures for a single moment. As if this were a new delight added to their holidays, they gave way to exultation and joy, wholly indifferent to either side, finding pleasure in public misfortune.”³⁸

13 – Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him.

Jesus came to be baptized shortly before his thirtieth birthday in the fifteenth year of Tiberius Caesar, which answers to the calendar year A.D. 29 (Lk. 3:1, 23). This was in accordance with the word of the Lord by the prophet Daniel, who was told that the Messiah would appear four hundred eighty-three years from the commandment to rebuild the wall of Jerusalem (Dan. 9:25). Dating from the twentieth year of Artaxerxes in 454 B.C., when Nehemiah received commandment to rebuild Jerusalem’s wall, brings us to A.D. 29, precisely as recorded by Luke (see comments at v. 6, above). To ascertain the day and month of Jesus’ baptism (so far as this may be known) we reckon backward from his crucifixion. Daniel said that Christ would cause the sacrifice and oblation to cease in the midst of the final week (Dan. 9:27). This refers to the legal termination of the temple service by the substitutionary death and atoning sacrifice of Christ three and a half years after his baptism. The three and a half year ministry of Christ is confirmed by the gospels, particularly John’s, who records the passage of feasts by which we may number the years.

³⁸ Tacitus, *Histories*, III, lxxxiii; Loeb. ed.



Threshing hills of wheat with a sledge

- John 2:13, 23 – John records a Passover shortly after the beginning of Jesus’ public ministry. Passover was typically in April, although, because the Jews used a lunar calendar, it could occur as early as March, depending upon the full moon.
- John 4:35 – Jesus commented that there were “yet four months, and then cometh harvest.” Harvest occurred about fifty days following Passover, and was marked by the feast of Pentecost. Since there were four months remaining until harvest, this would place Jesus’ comments in January or February. Thus, between the first Passover (John 2:13) and the time recorded here, almost one year has transpired.
- John 5:1 – John mentions another, unnamed feast. Many believe this was Passover (the second), but the evidence is unclear. In John 6:4, another Passover is recorded, which was preceded by Jesus’ feeding the five thousand (John 6:5-14). Luke records the feeding of the five thousand in Luke 9:10-17. Before this, Luke records an occasion where the disciples plucked ears of grain while passing through a field, placing this incident near harvest (Luke 6:1). However, this harvest was too early to be associated with the Passover preceding the feeding of the five thousand in Luke 9, but too late to be associated with the Passover in John 2:13. Thus, without identifying the feast in John 5:1, we are able to determine that another year has passed.
- John 6:4 – A second Passover is mentioned. However, based upon the harvest of Luke 6:1, this would actually be the third Passover since Jesus’ baptism. Jesus’ ministry has thus covered the space of about two and a half years (three Passovers, plus the partial year prior to his first Passover).
- John 7:2 – John records the Feast of Tabernacles, which occurs in the fall.
- John 10:22 – John mentions Jesus’ presence at the Feast of Dedication commemorating the re-dedication of the altar by Judas

Maccabaeus Casleu 25, 165 B.C., following its desecration by Antiochus Epiphanes (I Macc 4:59). John specifically mentions that it was winter.

- John 11:55 – The fourth and final Passover.

Thus, Jesus' ministry spanned four Passovers, plus the period from his baptism to the first Passover, for a total of three and a half years.³⁹ Passover occurs the fourteenth day of Nisan at the full moon (Ex. 12:2-6, 18). Jesus died on the Preparation (Friday) before the Sabbath, the day following Passover, or Nisan 15, A.D. 33 (Matt 27:62; Luke 23:54). Reckoning backward three and a half years, or forty-two lunar months (the feasts of the Jews followed a lunar calendar), from Nisan 15, A.D. 33, will bring us to Heshvan 15, A.D. 29.⁴⁰ Heshvan 15 in the Jewish calendar in A.D. 29 answered to November 8 in our Roman calendar. Hence, Jesus was baptized, and his thirtieth birthday occurred, in the final fifty-three days of the calendar year.

14 – But John forbid him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and cometh thou to me?

John's refusal to baptize Christ anticipates Peter's refusal that Jesus' wash his feet (Jn. 13:4-8). That John said he had need to be baptized by Christ, shows that something is *received* in baptism, and that it is not merely a symbolic act or ritual. Mark's gospel tells us that John's baptism was for (unto) remission of sins (Mk. 1:4). Peter assigned the same significance to baptism on Pentecost, urging his hearers to "*repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins*" (Acts 2:38). Similarly, Paul was told to submit to baptism that his sins might be washed away: "*And now why tarriest thou? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord*" (Acts 22:16). Peter said "*baptism doth also now save us*" (I Pet. 3:21). Jesus said "*He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved*" (Mk. 16:16). Faith and repentance are *expressed* in Christian baptism, which thus becomes the vehicle for receiving

³⁹ See also Eusebius who says Christ's ministry was confined within the space of four years, bounded by the high priestships of Ananus and Caiaphas. Eusebius, *Eccl. Hist.*, 1.10.2-3.

⁴⁰ A.D. 32 was a leap year of thirteen months.

divine grace through the atoning sacrifice of Christ. That men receive the remission of their sins in baptism was the uniform teaching of the fathers and church for the first fifteen hundred years of Christianity. All versions of the Nicene Creed, long the standard of Christian orthodoxy, state "I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins." It was not until sometime *after* the Reformation that the scriptural doctrine of salvation by *grace alone* was supplanted by the unscriptural doctrine of salvation by *faith alone* (belief minus response), and baptism robbed of its proper place in God's plan of redemption.

15- And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness. Then he suffered him.

As the child Jesus was subject to the ordinance of circumcision that he might be added to the covenant community of the Old Testament, so the man Jesus was subject to the ordinance of baptism, by which men are added to the covenant community of the New Testament, that he might be identified with the company of sinners and make atonement for their sins.

16 – And Jesus, when he was baptized, when up straightway out of the water:

Baptism by "effusion" (pouring) and by "aspersion" (sprinkling) was unknown to the primitive faith and practice of the church, but grew up later, apparently as an adjunct of infant baptism. As we see by the example of Christ himself, baptism involved *going down into* and *coming up out of* water (*cf.* Acts 8:38, 39). Elsewhere, Paul describes baptism as "burial" and "planting" (Rom. 6:4, 5).

and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him

John is given a vision of heavenly realities unseen by eye of man; a view into the spiritual realm where the divinity of Christ, veiled in flesh and concealed in human form, is revealed.

42 Lunar Months Comprising 3 1/2 years between Christ's

Baptism and Crucifixion

Nisan 15, A.D. 33 (Crucifixion)	Nisan 15, A.D. 32 (12 months)	Nisan 15, A.D. 31, (25 months)	Nisan 15, A.D. 30, (37 months)
Adar,	Adar II, (leap year)	Adar,	Adar,
Shevat,	Adar,	Shevat,	Shevat,
Tebet,	Shevat,	Tebet,	Tebet,
Cesleu,	Tebet,	Cesleu,	Cesleu,
Heshvan,	Cesleu,	Heshvan,	Heshvan 15 (Nov. 8), A.D. 29 (42months)
Tishri,	Heshvan,	Tishri,	
Elul,	Tishri,	Elul,	
Ab,	Elul,	Ab,	
Tammuz,	Ab,	Tammuz,	
Sivan,	Tammuz,	Sivan,	
Jyar	Sivan,	Jyar	
	Jyar		

and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove,

The vision given to John revealed Jesus' identity as the Christ of God appointed to bring man salvation. John's gospel records the testimony of the Baptist thus:

"I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him. And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost. And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God" (Jn. 1:32-34).

A dove was employed in the vision because of its special place in sacred history; as a clean animal it was used for sacrifice (Lk. 2:24); after the great deluge, it was the bearer of an olive leaf, signaling the end of

divine wrath and the return of heavenly favor and forbearance (Gen. 8:11). So here, the dove signals heaven's compassion upon man's fallen estate; the long ages of estrangement and alienation are ending; man is soon to be reconciled to God by Jesus Christ.

and lighting upon him.

The Spirit did not merely alight upon Christ, but abode within and upon him. Jesus spoke by the Spirit (Jn. 3:34), and by the Spirit wrought miracles (Lk. 11:20). John called Christ the "Word" (Jn. 1:1). Words are spirit (thought/intellect) clothed upon with language: Jesus was God's Spirit clothed upon with flesh. *"And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us" (Jn. 1:14).* The man was an earthen vessel; the life in him was the Spirit; both were from God.

17 – And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.

The vision given to John was accompanied by a voice owning Christ as God's own Son. The gospels record three instances during Jesus' ministry when such a declaration occurred: Here at Jesus' baptism (cf. Mk. 1:11; Lk. 3:22); again on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt. 17:5); and at Jesus' prediction of his death (Jn. 12:28). The question of Christ's sonship much vexed the church during the fourth century, and no fewer than ten versions of the Nicene Creed were put forward attempting to explain Christ's divinity and sonship, affirming that he was "begotten of the Father before all ages" or words to that effect.⁴¹ However, the "eternal generation" of the Son is oxymoronic; for that which is generated by definition thence is derived and thence takes its start, and therefore cannot be eternal within any normal meaning of the term. . Isaiah calls Jesus the "mighty God and everlasting Father" (Isa. 9:6). If the divinity in Christ was the "everlasting Father," how then can he be the "eternally generated" Son? The better view therefore seems to be that before his incarnation, the life within the man and the earthen vessel we call Jesus was nothing less than very the Spirit of God himself. The Father inhabited the earthen vessel by the Spirit in Christ. Hence Jesus, when Philip asked him to show them the Father, responded, saying,

"Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? He that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father? Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me: the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works." Jn. 14:8-10

Thus, the man and earthen vessel we call Christ, here claims to act and speak by the Father *within* him, and not by another or by himself. In another place, Jesus said "I and the Father are one" (Gk: *εγω και ο πατηρ εν εσμεν*) (Jn. 10:30), showing that the human form veiled the Spirit of the Father within, so that there was a virtual identity between them. The Jews understood perfectly the meaning of Jesus' claim, and took up stones to stone him, saying that he, being a man, made himself God (Jn. 10:33). Jesus did not shrink from his affirmation of his identity with God by the Spirit within

him, but said, "If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. But if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works: that ye may know, and believe that the Father is in me, and I in him" (Jn. 10:38). Isaiah calls Jesus the "mighty God and everlasting Father" (Isa. 9:6). Paul says before his incarnation Christ was "equal with God," and did not take on him the form of a servant because his divinity was ill-gotten by robbery, but possessed it in his own right and not derived from another (Phil. 2:5-8). And Paul, when he says that God created all things by the divinity that inhabited the man we call Christ, and that in him all things consist (Col. 1:16, 17; cf. Jn. 1:3), can speak only of the Spirit, for it is the Spirit we find present in Genesis at creation (Gen. 1:1) and the Psalmist says God "sendest forth thy spirit, they are created: and thou renewest the face of the earth" (Ps. 104:30). Finally, Paul states plainly, "the Lord is that Spirit" (II Cor. 3:18).

Hence, it may be seen that Jesus became the Son of God by incarnation in the virgin's womb, and not "before all ages" as affirmed by the creeds:

"And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God." Lk. 1:35

Jesus was also made the Son in his resurrection, as the first-begotten from the dead. Hence, Psalm two, speaking of Christ's resurrection, ascension, and coronation, says:

"Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion. I will declare the decree: the Lord hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee" Ps. 2:6, 7; cf. Acts 13:33; Rom. 1:4; Col. 1:18

Nowhere do we read of the divinity within the earthen vessel we call Jesus being referred to as God's Son any time before his conception in Mary's womb. However, if anyone be otherwise minded, let him take no offense, but let him interpret the person and divinity of Christ according to the light he receives from God.

⁴¹ Soctrates Scholasticus, *Ecclesiastical History*, XLI.

THE PAROUSIA IN THE FIRST EPISTLE OF JOHN

By

James Stuart Russell

Editor's Note: The writer here mistakenly applies the "end" to the Jewish age, rather than the world-epoch marked by the image in Nebuchadnezzar's dream (which naturally included the Jewish nation and economy), but he is quite correct in noting that the time of the end was upon that generation.

Commentators are much divided on the questions, When, where, by whom, and to whom, this epistle was written. There is no evidence on the subject except that which may be found in the epistle itself, and this gives ample scope for difference in opinion. Lange, who doubts the authenticity of the epistle, says that it 'has quite the air of having been composed before the destruction of Jerusalem;' and Lücke, who maintains its authenticity, is also of the opinion 'that it may have been written *shortly before* that event.' We think any candid mind will be satisfied, after a careful study of the internal evidence, first, that the epistle is a genuine production of St. John; and, secondly, that it was written on the very eve of the destruction of Jerusalem. It is impossible to overlook the fact, which everywhere meets us in the epistle, that the writer believes himself on the verge of a solemn crisis, for the arrival of which he urges his readers to be prepared. This is in harmony with all the apostolic epistles, and proves incontestably that their authors all alike shared in the belief of the near approach of the great consummation.

THE WORLD PASSING AWAY: THE LAST HOUR COME.

1 John ii. 17, 18.---'And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof. . . . Little children, it is the last time' [hour].

We have frequently in the course of this investigation had occasion to remark how the New Testament writers speak of 'the end' as fast approaching. We have also seen what that expression refers to. Not to the close of human history, nor the final dissolution of the material creation; but the close of the Jewish aeon or

dispensation, and the abolition and removal of the order of things instituted and ordained by divine wisdom under that economy. This great consummation is often spoken of in language which might seem to imply the total destruction of the visible creation. Notably this is the case in the Second Epistle of St. Peter; and the same might also be said of our Lord's prophetic language in Matt. xxiv. 24.

We find the same symbolic form of speech in the passage now before us: 'the world passeth away' [ὁ κόσμος παραγεται]. To the apprehension of the apostle it was already 'passing away;' the very expression used by St. Paul in 1 Cor. vii. 31, with reference to the same event [παραγει γαρ το σξημα του κοσμου τουτου] 'the fashion of this world is passing away.'

The impression of the Apostle John of the nearness of 'the end' seems, if possible, more vivid than of the other apostles. Perhaps when he wrote he stood still nearer to the crisis than they. In this view it is worthy of notice that there is a marked gradation in the language of the different epistles. The last *times* become the last *days*, and now the last *days* become the last *hour* [εσξατη ωρα εστι]. The period of expectation and delay was now over, and the decisive moment was at hand.

THE ANTICHRIST COME, A PROOF OF ITS BEING THE LAST HOUR.

1 John ii. 18.---'And as ye have heard that [the] antichrist cometh, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know it is the last hour' [ωρα].

In this passage for the first time 'the dreaded name' of *antichrist* rises before us. This fact of itself is sufficient to prove the comparatively late date of the epistle. That which appears in the epistles of St. Paul as a shadowy abstraction has now taken a concrete shape, and appears embodied as a person,---'the antichrist.'

It is certainly remarkable, considering the place which this name has filled in theological and ecclesiastical literature, how very small a space it occupies in the New Testament. Except in the epistles of St. John, the name antichrist never occurs in the apostolic writings. But though the *name* is absent, the *thing* is not unknown. St. John evidently speaks of 'the antichrist' as an idea familiar to his readers,---a power whose coming was anticipated, and whose presence was an indication that 'the last hour' had come. 'Ye have heard that the antichrist cometh; even now are there

many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last hour.’

We expect, then, to find traces of this expectation---predictions of the coming antichrist---in other parts of the New Testament. And we are not disappointed. It is natural to look, in the first place, to our Lord’s eschatological discourse on the Mount of Olives for some intimation of this coming danger and the time of its appearance. We find notices in that discourse of ‘false christs and false prophets’ (Matt. xxiv. 5, 11, 24), and we are ready to conclude that these must mean the same evil power designated by St. John the antichrist. The resemblance of the name favours this supposition; and the period of their appearance,---on the eve of the final catastrophe, seems to increase the probability almost to certainty.

There is, however, a formidable objection to this conclusion, viz. that the false christs and false prophets alluded to by our Lord seem to be mere Jewish impostors, trading on the credulity of their ignorant dupes, or fanatical enthusiasts, the spawn of that hot-bed of religious and political frenzy which Jerusalem became in here last days. We find the actual men vividly portrayed in the passages of Josephus, and we cannot recognise in them the features of the antichrist as drawn by St. John. They were the product of Judaism in its corruption, and not of Christianity. But the antichrist of St. John is manifestly of Christian origin. This is certain from the testimony of the apostle himself: ‘They went out from us, but they were not of us,’ etc. (ver. 19). This proves that the antichristian opponents of the Gospel must at some time have made a profession of Christianity, and afterwards have become apostates from the faith.

It cannot indeed be said to be impossible that the false christs and false prophets of the last days of Jerusalem could have been apostates from Christianity; but there is no evidence to show this either in the prophecy of our Lord or in the history of the time.

On the other hand, in the apostolic notices of the predicted apostasy this feature of its origin is distinctly marked. We have already seen how St. Paul, St. Peter, and St. John all agree in their description of ‘the falling away’ of the last days. (See *Conspectus* of passages relating to the Apostasy, p. 251). Nor can there be any reasonable doubt that the *apostates* of the two former apostles are identical with the *antichrist* of the last. They are alike in character, in origin, and in the time of their appearing. They are the bitter enemies of the Gospel; they are apostates from the faith; they belong to the last days. These are marks of identity too numerous and striking to be accidental; and we are

therefore justified in concluding that the antichrist of St. John is identical with the apostasy predicted by St. Paul and St. Peter.

ANTICHRIST NOT A PERSON, BUT A PRINCIPLE.

1 John ii. 18.---‘Even now are there many antichrists.’

In the opinion of some commentators the name ‘the antichrist’ is supposed to designate a particular individual, the incarnation and embodiment of enmity to the Lord Jesus Christ; and as no such person has hitherto appeared in history, they have concluded that his manifestation is still future, but that the personal antichrist may be expected immediately before the ‘end of the world.’ This seems to have been the opinion of Dr. Alford, who says:---

‘According to this view we still look for the man of sin, in the fulness of the prophetic sense, to appear, and that immediately before the coming of the Lord.’

There is here, however, a strange confounding of things which are entirely different,---‘the man of sin’ and ‘the apostasy;’ the former undoubtedly a *person*, as we have already seen; the latter a *principle*, or *heresy*, manifesting itself in a multitude of persons. It is impossible, with this declaration of St. John before us,---‘Even now are there *many* antichrists,’---to regard the antichrist as a single individual. It is true that in every individual who held the antichristian error, antichrist might be said to be personified; but this is a very different thing from saying that the error is incarnate and embodied in one particular persona as its head and representative. The expression ‘many antichrists’ proves that the name is not the exclusive designation of any individual.

But the most common and popular interpretation is that which makes the name antichrist refer to the Papacy. From the time of the Reformation this has been the favourite hypothesis of Protestant commentators; nor is it difficult to understand why it should have been so. There is a strong family likeness among all systems of superstition and corrupt religion; and no doubt much of the Papal system may be designated antichristian; but it is a very different thing to say that the antichrist of St. John is intended to describe the pope or the Papal system. Alford decidedly rejects this hypothesis:---

‘It cannot be disguised,’ he remarks, in treating of this very point, ‘that in several important particulars the prophetic requirements are very far from being fulfilled. I will only mention two,---one subjective, the other objective. In the characteristic of 2 Thess. ii. 4

("who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God," etc.) the pope does not, and never did, fulfil the prophecy. Allowing all the striking coincidences with the latter part of the verse which have been so abundantly adduced, it never can be shown that he fulfils the former part---nay, so far is he from it, that the abject adoration of and submission to λεγομενοι θεοι ανδ σεβασματα (all that is called God and that is worshipped) has ever been one of his most notable peculiarities. The second objection, of an external and historical character, is even more decisive. If the Papacy be antichrist, then has the manifestation been made, and endured now for nearly 1500 years, and yet that day of the Lord is not come which, by the terms of our prophecy, such manifestation is immediately to precede.

But the language of the apostle himself is decisive against such an application of the name antichrist. Indeed, it is difficult to understand how such an interpretation could have taken root in the face of his own express declarations. The antichrist of St. John is not a *person*, nor a *succession* of persons, but a *doctrine*, or *heresy*, clearly noted and described. More than this, it is declared to be *already existing and manifested* in the apostle's own days: 'Even NOW are there many antichrists;' 'this is that *spirit of antichrist*, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and *even now already is it in the world*' (1 John vi. 18; iv. 3). This ought to be decisive for all who bow to the authority of the Word of God. The hypothesis of an antichrist embodied in an individual still to come has not basis in Scripture; it is a fiction of the imagination, and not a doctrine of the Word of God.

MARKS OF THE ANTICHRIST.

1 John ii. 19.---'They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us; but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.'

1 John ii. 22.---'Who is a [the] liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is [the] antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son.'

1 John iv. 1.---'Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.'

1 John iv. 3.---'Every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God; and this is that spirit of antichrist whereof ye have heard that it should come: and even now already is it in the world.'

2 John, ver. 7.---'Many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is [the] deceiver and [the] antichrist.'

Here we may be said to have a full-length portrait of the antichrist, or, as we should rather say, the antichristian heresy or apostasy. From this description it distinctly appears,---

1. That the antichrist was not an individual, or a person, but a principle, or heresy, manifesting itself in many individuals.
2. That the antichrist or antichrists were apostates from the faith of Christ (ver. 19).
3. That their characteristic error consisted in the denial of the Messiahship, the divinity, and incarnation of the Son of God.
4. That the antichristian apostates described by St. John may possibly be the same as those denominated by our Lord 'false christs and false prophets' (Matt. xxiv. 5, 11, 24), but certainly answer to those alluded to by St. Paul, St. Peter, and St. Jude.
5. All the allusions to the antichristian apostasy connect its appearance with the 'Parousia,' and with 'the last days' or close of the aeon or Jewish dispensation. That is to say, it is regarded as near, and almost already present.

Doubtless, if we possessed fuller historical information concerning that period we should be better able to verify the predictions and allusions which we find in the New Testament; but we have quite enough of evidence to justify the conclusion that all came to pass according to the Scriptures. Whether the false prophets spoken of by Josephus as infesting the last agonies of the Jewish commonwealth are identical with the false prophets of our Lord's prediction and the antichrist of St. John, it is not easy to determine. But the testimony of the apostle himself is decisive on the question of the antichrist. Here he is at the same time both prophet and historian, for he records the fact that 'even now are there many antichrists;' 'many false prophets are gone out into the world.'

ANTICIPATION OF THE PAROUSIA.

1 John ii. 28.---'And now, little children, abide in him, that when he shall appear we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming.'

1 John iii. 2.---'We know that when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.'

1 John iv. 7.---'That we may have boldness in the day of judgment.'

In these exhortations and counsels St. John is in perfect accord with the other apostles, whose constant admonitions to the Christian churches of their time urged the habitual expectation of the Parousia, and therefore fidelity and constancy in the midst of danger and suffering. The language of St. John proves,---

1. That the apostolic Christians were exhorted to live in the constant expectation of the coming of the Lord.

2. That this event was regarded by them as the time of the revelation of Christ in His glory, and the beatification of his faithful disciples.

That the Parousia was also the period of 'the day of judgment.'

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Questions from our Readers

Question: Do you hold to the belief that the Bible uses the "land" to represent the Hebrews and the "sea" to represent the Gentiles at times? I bring this up because in our Bible Study a discussion of sea in Revelation 21:1 and I have your commentary "The Consummation of the Ages" and I stated that I thought it meant Gentiles and that there is no longer a divide between the Hebrew and the Gentiles.

Another person said that it represented death and I never heard that before. Are there some more scripture that identifies the sea as gentiles or mass of people and the Hebrews as the land. Hope this makes sense and any help would be appreciated. Or just you thoughts on the subject of the sea referring to death.

Answer: Thanks for writing. I have never heard the "sea" described as a symbol for "death", but given the sea's appearance in chapter twenty as the place where certain of the dead were found, it is not wholly unreasonable. (Rev. 20:13). However, the idea that there is "new earth" but no sea (death) has serious problems to overcome. If there is no death in the new earth then Universalism results. All men live forever, even the wicked, who are portrayed as part of the new earth (Rev. 21:27; 22:15).

The idea that the "sea" is a symbol for the Gentiles goes back to Daniel 7, where the prophet saw four Gentile, world powers rise from the "Great Sea" (Mediterranean). Isaiah also speaks about the "abundance of the sea" being converted (Isa. 60:5). This conversion of the sea clearly sets the Jews over against the Gentiles. The "land" has connections with the promise to Abraham. So the natural dichotomy is between Jew/Gentiles and earth/sea. The sea beast in Rev. 13 is pagan Rome, and land beast is the Jewish power in Palestine. Or, so it seems to me.

Question: I hope this gets to you...you once invited me to ask questions and make comments. I have been a preterist from the first time I heard that there was even

such a thing!!!! I have been reading and reading. Came through Russell, Chilton, Preston, Stevens, and a few more, both full and partial. I have homed in on you as the most logical student of the Word. (Love the art of syllogisms). Of course, I haven't completed my vision of all the info, too much. But I want it yesterday...if you would be so kind as to direct me to articles and/or newsletters,etc., it would save me some time anyway.

I have been putting this inquiry off until I got some of my ducks in a row...but, the little dickens keep slipping out of line. "The Question" Who are the "they" that sit on the thrones, in the first line of Rev 20:4? I see the "they" and also (in some trans.) the use of, "and I saw those beheaded..." This would lead one to think that there are others included in the ruling and reigning with Christ, other than the beheaded, would it not? If "they" are the ones given authority to judge...that still implies two groups to me.

Answer: I agree that there are two groups in Rev. 20:4. The first group seated upon thrones seems to refer simply to the righteous dead in general. Men who died in a saved condition from the garden forward, who were waiting the general resurrection. They are in Hades Paradise. I think the same group is potentially alluded to in chapter 5 as the 24 elders seated upon thrones. The other group are martyrs who died (were beheaded) during the persecution under Nero for not receiving the mark or worshipping his name, etc. They too are in Hades Paradise and live and reign with Christ pending the general resurrection, when they would be taken eternally to heaven. The souls under the altar in chapter six present a similar message, but seem to be those that died as martyrs in earlier ages and in the persecution that arose over Stephen.

Hope that helps. Write back if you want further clarification.

THE ALL-OF-AGES JUDGMENT IN THAT GENERATION

M. Lee

THE ISSUE:

When is the day of the all-of-time, end of the age judgment of all nations? (Mtt 25:31ff; Acts 17:31; 2 Pet 3:3ff) ie. *eschaton* □ called variously; “Day of Visitation.” 1 Pet 2:12, “Day of the Lord,” 2 Pet 3:10, 12, ubiquitous in OT: “Day of Vengeance, Great Day, Last day, Day of Evil, That Day,” (Van Gemeren. T.R.U.M.P.E.T. day. *Progress of Redemption* p450ff.) part of a wide cluster of ideas occurring at the end of the age. eg. *parousia coming, resurrection, millennium, antichrist, new heavens* etc.

BIBLE FACTS:

By ‘universal judgment’ is meant *judgment of all past persons living and dead in all ages** (esp. Abel son of Adam, Abraham, Sodom, Tyre, Nineveh, Sheba) simultaneously with *Jesus’ own generation.*’

Mtt 10:5-15 better for Sodom & Gomorrah* (2000BC) in day of Judgment than city which rejected disciples

11:21 better for Tyre* (500BC) than Chorazin (which saw His miracles) in day of judgment

11:23 More tolerable for Sodom*(2000BC) than Capernaum (which saw miracles) in day of judgment

12:41 Men of ancient Nineveh* (1000BC) shall judge this generation at the judgment

12:42 Queen of Sheba* (1000BC) shall stand with this generation at the judgment and condemn it

23:35 *All blood* from Abel* (BC?) *shed on earth* shall come upon this generation. O Jerusalem

Lk 11:50- In order that *all blood shed since foundation of world* (0BC) charged against this generation’

13:28 You shall see *Abraham, Isaac, Jacob** (1500+BC) in kingdom, but ‘you’ shall be cast out.

Rev 1:18; 2:7; 20:13-14 I have the *keys of Hades...*
18:24 In the harlot city was found *all the blood of prophets* & all slain on earth

19:2 Judged great harlot and He has *avenged the blood* of bondservants on her

20:13-14 and *Hades gave up the dead* & they were judged

RULE:

The totality of *bible facts* determine what is and what is not the case. A *bible* state of affairs (a state of things) is a combination of *bible things*. In *scripture and logic* nothing is accidental. If a thing can occur in a state of affairs, the thing must have been written into the thing itself from the beginning. (Wittgenstein *Tractatus* 1-2:0121. adapted)

APPLY RULE TO FACTS:

I. What IS the case from these observations?

1. All the blood shed since foundation of world charged against this generation. Lk 13:28
This generation lived in the C.1st.

Therefore all blood shed since foundation of world (all of time) charged in C.1st.

2. All the blood shed since foundation of world charged against that generation in Jerusalem. Mtt 23:35-36

That generation lived in the C.1st.

Therefore all blood shed since foundation of world (all of time) charged against Jerusalem C.1st.

3. All the blood shed since foundation of world charged against that generation in Jerusalem. Mtt 23:35-36

All the blood found in the harlot city. Rev 18:24-19:2
Therefore Jerusalem in that generation is the harlot city.

4. All ancient persons to stand with this generation at the judgment. Mtt 10,11,12:

That generation lived in the C.1st.

Therefore all ancient persons stood with this generation at the judgment in C.1st.

5. The great judgment includes all of the dead from foundation of world in the C.1st.

All of the dead from foundation of world were in Hades

Therefore all of the dead in Hades were judged in the C.1st.

II. What is NOT the case from these observations?

All the blood shed since foundation of world charged against *this generation* in Jerusalem at Judgment. Mtt 23:35-36

This generation lived in the first century

Therefore it is not the case that another generation can be judged in another century.

III. A state of affairs (a state of things) is a combination of things.

A C.1st state of affairs combines the Great Judgment with Jesus' own generation as the central organizing idea. (See radial)

CONCLUSION:

In scripture and logic nothing is accidental. If a thing can occur in a state of affairs, the thing must have been written into scripture itself from the beginning. The great Judgment Day in the first century is written into scripture itself.

Appendix I. Cause.

Major premise: All Old Covenant blood in the Jerusalem temple C.1st. 1 Kgs 8-9; Heb 10

Minor premise: The Jerusalem temple ended in the AD 70 judgment

Conclusion: Therefore all Old Covenant blood and persons judged in the temple in AD 70.



Questions from our Readers

Question: Thanks Kurt for these articles. I thoroughly enjoy them. On one of your answers I do have a disagreement. You used Dan. 9:26,27 to state that Jesus (Messiah) was cut off in the middle of the week & stating that this meant his ministry was to be 3 1/2 years. From reading this passage I see this as stating that He would be cut off after 62 weeks. In verse 27, concerning the "midst of the week", it seems clear, to me anyway, that this is talking about the prince in verse 26 who would come to destroy the city and the temple and bring the abomination of desolation. This prince certainly cannot be Jesus. Just my thoughts on it. Gene

Answer: Thanks for the kind and encouraging words. You certainly are not alone in understanding the pronoun "he" in v. 27 as referring back to the "prince of the people to come" in v. 26. Whiston, who translated Josephus was of that view, as are many others. I believe that the prince is Titus Caesar, who destroyed Jerusalem in AD 70 as Jesus prophesied in Matt. 23 & 24. However, I take the view, as my article shows, that in v. 27 the subject reverts to the Messiah again. This, too, is a well attested view. The Pulpit Commentary (Henrickson) thus states:

"On the ordinary Christian interpretation, this applies to the crucifixion of our Lord, which took place, according to the received calculation, during the fourth year after his baptism by John, and the consequent opening of his ministry."

However, I do acknowledge that the point in Daniel can be taken either way.

