



# The Sword & The Plow

Newsletter of the Bimillennial Preterist Association

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Vol. X, No. 7 – August 2008

An Exposition of

## II Thessalonians One & Two

*By*

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### **Chapter One**

#### **1 - Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:**

Thessalonica was in Europe, in the Roman province of Macedonia, south of Philippi, the site of the famous battle where Marc Antony and Octavian Caesar defeated Cassius and Brutus. Another important site in Macedonia is Pharisalus, where Julius Caesar defeated Pompey the Great. Gallio of Acts 18:12, the consul of Achaea who refused to try Paul (A.D. 51-52), was brother to Seneca, Nero's tutor. Lucan, the nephew of Gallio and Seneca, wrote his immortal, epic poem entitled *Pharisalia*, about the civil war of Caesar against the Roman senate and Pompey. Lucan and Seneca were compelled to commit suicide for their part in the conspiracy to assassinate Nero and place Piso on the throne. South of Macedonia laid the Roman province of Achaea, containing the cities of Athens and Corinth, the latter on the Peloponnesian

peninsula. Thus, as we enter into a discussion about Thessalonica, we come into contact with some of history's most important people, places, and events.

In Acts, we learn that Paul's missionary efforts first carried him into Europe sometime around A.D. 50-51. Following the Jerusalem Council (A.D. 49-50), Paul went briefly to Antioch where he took Silas and departed, and went about "Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches" (Acts. 15:41). This missionary journey carried Paul into Lyconia, and the cities of Iconium, Derbe, and Lystra. Here, Paul met Timothy (Acts 16:1-4), who became the apostle's companion in his missionary travels, and who carried the instant epistle to the Thessalonians.

Acts 16:6, 7 indicates that, from Derbe and Lystra, Paul and his companions attempted to preach the gospel in Asia but "were forbidden by the Holy Ghost." They then attempted to enter Mysia, and Bithynia, but "the Spirit suffered them not." Instead, Paul had a vision at night in which he saw a man of Macedonia entreating them to "come over and help us" (Acts 16:9). From this, Paul understood that it was God's will

that the gospel now be carried into Europe. They crossed over first into Philippi, and thence into Thessalonica (Acts 17:1).

The Jerusalem Council is important to our discussion because it dealt with Jewish resistance to the gospel by false brethren who attempted to bind circumcision and Judaistic practices upon the Gentiles. Jewish opposition to the gospel was not confined to Palestine, but was carried into Asia and Europe. This seems to be the meaning behind the imagery of John in Revelation where he depicts a harlot riding (driving) the beast in a surfeit of blood and gore. The woman represents Jerusalem and Jewry, the beast the persecuting power of the empire under Nero; the beast has seven heads and ten horns, and signify the political and geographical powers animating the beast; viz., that there are seven cities or provinces where the persecution has a head. The Jews' hatred of the gospel created disturbances throughout the Roman Empire, causing Claudius to banish them from Rome and Italy about A.D. 50-51 (Acts 18:2). Their incitement of persecution against the church was central to the Lord's second coming to put his enemies beneath his feet, and figures prominently later in the epistle.

**2-4 - Grace unto you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth; So that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure:**

From the very start, the Jews in Thessalonica incited hatred and persecution against the brethren. Luke records that upon entering Thessalonica, Paul preached in the synagogue that Jesus was Christ (Acts 17:1-3). As a result "some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few" (v. 4). But the unbelieving Jews raised such a tumult that Paul was forced to depart from Thessalonica, traveling to Berea: "*But the Jews which believed not, moved with envy, took unto them certain lewd fellows of a baser sort, and gathered a company, and set all the city on an uproar*" (v. 5). Not content, when the Jews learned that Paul was preaching in Berea, they came thither and stirred up the people against

him. Paul was thus compelled to depart thence unto Athens, where he preached his famous sermon on Mars hill, leaving Silas and Timothy in Berea (Acts 17:10-34). Paul's first epistle to the Thessalonians was written from Athens (I Thess. 3:1). Judging from Paul's comments, after his departure the Jews of Thessalonica turned their wrath upon the church there, for which Paul praises their patience and endurance. In his first epistle, Paul thus alludes to the impending wrath upon the Jews and their allies among the Gentiles at Christ's coming: "*For ye, brethren, became followers of the churches of God which in Juadea are in Christ Jesus: for ye also have suffered like things of your own countrymen, even as they have of the Jews: who both killed the Lord Jesus, and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they please not God, and are contrary to all men: forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved, to fill up their sins away: for the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost*" (I Thess. 2:14-16)

**5 - Which is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer:**

The gospel sorts the hearts of men, like seeds falling upon various soils. Those who have a love of the truth and own to their sinfulness and need of a Savior will obey the gospel charge to believe and be baptized. Those with moral root and depth will persevere persecution, if not for their love of the Savior, then for fear of his judgment and wrath. The Thessalonians have kept the faith in the face of affliction and contradiction and so demonstrate the propriety of God's judgment granting the reward of the eternal inheritance to those who abide until the end.

**6 - Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you;**

Here we see the world-wide nature of Christ's coming and kingdom at the eschaton; it was not merely universal in effect; it was universal *in fact*. After departing Thessalonica and Berea, Paul came to Athens where he warned of the Christ's judgment that would overtake the world. "*And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: because he hath appointed a day in the*

which he is about to judge the world [kosmos] in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead” (Acts 17:30, 31). The whole civilized world, or the larger Roman Empire would experience a time of divine judgment for its rejection of the gospel and persecution of Christ’s church. “But unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath. Tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile...In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel” (Rom. 2:8, 9, 16).

**7 - And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels,**

The Thessalonians would find rest from persecution at the revelation of Jesus Christ. The very use of the term “revelation” (*Gk. apokalypsei*) implies that the coming of Christ would not be bodily or visible as is commonly imagined. Rather, Christ’s revelation would be as depicted in the Apocalypse of St. John, and would consist in Christ’s providential judgments upon men and nations, including the destruction of Jerusalem and Roman civil wars. Paul thus wrote to Timothy, charging him to “keep this commandment without spot, unrebukeable, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ; which in his time he shall shew who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords; who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom be honour and power everlasting. Amen” (I Tim. 6:14, 15). What must be shown cannot be seen. Christ would show that he is the only Potentate, King of kings and Lord of lords by his providential acts at his coming. Men would witness the dread judgments, and would know that Christ sat enthroned above the circle of the earth.

**8 - In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ:**

The flames are not actual or literal, but figurative. They are the same flames of fire mentioned by Isaiah, Malachi, and Joel, and repeated by John the Baptist and Peter on

Pentecost and in his second epistle (Matt. 3:7-12; Acts 2:17-21; II Pet. 3:10-13).

**Isaiah 66:6, 15, 16**

A voice of noise from the city, a voice from the temple, a voice of the Lord that rendereth recompence to his enemies...For, behold, the Lord will come with fire, and with his chariots like a whirlwind, to render his anger with fury, and his rebuke with flame of fire. For by fire and by his sword will the Lord plead with all flesh: and the slain of the Lord shall be many.

**Joel 2:1, 3, 30, 31**

Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, and sound the 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 fire devoureth before them; and behind them a flame burneth: the land is as the garden of Eden before them, and behind them a desolate wilderness; yea, and nothing shall escape them...And I will shew wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and terrible day of the Lord.

**Malachi 4:1, 5, 6**

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, let I come and smite the earth with a curse.

The reference in each case is to the Roman legions that overflowed Palestine, denuding it of men and cities. However, Christ’s wrath was not confined to Palestine; the fall of Jerusalem was but part of a universal time of wrath that would overtake Europe, Asia, Rome and Italy. Haggai thus states “For thus saith the LORD of hosts; Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land; And I will **shake all nations**, and the desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory, saith the LORD of hosts... I will shake the heavens and the earth; And I will overthrow the **throne of kingdoms**, and I will destroy the strength of the **kingdoms of the heathen**” (Hagg. 2:6, 7; 21, 22; cf. Heb. 12:26, 27). The Psalmist is to the same effect: “The Lord at thy right hand shall strike through kings in the day of his wrath. He shall **judge among the heathen**, he shall fill the places with dead bodies; he shall wound the heads over **many countries**” (Ps. 110:5, 6).

**9, 10 - Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day.**

The eschaton would take men as it found them. John describes it at the close of Revelation as hastening upon his generation so fast that men would scarcely have time to amend their ways or change: "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still" (Rev. 22:11). Christ's wrath upon the nations would provoke wonder and admiration in the saints. The world might marvel at the things coming upon it, but the saints would know and realize that the famines, earthquakes, pestilences, and political upheavals that rocked the Roman Empire represented the wrath of the Lamb as he trod his enemies beneath his feet.

**11, 12 - Wherefore also we pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfill all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power: that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.**

If we would be worthy, we must be faithful in word and works. The Thessalonians would suffer severely during the eschaton. The intensity of Jewish opposition and persecution causes them to suppose that the eschatological battle of the last day has already come (II Thess. 2:2). In their perseverance, possessed they their souls. The shout at the defeat of the dragon, beast, and harlot that the wedding of the bride had come and she was worthy to be clothed in white (Rev. 19:10), contemplates the consummation of the New Testament and award of righteousness at Christ's coming by remaining faithful during the persecution under Nero and the Jews. It is to this that the second chapter of the epistle looks.

## Chapter Two

**1 - Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him,**

The eschatological gathering is a recurring theme of the gospels. We first hear mention of it by John the Baptist: "*Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire*" (Matt. 3:12). It is also the subject of the Lord's parables of the *Wheat and Tares* and the *Fishes and Net*. Both of these parables are built upon the theme of a harvest, in which the evil are cast into a furnace of fire, and the good gathered into the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 13:24-30; 37-43; 47-50). The eschatological gathering is also mentioned in the Lord's Olivet discourse:

*"Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: and then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other."* Matt. 24:29-32

The question in all of these cases is into what are the good and evil gathered, and how was this accomplished? The fate of the wicked seems plainly to contemplate their destruction in Gehenna, for this is uniformly described as a lake of fire, answering to the fiery furnace into which the wicked were to be cast. If the wicked were thus gathered into Gehenna, it would seem to follow that the righteous were gathered into heaven. If so, the eschatological gathering is but a variation upon the theme of sorting the sheep and goats in Matt. 25:31-46. The gathering of the wicked into the furnace of fire was fulfilled in the cataclysmic events of the eschaton, including the famines and pestilences that swept the Roman world, and witnessed the fall of Jerusalem and Roman civil wars. But how were the righteous gathered? Some affirm a literal rapture occurred, but the better view probably is that the eschatological gathering occurred by *martyrdom* under Nero and, ultimately, as suggested by Matt. 24:32, *supra*, the resurrection

*In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in  
Modest Apparel*



*“Come out and Be Ye Separate, Saith the Lord”  
Dressing Overtly Christian is O.K.*

of souls from Hades. As we shall see as we proceed, this is clearly the context of the present passage.

**2 - That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand.**

Although Christ's coming would bring relief for the saints, the persecution would get worse before it got better. The day of Christ's coming would bring fiery trials to test the church and purify the saints. "Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is" (1 Cor. 3:13). Meanwhile, however, there was a time of political stability and relative repose; the four winds of heaven were restrained until the servants of God were sealed by obedience to the gospel (Rev. 7:1-3). Claudius was upon the throne and extended the protection of law to the church; magistrates like Gallio refused to entertain Jewish complaints against the church or involve themselves in religious disputes (Acts 18:12-17). Unlike today where jurisdiction is based upon the place or territory where an act or crime is committed, in the ancient world jurisdiction was based upon *citizenship*. In his prior life, Paul could thus travel to Damascus and arrest Jewish citizens and bring them back to Jerusalem for punishment. Likewise, Jews of Asia or Europe might punish men of their own nation residing there. However, the Gentiles were immune to Jewish law courts, and the *ius gladii* (Lat. "power of the sword") was beyond their reach, safely retained by the Roman procurator. Pilate had allowed the Jews to put Christians to death, but in this he was alone. In the rest of the empire, Christianity was protected by law. However, with the rise of Nero this would all change and the emperor's open persecution of the faith would provide the example and authority for magistrates throughout the empire to punish and slay the saints. It is in apprehension of this persecution – the time of great tribulation (Dan. 12:1; Matt. 24:22; Rev. 3:10; 7:14) – that the Thessalonians were shaken in mind, supposing because the intensity of the persecution they were presently under, that the day had already arrived.

**3 - Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first,**

The great tribulation would be preceded by the great apostasy. The Reformers supposed this referred to the errors of the Catholic church, but the historical context of the epistle places the falling away (*Gk. apostasia*) in the apostle's time. D. A. N. Hays in his book, *Paul and his Epistles* says:

*"The apostasy (verse 3) is the definite and final rejection of the true Messiah by the Jews, which might come, as the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews suggest, after a period of forty years, in which the claims of Christianity were to be presented to them even as their fathers saw the wonders of Jehovah forty years in the wilderness. The Man of Sin (verses 3, 4) is the false Messiah who will incarnate within himself all the Jewish opposition to the gospel. He will be a lawless one, working signs and deceiving, and his destruction will result in the final establishment of the Christian Church, verses 8-10. The Restrainer (verses 6, 7) is the Roman emperor as representing the restraining power of the Roman empire, holding the Jews in subjection and preventing them from illegal and destructive attacks upon the Christians."*<sup>1</sup>

According to this writer, then, Jewish rejection of the Messiah is the great apostasy. However, we would amend this definition to include those who, under persecution, apostatized from the church, returning to paganism and Judaism. Thus, the epistle to the Hebrews warns "take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God" (Heb. 3:12; cf. Heb. 12:25). John, who wrote to the Gentile churches of Asia, likewise warns against apostasy during the coming persecution under Nero and the Jews: "If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, the same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb...Here is the patience of the saints; here are they that keep the commandment of God, and faith of Jesus." Rev. 14:9-12

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<sup>1</sup> D. A. N. Hays, *Paul and his Epistles* (Methodist Book Concern, New York, NY, 1915), pp 172, 173

**and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition;**

There is a long history of Christian tradition identifying the man of sin and son of perdition with Nero:

*“And after many plagues completed in the world, in the end he says that a **beast ascended from the abyss...that is, of the Romans.** Moreover that he was in the kingdom of **the Romans**, and that he was among the **Caesars**. The Apostle Paul also bears witness, for he says to the Thessalonians: Let him who now restraineth restrain, until he be taken out of the way; and then shall appear the **Wicked One**, even he whose coming is after the working of Satan, with signs an lying wonders.’ And that they might know that he should come **who then was the prince**, he adds: ‘He already endeavours after the secret of mischief’ – that is, the mischief which he is about to do he strives to do secretly; but he is not raised up by his own power, nor by that of his father, but by command of God.”<sup>2</sup>*

Victorinus here connects the “beast” from the abyss with the Roman Empire and the “Wicked One” with he who was prince when Paul wrote (Nero), and would follow his father (Claudius) to the throne.

Augustine (A.D. 354-430) is even more explicit: *“Some think that these words refer to the Roman empire, and that the apostle Paul did not wish to write more explicitly, lest he should incur a charge of calumny against the Roman empire, in wishing ill to it when men hoped that it was to be everlasting. So in the words: ‘For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work’ he referred to Nero, whose deeds already seemed to be as those of Antichrist.”<sup>3</sup>*

St. Chrysostom (A.D. 347 to 407) states: *“For the **mystery of lawlessness doth already work.**’ He speaks here of **Nero**... But he did not also wish to point him out plainly: and this not from*

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<sup>2</sup> Victorinus, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, ad 11:7; Ante-Nicene Fathers, p. 354; emphasis added

<sup>3</sup> Augustine, *City of God*, XX, xix; cf., Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, V, xxv-xxviii; Lactanius, *Divine Inst.* VII, xxv; emphasis added.

*cowardice, but instructing us not to bring upon ourselves unnecessary enmities, when there is nothing to call for it.”<sup>4</sup>*

**4 - Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped;**

Nero was the spiritual “reincarnation” of Antiochus Epiphanes who attempted to suppress the worship of every god but his own, and establish one religion in the realm, even to the persecution, torture, and death of those who resisted or refused. Nero would attempt to expunge the true faith from the earth. But his impiety and irreligion was not confined to persecuting the faith; for he despised all religion, supposing himself the only true god.

*“Nero was now a god. After the death of Agrippina a consul-elect had proposed a temple ‘to the deified Nero.’ When, in 63, Poppaea bore him a daughter who died soon afterward, the child was voted a divinity. When Tiridates came to receive the crown of Armenia, he knelt and worshipped the Emperor as Mithras. When Nero built his Golden House, he prefaced it with a colossus 120 feet high, bearing the likeness of his head haloed with solar rays that identified him as Phoebus Apollo.”<sup>5</sup>*

**so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God.**

The Jerusalem temple was merely adapted from the pattern showed to Moses on the mount; it was a figure and image of heavenly things (Ex. 25:40; Heb. 8:5). The true temple of God is in heaven, where Jesus intervenes for the saints as our High Priest, interposing his blood (Heb. 8:2). Hence, Paul does not refer to the church or Jerusalem temple when he mentions the man of sin taking his seat in the temple of God, but to a man lifted up, aspiring to the very throne of God in his heart. Similar language occurs regarding the prince of Tyrus: *“Son of man, say unto the prince of Tyrus, Thus saith the Lord God; Because thin heart is lifted up, and thou hast*

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<sup>4</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on II Thess.*, *Nicene-Post Nicene Fathers*, Vol. XXIII; emphasis added.

<sup>5</sup> Will Durant, *Caesar and Christ* (New York, Simon & Schuster, 1944) p. 280.

said, I am a God, I sit in the seat of God, in the midst of the seas; yet thou art a man, and not God, though thou set thine heart as the heart of God" (Eze. 28:2). Another example (one of many) that should be consulted is Isaiah's description of the king of Babylon: "For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north. I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High" (Isa. 14:13, 14). By consulting these examples it is easily seen that the man of sin contemplated by St. Paul is a world-ruler who is so puffed up with power and pride as to suppose himself a god.

**6 - Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things?**

It is telling that in the short time Paul was with the Thessalonians (probably only a few days or weeks at the most) he found it expedient to apprise them of eschatological events. Surely, it challenges our credulity to believe that Paul would explain to these new Christians events thousands of years off, having no connection with them whatever. Is it not, rather, more reasonable to conclude that Paul informed the Thessalonians of these events because they were of a *contemporary-historical* nature, events that would verily overtake them, and that it is this fact that has caused them to prematurely anticipate the time of trouble?

**And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time.**

The man of sin and son of perdition was then presently held back from power, but would be revealed in his time; then the great eschatological battle of the last day would overtake the saints and they would be gathered by martyrdom into the kingdom of heaven. God's providential oversight of men, governments, and history would guide events to happen at their appointed season, to accomplish his own purpose. The comments of Farrar, Russell, and Gentry follow:

F.W. Farrar: "*St. Paul, when he wrote from Corinth to the Thessalonians, had indeed seen in the fabric of Roman polity, and in Claudius, its reigning representative, the "check" and the*

*"checker" which must be removed before the coming of the Lord.*"<sup>6</sup>

J. Stuart Russell: "*At that time Nero was not yet 'manifested;' his true character was not discovered; he had not yet succeeded to the Empire. Claudius, his step-father, lived, and stood in the way of the son of Agrippina. But that hindrance was soon removed. In less than a year, probably, after this epistle was received by the Thessalonians, Claudius was 'taken out of the way,' a victim to the deadly practice of the infamous Agrippina; her son also, according to Suetonius, being accessory to the deed.*"<sup>7</sup>

Kevin Gentry: "*Apparently something is presently (ca. A.D. 52) 'restraining' the Man of Lawlessness: 'you know what is restraining [katechon; present participle], that he may be revealed in his own time' (2:6). This strongly suggests the preterist understanding of the whole passage. The Thessalonians themselves know what is presently restraining the Man of Lawlessness; in fact the Man of Lawlessness is alive and waiting to be 'revealed.' This implies that for the time-being Christians can expect some protection from the Roman government. The Roman laws regarding religio licita are currently in Christianity's favor, while considered a sect of Judaism and before the malevolent Nero ascends the throne.*"<sup>8</sup>

**7 - For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way.**

The New King James version made the unfortunate choice of capitalizing pronouns the editors believed referenced God. Accordingly, they capitalized "he who now letteth," providing their interpretation that God or the Holy Ghost is alluded to by these verses. However, the better

<sup>6</sup> F.W. Farrar, *The Early Days of Christianity* (1891, Columbian Publishing Co, NY), p. 13; cf. *The Life and Work of St. Paul*, Excursus XIX, (1879, Cassell and Co. ed), p. 726.

<sup>7</sup> J. Stuart Russell, *The Parousia* (1887, London, T. Fisher Unwin; republished 1983, 1999 by Baker Books, Grand Rapids, MI), pp. 182, 183.

<sup>8</sup> Kenneth L. Gentry Jr, *Perilous Times* (1999, CMP), p. 104-106 (*emphasis in original*).

view is that “he who lets” is Claudius, the reigning emperor. It is our opinion that this passage answers to the binding of the dragon (imperial Rome) in Rev. 20:1-3, whose release would mark the eschatological battle of the last day, the battle of Gog and Magog, or Armeggedon. The mystery of iniquity is the inexplicable hatred of Christ by the Jews and Gentiles that would break out in open persecution once Claudius was taken out of the way and Nero was come to power and arrived at the full degree of wonton abandonment of all moral restraint.

**8 - And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming:**

Nero would come to his end by the coming of Christ. Having murdered his brother, wife, mother, aunt, and waged a reign of terror against all his real and imagined political enemies, having disgraced Rome and the throne by singing and acting upon the common stage, having polluted his own body and chastity with unspeakable sins and vice, having married himself to one man and having taken another man as his catamite and pretended wife, having done all these things and more, a conspiracy arose in Gaul to wrest the government from Nero and settle it upon a more worthy object. Julius Vindex, governor of Gaul, raised an army to depose Nero, offering the purple to Galba, governor of Spain. The senate shortly declared for Galba and decreed Nero a public enemy, fixing his punishment as that his neck be fastened by a fork to a post, where he was to be stripped naked and beaten to death with rods. To escape punishment, Nero committed suicide.

**9 - Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders,**

Nero’s arrival at the apex of power would be the culmination all manner of political posturing and intrigue. Claudius’ first wife Messellina was put to death for adultery and marrying another man while still the emperor’s wife. The uxorious Claudius next fell victim to Nero’s mother, Agrippina. The great granddaughter of Augustus and sister of Caligula, Agrippina had been banished by her brother for plotting his murder, but was recalled by Claudius upon Caligula’s assassination. Agrippina became the mistress of

Pallas, one of Claudius’ freemen and advisers, and obtained his assistance in persuading Claudius to marry his niece, uniting the lines of the imperial family and the Claudian house. Agrippina succeeded in seducing her uncle by a niece’s over familiarity, kisses, embraces, and feminine wiles. But as such marriages were deemed incestuous by Roman law, the senate passed a law making it legal to wed one’s niece. Claudius had two children by Messallina, Britannicus and Octavia. Nero was the son of Agrippina’s first husband, but she was able to secure his adoption by Claudius to put him in line for the throne. To further strengthen his hope of accession, Agrippina arranged the betrothal of Nero to his step-sister, Octavia. Encyclopedia Britannica 1911 edition describes Agrippina’s machinations:

“Agrippina's next step was to provide a suitable training for her son. The scholar L. Annaeus Seneca was recalled from exile and appointed his tutor. On the 15th of December 51 Nero completed his fourteenth year, and Agrippina, in view of Claudius's failing health, determined to delay no longer his adoption of the *toga virilis*. The occasion was celebrated in a manner which seemed to place Nero's prospects of succession beyond doubt. He was introduced to the senate by Claudius himself. The proconsular *imperium* and the title of *princeps juventutis* were conferred upon him.' He was specially admitted as an extraordinary member of the great priestly colleges; his name was included by the Arval Brethren in their prayers for the safety of the emperor and his house; at the games in the circus his appearance in triumphal dress contrasted significantly with the simple *toga praetexta* worn by Britannicus. During the next two years Agrippina followed this up with energy. Britannicus's leading partisans were banished or put to death, and the all important command of the praetorian guard was transferred to Afranius Burrus, a Gaul by birth, who had been the trusted agent first of Livia and then of Tiberius and Claudius. Nero himself was put prominently forward. The petitions addressed to the senate by the town of Bononia and by the communities of Rhodes and Ilium were gracefully supported by him in Latin and Greek speeches, and during Claudius's absence in 52 at the Latin festival it was Nero who, as praefect of the city, administered justice in the forum. Early in 53 his marriage with Claudius's daughter Octavia drew still closer the ties which connected him with the imperial house. Agrippina determined to hasten

the death of Claudius, and the absence, through illness, of the emperor's trusted freedman Narcissus, favoured her schemes. On the 13th of October 54 Claudius died, poisoned, as all our authorities declare, by her orders, and Nero was presented to the soldiers on guard as their new sovereign. From the steps of the palace he proceeded to the praetorian camp to receive the salutations of the troops, and thence to the senate-house, where he was promptly invested with all the honours, titles and powers of emperor. Agrippina's bold stroke had been completely successful. Only a few voices were raised for Britannicus; nor is there any doubt that Rome was prepared to welcome the new emperor with genuine enthusiasm. His prestige and his good qualities, carefully fostered by Seneca, made him popular, while his childish vanity, ungovernable selfishness and savage temper were as yet unsuspected."<sup>9</sup>

**10 - and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved.**

The Apocalypse of St. John depicts the great tribulation as dividing the world into two groups: those who obeyed the beast and those that obeyed the Lamb. Those who obeyed unrighteousness yielded to deceptions and slanders against the church, saying they were guilty of heinous crimes of all sorts, from the burning of Rome to the incestuous acts and secret murders. "And I saw out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet, three unclean spirits like frogs; for they are spirits of demons doing signs to go forth to the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty" (Rev. 16:13, 14). Justin Martyr is clear that the source of many of these slanderous deceptions were the Jews: "*For after that you had crucified Him, the only blameless and righteous Man, - through whose stripes those who approach the father by Him are healed, - when you knew that He had risen from the dead and ascended to heaven, as the prophets foretold He would, you not only did not repent of the wickedness which you had committed, but at that time you selected*

*and sent out from Jerusalem chosen men through all the land to tell that the godless heresy of the Christians had sprung up, and to publish those things which all they who knew us not speak against us...Accordingly, you displayed great zeal in publishing throughout all the land bitter and dark and unjust things against the only blameless and righteous Light sent by God.*"<sup>10</sup>

**11, 12 - And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.**

The lies of Nero and the Jews would enlist the world in the war against Christ and the church. God does not send the delusion because he is unwilling that men believe; rather, he sends the delusion because men have refused to believe. Man is a free moral agent; faith is tied to our moral faculty. It is not that we cannot believe, but that we *will not*; the implications of submitting to God's rule in our lives are odious to us. Not until we feel the need a savior to restore joy to life and bring salvation from death are we willing to humble ourselves and obey.

**13 - But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth:**

Christ *died* for all; salvation is freely *available* to all; and God *wants* all to be saved. God's election is not arbitrary or capricious; he does not choose one man to salvation, and harden or predestinate another to damnation. Rather, the case is like a man who makes a will and sets conditions upon his gifts and legacies, granting an inheritance to those who obey, disinheriting those who refuse and rebel. The choice was made from the beginning by the conditions set in place, but whether any particular man will receive the inheritance depends upon his own willingness to respond to the warning and invitation of God. The process thus begins with God, for he seeks us and sets in our hearts the hope of salvation. The process also ends with God, for he is both author and finisher of our

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<sup>9</sup> For the whole article on line, see <http://www.1911encyclopedia.org/Nero>

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<sup>10</sup> Dialogue with Trypho, XVIII; *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. I, p. 203

salvation. But the middle of the process requires the moral willingness, responsiveness, and perseverance of man.

**14 -Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.**

Here, at last, is the gathering of the saints to glory at Christ's coming mentioned in verse one. "Being gathered unto one's people" was a common euphemism for death in the Old Testament and doubtless is behind the general imagery here (Gen. 25:17 – *Ishmael*; 35:29 – *Isaac*; 49:33 – *Jacob*; Num. 20:24 – *Aaron*; Duet. 32:50 – *Moses*). The gathering of the saints unto Christ thus implies *physical death*. We saw earlier that Rev. 14 called the saints to perseverance in the coming persecution under the beast, saying, "*Here is the patience of the saints; here are they that keep the commandment of God, and faith of Jesus*" (Rev. 14:9-12). In the same passage, the Spirit also pronounces a blessing upon the martyrs, saying, "*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 do follow them*" (v. 13). However, contrary to what we might expect, the martyrs are not depicted being slain under the beast, but *harvested (gathered) by Christ*.

*"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. And he that sat on the cloud thrust in his sickle on the earth; and the earth was reaped"* (Rev. 14:14-16).

This imagery tracks precisely the language of John the Baptist who likened the eschatological gathering to a harvest in which the good were gathered into the granary, but the wicked burned up like chaff (Matt. 3:10-12). Another excellent example is recorded in the gospel of Mark: "*And he said, So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground; And should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how. For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear. But when the fruit is brought forth,*

*immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come"* (Mk. 4:26-29).

It seems clear that John's imagery in Revelation shows the fulfillment of the eschatological harvest (gathering) of the gospel parables: Christ astride a white cloud, reaping the harvest of the earth. The term rendered "ripe" in Rev. 14:15 is actually "dried." Wheat is harvested after the plant has died and its head of grain is dried. Thus, it is clearly wheat that is being harvested, whence we know that this is the eschatological gathering of the saints to glory. But the destruction of the wicked is also shown. The authors of Christian persecution were the Jews, and John signifies their fate by a harvest of wrath: "*And another angel came out of the temple which is in heaven, he also having a sharp sickle. And another angel came out from the altar, which had power over fire; and cried with a loud cry to him that had the sharp sickle, saying, Thrust in thy sharp sickle, and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth; for her grapes are fully ripe. And the angel thrust in his sickle into the earth, and gathered the vine of the earth, and cast it into the great winepress of the wrath of God. And the winepress was trodden without the city, and blood came out of the winepress, even unto the horse bridles, by the space of a thousand and six hundred furlongs"* (Rev. 14:17-20).

"Outside the city" signifies that the war has not yet reached Jerusalem's gates, and probably is still confined to Galilee. It was not until Passover (mid April) A.D. 70 that Titus invested Jerusalem. The persecution under Nero lasted 3 ½ years (1260 days, 42 months). It began in Nov. A.D. 64 and ended soon after Nero's death in June, A.D. 68. The Jews' war with Rome initially broke out in the summer/fall of A.D. 66; Vespasian was commissioned by Nero to conduct the war in February A.D. 67; it was not concluded until September A.D. 70. Hence, the persecution overlapped the Jews' war with Rome for almost two years. From a Biblical perspective, the one virtually invited the other, the war coming in direct result of the Jews' persecution of the saints. It is for these reasons that the two are here portrayed together.

**15 - Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle.**

The charge to “stand fast” is in anticipation of the coming persecution and the temptation to abandon faith in Christ, and is very like the charge to the Hebrews to “forsake not the assembling of yourselves together” (Heb. 10:27), that is, not to forsake the profession of their faith for fear of being discovered assembled together in worship of Christ. The saints are to keep the traditions set in place by the apostles, for these have the authority of Christ. Human traditions are wrong only when they negate a commandment of God or are made commandments of men. If a particular practice does not violate a principle, precept, or precedent of scripture, then it is not objectionable and lawful for men to keep.

**16, 17 - Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work.**

The promise of glory establishes and sustains us in the good words and work of the gospel. Thus, Paul evokes the consolation and hope of salvation as the inducement for the Thessalonians to abide faithful and fruitful. May God grant each of us to follow their example.



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# MATTHEW 24 THE END OF THE HOLY CITY: JERUSALEM AND JOSEPHUS.

*An example of Rational Preterism*

By Morrison Lee

**The problem** in understanding the prophecies of Matthew 24 is that readers take words and predictions (signs) out of a first century book and apply the words and signs yet future' to their own generation. This article explains the historical background to the prophecies of Jesus by an eye witness to their fulfillment, Josephus, the Sanhedrin-appointed governor of Galilee, and the main source of our knowledge of the time.

The three conditions of any reasonable explanation are, firstly, it be *suggested by the facts it is trying to explain*: that is it *saves the appearances* of the facts, or in other words the explanation arises from our observation of the facts. Most simply, a satisfactory explanation is one that is always accountable to the facts by observation.

Secondly, from this starting point of being suggested by facts, a satisfactory theory will then go on to *explain more and more facts; it answers more and more facts* and gives new meaning to old facts and places them in new combinations. At the same time a good theory will explain the causes between these connections with facts, facts that may be observed.

Thirdly a good theory will *predict* new combinations of facts that have not been seen before. This can be challenging for some with a bias against novelty, but by their nature, every new truth is novel. A good theory will predict what is formerly unknown, but what must logically extend from the facts, just as an unseen pine tree root is predictable from pine tree leaves on a pine tree trunk.

The aims of this article are twofold; (i) to explain how a good theory works, and (ii) to explain the facts of Matthew 24 themselves. This article argues that Preterism is a preferable explanation because it does three things; it is *suggested by*

*biblical and historical facts, answers more facts, and predicts new relations between the facts of prophecy and history.*

## **I. A first century explanation is suggested by the facts of Matthew 23-24**

Matthew 23, 24 and 25 form part of a prophetic section of the book that is called the 'mini apocalypse.' These chapters discuss the end of the Mosaic world at the destruction of the holy city Jerusalem in 70 AD. That these events are peculiar to that generation of Moses in Judea is suggested by some clear facts: *'All these things shall come upon this generation. O Jerusalem Jerusalem. '* (Mtt 23:36-37a)

Here, in time, the facts state Jesus is speaking to His own generation in Jerusalem, forty years before the destruction of the Mosaic temple and the end of the age. It is also clear from the context and facts of Matthew 24:1-3 that Jesus is discussing the Mosaic temple, in which was the Mosaic covenant. (placed there by King Solomon exactly 1,000 years before. cf. 1 Kgs 8:1 – 9:9)

*And Jesus went out and departed from the temple, and His disciples came to Him for to show him the buildings of the temple. And Jesus said unto them, 'See ye not all these things?' 'Verily I say unto you, there shall not be one stone upon another that shall not be thrown down.' ...the disciples asked, 'When shall these things be?...'*

It is in reply to the disciples' question *'When shall these things be?'* that Jesus framed his response. In time and in space He speaks to those of his own generation who lived in land of Mosaic Judea before the destruction. This is why He warns; *'Then let them which be in Judea flee into the mountains...'* (Mtt 24:16) It also explains His reference to escaping on the *Sabbath day*, the Sabbath being a Mosaic

institution: *'But let not your flight be not in the winter, neither on the Sabbath day.'* (Mtt 24:16) Again, over halfway through the chapter, the facts state in the same terms, that Jesus expects these things to occur in His own [Mosaic] generation. *'Verily I say to you this generation shall not pass away until all these things come to pass.'* (Mtt 24:34)

These facts suggest that Jesus is speaking to His own generation about a state of affairs occurring in their own lifetime, as indeed history demonstrates. His words herald the inevitable and terrible end to the nation prophesied by John Baptist at the start of His ministry when John said; *'the axe is laid on the root'*, the imminent fulfillment of what was foretold 1,000 years before saying; *'I will cut off Israel of the land which I have given them; and this house which I have hallowed for my name will I cast out of my sight.'* (I Kgs 9:7) These prophecies also correspond to the historical events which shortly came to pass in Jesus' generation in 70 AD.

## **II. A first century explanation answers the facts of Matthew 23-24**

Just forty years after Jesus uttered the words of Matthew 24, on the 15<sup>th</sup> of Nisan 70AD, the national Jewish temple was surrounded by the Roman armies of Titus and sacked. (Exactly the same date in the same month as the first temple burned down in BC 586.) It was then plundered, dismantled stone by stone, its walls leveled with the ground, the land ploughed up and salted so that nothing would ever grow, and finally sold along with all Judea. The human cost was appalling. At the time of the Passover there were approximately 3,000,000 people trapped in the holy city. Of these approximately 1,100,000 died terrible deaths from famine and injury, and 97,000 were taken captive and sold to work in Egyptian mines, or eaten by wild beasts in games at Roman theatres. The decimation of the nation was cataclysmic, total, and definitive, the subject of a detailed prophecy fulfilled as recorded by eyewitness and historian Flavius Josephus in his work, *Wars of the Jews*. Following is a correlation of the tragic history with the tragic prophecy of Matthew 23 and 24.

**Mtt 23:36-37 'All these things shall come upon this generation. O Jerusalem Jerusalem'**

*[40 years later] While the holy house was on fire, everything was plundered that came to*

*hand, and ten thousand of those that were caught were slain...but children, and old men, and profane persons and priests, were all slain in the same manner.* Wars 6:5:271

*Yet was this misery itself more than the disorder; for one would have thought the hill itself on which the temple stood was seething hot, as full of fire on every part of it, that the blood was in larger quantity than the fire, and the slain more in number than those who slew them; for the ground did nowhere appear visible for the dead bodies that lay on it; but the soldiers went over heaps of these bodies as they ran upon such as fled from them..* Wars 6:5:275-276

*..all this burning came upon Jerusalem...a city that had been liable to so many miseries during the siege that, had it always enjoyed as much happiness from its first foundation, it would have been the envy of the world. Nor did it...deserve such misfortunes, as by producing such a generation of men as were the occasions of this its overthrow.* Wars 6:8:408

**Mtt 24 2. Jerusalem temple was to be destroyed stone by stone.**

*Caesar gave orders that they should now demolish the entire city and temple..but for the rest of the wall, it was so thoroughly laid even with the ground by those that dug it up to the foundation, that there was left nothing to make those that came thither believe it had ever been inhabited.* Wars 7:1:1,3

**v7. Nation against nation, kingdom against Kingdom...end not yet.**

*.while Vespasian was about Alexandria, and Titus was lying at the siege of Jerusalem, a great multitude of the Germans were in commotion, and tended to rebellion, and as the Gauls in the neighborhood joined with them..hoping to free themselves of Roman dominion.. At the very same time with the forementioned revolt of the Germans did the bold attempt of the Scythians against the Romans occur, for those Scythians, who are called Samaitans, being a very numerous people, transported themselves over the Danube into Mysia without being perceived..and slew a great many Romans that guarded the frontiers.* Wars 7:4:75ff

**v7. Famine**

*Now of those who perished by famine in the city, the number was prodigious, and the miseries they underwent were unspeakable; for if the shadow of any kind of food did anywhere appear, a war was commenced presently; and the dearest friends fell a fighting one with another over it...nor would men believe those dying had no food, but the robbers would search them when they were expiring, lest any should have concealed food in their bosoms and counterfeited dying. Moreover their hunger was so intolerable that it obliged them to chew everything, while they gathered such things as the most sordid animals would not touch and endured to eat them; nor did they at length abstain from girdles and shoes, and the very leather which belonged to their shields they pulled off and gnawed; the very wisps of old hay became food to some, and some gathered up the fibers and sold a very small weight of them for four Attic drachmae. Wars 6:3:193-198*

*..I am going to relate a matter of fact the like to which no history relates, either among the Greeks or barbarians! It is horrible to speak of and incredible when heard...but that I have innumerable witnesses to it in my own age. ..a certain Mary, her father was Eleazar.. She was eminent for her family and her wealth, and had fled away to Jerusalem. [When it became impossible for her anyway to find more food, while the famine pierced through her very bowels...she then attempted a most unnatural thing; and snatching up her son, who was a child sucking at her breast she said; "O thou miserable infant! For whom shall I preserve thee in this war, this famine, this sedition? Come on: be thou my food...and a byword to the world.." As soon as she said this she slew her son, and roasted him, and ate one half of him, and kept the other half concealed. Wars 6:3:199ff.*

#### **v7. Earthquakes**

*..when the war about Actium was at the height, at the beginning of the Spring the earth was shaken, and destroyed an immense number of cattle, with thirty-thousand men, but the army received no harm because it lay in the open air. Wars 1:19:370*

*Moreover at the feast called Pentecost..the priest of the inner court felt a quaking Wars 6:5:298ff*

#### **v10. Many betray each other. (Cf Mtt 10:21)**

*And here, a certain old man - the father of seven children, whose children, together with their mother decided to give them leave to go out [to Herod] – slew them after the following manner: he ordered them to go out while he himself stood at the cave's mouth, and slew that son of his perpetually who went out. Herod was near enough to see this sight, and his bowels of compassion were moved at it... yet did he not relent at all...but reproached Herod for his lowness of descent and slew his wife as well as his children, and when he had thrown their dead bodies down the precipice, he at last threw himself down after them. Wars 1:17:312 ff.*

#### **v11. False prophets arise**

*A false prophet was the occasion of these peoples destruction, which had made a proclamation in the city that very day that God commanded them to get up on the temple, and they should receive miraculous signs of their deliverance. Wars 6:5:285*

#### **v14. Gospel preached to all world. Cf. Matt 10:23, Acts Col 1:23, Rom 15:19, 2 Tim 4:17**

#### **v15. Abomination of desolation in holy place.**

*'Why do you trample upon dead bodies in this temple? And why do you pollute this holy house with the blood of both foreigners and Jews themselves?' '..I do not force you to pollute your sanctuary...' Wars 6:2:126*

#### **v21. Great tribulation not seen in world**

*..but the entire nation was now shut up by fate as in a prison, and the Roman army compassed the city when it was crowded with inhabitant. Accordingly the multitude of those that therein perished exceeded all the destructions that either men or God ever brought upon the world... Wars 6:9:428ff.*

*Accordingly, it appears to me, that the misfortunes of all men from the beginning of the world, if they be compared to these of the Jews, are not so considerable as they were.. Wars Preface:12*

#### **v24. False Christs, false prophets**

*A false prophet was the occasion of these people's destruction, which made a public proclamation in the city that very day, that God commanded them to get up on the temple, and*

that they should receive miraculous signs of their deliverance. Wars 6:5:285

**v26. Behold he is in the desert. Go not forth.**

*Festus sent [Roman forces] ..to fall upon those that had been seduced by a certain imposter, who promised them deliverance and freedom..if they would but follow him as far as the wilderness. Accordingly those forces .. destroyed both him that had deluded them, and those that were his followers also. Antiquities 20:9:188*

**v28. Wheresoever the carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered.**

*Now the King [Herod] had put up a large golden eagle over the great gate of the temple, of very great value, and had dedicated it to the temple. Wars 1:33:650ff*

**v29. Immediately after tribulation Sun darkened**

*While the holy house was on fire everything was plundered that came to hand ..Wars 6:5:271*

*one would have thought the whole city was on fire. Wars 6:5:272*

Fires across the whole country blotted out the moon at night and tinted the sun red by day.  
Moon not give its light

*But Herod deprived this Matthias of the priesthood, and burnt the other Matthias who had raised the sedition, with his companions, alive. And that very night there was an eclipse of the moon. Antiquities 17:6:167*

**Stars fall from heaven**

*There was a star resembling a sword, which stood over the city, and a comet, that continued for a whole year. Wars 6:5:289*

**v29. Powers of heaven shaken.**

*..the Roman government in great internal disorder by the continual changes of its rulers, and understood that every part of the habitable earth under them was in an unsettled and tottering condition. Wars 7:4:79*

**v30. Sign of son of man in clouds of heaven, tribes mourn**

*So these publicly declared that this signal foreshadowed the desolation that was coming upon them...for, before sun setting, chariots and troops of soldiers in their armor were seen running about among the clouds and surrounding the cities...Moreover at the feast called Pentecost..the priest of the inner court felt a quaking and heard a great noise..and the sound of a multitude saying 'Let us remove hence... Wars 6:5:298ff*

**III. A first century explanation predicts new relations in the Apocalypse**

The book of Revelation is an embarrassment to the yet future view, for in 2000 years of critical study it has not only not been understood uniformly, its context has not even been determined, the consensus of scholars believing it was written in 96 AD from external reasoning. But what happens if you look into the book itself? What is the internal evidence for the context of Revelation? The conclusion must be that it was written before the holy city Jerusalem was destroyed. This is consistent with a first century explanation of Matthew 24. Does the idea of Jerusalem predict new relations in Revelation?

***The Harlot of Revelation matches the Holy City Jerusalem.***

A past explanation argues from the internal evidence of Revelation it was written: that Jerusalem is the biblical *holy city* (Neh. 11:1, 11:18, Is 48:2, 52:1, Dan 9:24, Matt 4:5, 27:53) the same city *where their Lord was crucified* (Rev 11:8) also likened to *immoral Sodom and Gomorrah* by Isaiah (Is 1:10) the same holy city in which the *bridegroom's voice* [Jesus' voice] was heard (Rev 18:23) and the harlot city wherein was *all the blood* of the prophets. (Rev 18:24, 19:1-2, Matt 23:36) while the Mosaic temple was still standing, (Rev 11:1-2) A past view also suggests a natural correspondence between the two systems, earthly city Mosaic Jerusalem and heavenly city spiritual Jerusalem. This natural correspondence of systems is mirrored in the facts of Gal 4:21-31) again a correspondence between two women, one represented by Hagar (Jerusalem) and the other by Sarah, (New Jerusalem) and also by mountains, Mt Sinai, (Jerusalem) and the other

by Mt Zion, (New Jerusalem) system representing law, (Mosaic Jerusalem) the other grace. (New Jerusalem).

The first century (Preterist) explanation proposes that Jerusalem is suggested by the facts of Revelation. What happens when a past hypothesis (the context of the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD) is overlaid on Revelation? The result is that we find a near correspondence between biblical prophecy and historical description. Ie.

***A first century history matches the affairs of Revelation.***

A sample Preterist synthesis of prophecy and history informs us that Vespasian's Roman army under his son Titus surrounded a Jerusalem besieged by civil war, and a holy temple occupied by: *a generation of villains so mad, that had the Romans made a longer delay the city would have been swallowed up by the earth, or destroyed as Sodom...* (Is 1:10 Jerusalem Wars 5:13:566) a national event described by this eyewitness as the *greatest [national] misery since its' foundation*, (Mtt 24:21 Jerusalem Wars 6:8:408) *in which the number of those which perished [over 1,100,000] exceeded all the destructions ..ever brought on the world* (Jerusalem Wars 6:9:429), a time when *false prophets abounded*, (Mtt 24:24 Jerusalem Wars 6:5:285) *"the daily sacrifice" failed* (Dan 9:27 Jerusalem Wars 6:2:94) *when famine and pestilence affected the estimated 3,000,000 people in the city*, (Rev 18:8 Jerusalem Wars 5:12) a famine so bad *people searched the sewers for dung*, (Rev 18:8 Jerusalem Wars 5:13:571) and *one mother ate her own child for food* (Wars 6:3:207 ) *when a measure of wheat was sold for a talent of money* (Rev 6:6 Jerusalem Wars 5:13:571) *when men sought by death [by sword over death by starvation], but found it not*, (Rev 9:6 Jerusalem Wars 5:12:517) a context when *fire and blood mingled together, the blood in the lanes in such quantities that the whole city ran with blood, to such a degree indeed that the fire of many of the houses was quenched with these men's blood* (Rev 8:7 Jerusalem Wars 6:8:406ff) *earthquakes* (Rev 6:12 Jerusalem Wars 1:19:370 ) and *signs in the heavens*: (Rev 8:12 Jerusalem Antiquities 17:6:167 Eclipse, comet) a time when *the sounds of trumpets* (Rev 8:13 Jerusalem Wars 6:1:68) and *the noise of horses* (Rev 9:16 Jerusalem Wars 3:2:33) were sounds to inspire dread and

*torment*, (Rev 9:16 Jerusalem Wars 5:1:35) when the *great plain* in front of Jerusalem (Wars 5:2:67, 5:3:106ff) was leveled even wider by the four legions of the Roman army as *numerous as locusts* (Rev 9:3,7 Jerusalem Wars 4:9:536) to make a greater plain for battle. In 70 AD the entire city was shut up, the entire population of the nation *captured*, Josephus tells us, *in a kind of net*. (Matt 13:47 Jerusalem Wars 6:1:160) Our historian also tells us the time from the coming of the Roman Emperor Vespasian (in 66 AD) until the time *the daily sacrifices failed to be offered in the temple* was three and a half years, or forty two months, or times, times and half a time. (Rev 12:14, 13:5, Dan 9:27 Jerusalem Wars 6:2:94). This is complimentary correspondence between prophetic fate and actual fulfillment that doesn't need an hypothesis of 2000 years.

***A first century history matches many details of Revelation.***

In Revelation 22 we have the prophetic destruction of a holy city in 42 months '*soon to take place, shortly, quickly, soon*' to Jesus' own generation. In historical Josephus we have the destruction of the holy city Jerusalem in 42 months in Jesus' own generation.

Who will then dismiss the natural context of the first century, and this detailed correspondence as merely an accidental and not actual fulfillment? The futurist may *pooh-pooh* and dismiss a first century explanation with a wave of the hand, but this is too simple; (i) they have no better detailed explanation to offer, and (ii) must dismiss what is beyond coincidence as pure chance. This is unconvincing reasoning.

The futurist view cannot tell us anything of Jesus' generation, but a Preterist view tells us it was an unsettled world revolved by wars in Rome, (Vitellus brought an army from Germany into Rome and took over the Italian government) Vespasian fighting in Egypt, Titus in Judea, the Idumeans against the Jews, the zealots against the ruling Sanhedrin and the people, the Sicarii (bandits) against everyone, the uprising in Gaul, the Syrians scheming against the Jews, the Scythians (called Sarmatians) invading borders along Germany, Scythians plundering Media, the Celts revolting, those beyond Euphrates warring, a world in turmoil that saw *the Roman government in great internal disorder by the continual changes of its rulers, and understood*

*that every part of the habitable earth under them was in an unsettled and tottering condition.. (Jerusalem Wars 7:4:75-95)*

This is only a *sample-Preterist* explanation of the state of affairs existing in Jerusalem, Judea and all over the known world in the first century, yet it shows a near correspondence between biblical prophecy and history. Much more evidence may be produced to demonstrate the equivalence between Jerusalem and Revelation's harlot city which crucified its Lord, (Rev 11:8) but here we are only concerned with making the link back to the first century, and demonstrating how a past viewpoint is suggested by biblical facts, answers more facts, and predicts new relations between facts.

### **Conclusion**

The power of any explanation is its ability to save the appearances of the facts, and develop intricate linkages between those facts. This is called explanatory power, and is one of the key measures of a good explanation. A first century view has superior explanatory because it is

always accountable to the first century as the natural context of a first century document, an aspect that saves the appearances of the biblical facts. A first century view is the simplest explanation consistent with observation.

Contrary-wise a yet future to us view turns its' back to the past and peers into the future to connect the ideas of a first century book, but explains nothing except conjecture. The rule is *when our theories do not fit our observations, theories must be changed.* (Beck,S p82. The Simplicity of Science). The goal here is to seize factual solutions that answer the facts we observe, while deferring our judgment on remaining problems.

By the measure of explanatory power and the ability to save the appearances of the facts, a Preterist explanation is clearly to be preferred. June 2008

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# *Read The Sword & The Plow*