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The Angels of the Bottomless Pit

by

Kurt M. Simmons

A previous article discussed the identity of Revelation's great red dragon. There we concluded that the dragon had a dual identity, first, as a metaphor for the prince of this world - sin and death - and, second, the embodiment of sin and death in the world civil power as the enemy of God and his people (*viz.*, Egypt, Assyria, Babylon) or, more specifically for purposes of Revelation – Imperial Rome. In this article we want to discuss the identity of the angel who bound the dragon and shut it up in the bottomless pit.

And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, and cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season.

Rev. 20:1-3

Not the Lord Christ

A common error in interpreting this passage has it that the angel is Christ. This is the basic assumption of Postmillennialism. Consider the following comments from Gentry:

In Revelation 20:1-3 John portrays the negative implications of Christ's triumph over Satan, when "the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan

(v. 2)" is spiritually bound (Gk. *deo*). This binding restricts him from successfully accomplishing his evil design in history. The angel from heaven who binds him evidently is Christ himself. (1) Christ appears under angelic imagery elsewhere in Revelation (cf. Rev. 10:1 with 1:13-15). (2) The struggle of the ages is ultimately between Satan and Christ (Gen. 3:15; Matt. 4:1-11; John 12:31-32; Acts 26:15-18), making it most appropriate for Christ to bind Satan. (3) Matthew 12:28-29 informs us of Christ's binding of Satan during his ministry and in relation to the struggle between Christ's and Satan's kingdoms: "If I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. Or again, how can anyone enter a strong man's house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up [Gk. *deo*, same word as in Rev. 20:2] the strong man? Then he can rob his house" (Matt. 12:28-29; see preceding context for reference to Satan's kingdom).¹

Gentry's arguments that Christ is depicted by the angel lack meaningful analysis. There is nothing about the present imagery that is uniquely applicable to Christ and cannot with equal validity be applied to any number of other historical personages. That Christ may appear elsewhere under angelic imagery does not prove that he so appears here. Numerous other figures appear under angelic imagery. For instance, in chapter nine, the Roman Emperor, Nero, is figured

¹ Kenneth L. Gentry Jr, *Three views on the Millennium and Beyond* (1999, Zondervon, Grand Rapids MI), p. 52. Cf. Keith A. Mathison, *Postmillennialism - An eschatology of Hope* (1999, P&R Publishing, Philipsburg, PA), p. 155; David Chilton, *Days of Vengeance* (1987, Dominion Press, Tyler TX), pp. 499-506.

as an angel given possession of the key to the bottomless pit to loose its armies, and the Roman legions themselves are described as four angels bound at the River Euphrates. (Rev. 9: 1, 11, 14) If these “angels” are earthly figures connected with the world civil power, why is the angel in Rev. 20:1-3 divine? According to Gentry, the dragon is Satan, hence the angel that binds him *must* be Christ. However, that the dragon is a demonic being is itself very doubtful, rendering the conclusion that the angel “must” be Christ equally doubtful. Revelation is a book of symbols. The passage veils spiritual and historical realities in the garb of symbolic imagery. Reference to the dragon as the “devil and Satan” is no more literal than reference to its being bound with a chain and cast alive into the bottomless pit. Thus, to place a literal construction upon the image is to violate the first rule of interpretation and confound our understanding. The better view is that the dragon is the world civil power poised as the adversary of Christ and his church, not a demonic being. Since any number of earthly figures might bind and loose the power of earthly kingdoms, there is no basis upon which to conclude that Christ is the angel who binds the power here.

II Peter 2:4 Probable Source

According to Postmillennialists, the imagery of Revelation 20:1-3 is adapted from Matt. 12:28, 29 and speaks to the whole gospel dispensation, beginning with Christ’s earthly ministry, concluding just before the purported end of time. Although there is a superficial similarity between the texts, careful analysis will show that the points of contact are so few that they cannot justify the conclusion that the one is the source of the other’s imagery or that there is an identity of subject matter between them. Jesus’ parable in Matthew does not mention casting down, the bottomless pit, chains, a thousand years, *etc.* Other than the image of binding the strong man, there is no further correspondence at all between the texts. With so little similarity between them, upon what are we to base the conclusion that Matthew is the source of Revelation’s imagery or that the texts speak to the same spiritual and historical events? Shouldn’t something more substantial be required

upon which to base this conclusion? Because the similarity between the texts is so insubstantial, the better view is that the imagery of binding the dragon in the bottomless pit is derived, not from Matt. 12:28, 29, but from II Pet. 2:4 and various Old Testament sources:

“For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell (Gk. *tartarus*), and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment.” II Pet. 2:4

Comparison of this passage with Rev. 20:1-3 shows the following points of contact:

Revelation 20:1-3	II Peter 2:4	Matthew 12:28, 29
The Dragon	“Angels” that sinned	The “Strong man”
Cast down	Cast down	
Shut up in bottomless pit	Shut up in Tartarus	
Bound with a chain	Bound with chains	Bound
Imprisoned for a thousand years	Reserved unto the judgment	

Angels are not subject to fleshly lusts and therefore are not tempted with sin. Hence, the “angels” mentioned by Peter should not be construed as heavenly beings, but the righteous “sons of God” (children of Seth) who apostatized before the flood by marrying the unbelieving daughters of men. (Gen. 6:1-4) For their sin, these men perished in the flood and were confined to tartarus under chains of darkness.² Evidence that these angels are a reference to the sons of Seth in the antediluvian world may be seen in the fact that Peter’s argument follows the record of sacred history. Beginning with the “angels” that sinned, Peter next proceeds to the flood of Noah, and finally to Sodom and Gomorrah. (II Pet. 2:4-8) This tracks precisely the order of the cataclysmic judgments recorded in Genesis. The flood narrative opens with a recital of the apostasy of the “sons of God” by marrying unbelieving daughters of men and the violence these men wrought in the earth (Gen. 6:1-4, 11), of which of the deluge was God’s answer, lest the righteous perish entirely from the earth. (Gen. 6:9-9:29) The
(Cont’d page four)

² Tartarus is the realm of the lost “dead,” the place of binding over until execution of judgment and sentence.

8 Compelling Reasons Why: Christ is coming “Very, Very Soon” #3—Earthquakes and Distress in Nature

by

Don Preston

The article we have been examining claims that earthquakes have increased dramatically since the rebirth of Israel. Other “prophets” insist that weather changes, hurricanes and earthquakes are a portent of the end. Doubtlessly, the recent and tragic tornadoes that hit the Oklahoma City area will be seen by some as a sign of Christ’s return. Support for this view is taken, wrongly, from Matthew 24: 7: “There will be famine, earthquake and pestilence in various places.” It is argued that Jesus was giving disturbances in nature as signs of His coming. This is not what Jesus taught!

The disciples asked Jesus for a sign of the end (Matthew 24:3). Jesus gave them a warning, “Do not be deceived” (v. 4), and proceeded to tell them of things that were to happen, among them the so-called “disturbances in nature.” However, he specifically told them, “These are the beginning of sorrows” (v.8), and in Luke He added, “These things must come to pass first, but the end will not come immediately” (Luke 21:9). Jesus said the disturbances were *not signs of the imminent end of the age!* To claim that these natural events are signs of the imminent end is to ignore what Jesus said!

Jesus told his disciples that these events were the, “beginning of birth pangs.” This was a common expression, unfortunately lost on most readers today, of what was known as the *birth-pangs of the Messiah*. The Jews believed, and scripture taught, that before the coming of the kingdom, there was to be a period of intense distress and persecution. This terrible time was to bring forth the kingdom at the glorious appearing of the King (Jeremiah 30:7-9; Daniel 12, etc.). Tragically, most Bible students today ignore the fact that

Jesus said the time of suffering was to occur in His generation. It is also unfortunate that most students ignore the fact that Paul said the “birth-pangs” were present in his generation!

In Matthew 24: 34 Jesus emphatically said, “Verily I say to you, this generation will by no means pass until all of these things be fulfilled.” We ask kindly, how is it possible to ignore or deny what our Lord said? It is not possible to distort His words to mean a generation 2000 years removed from His. He did not say some generation one of these days far off. He said “this generation will not pass. He did not say, “The Jewish race will not pass until all these things are fulfilled.” This is an improper use of the original words. Jesus definitely said the distress He was predicting would occur in His generation, and it did.

In Romans 8, Paul spoke of, “the suffering of this present time” (v. 18). Paul and his contemporaries were experiencing suffering, and what did he call it? In verse 22, he said, “we know that the whole creation groans and labors with *birth pangs* until now.” Paul uses the word used by Jesus to foretell the “beginning of birth-pangs,” and says those pangs were being experienced when he wrote! Was Paul wrong? Was he mistaken? No, what Jesus said would occur in his generation was occurring as predicted.

The distress in nature was not even to be a sign of the imminent end, and further, Jesus said the things he predicted were for His generation. Paul said the predicted events were present 2000 years ago. It is a misuse of scripture to apply Jesus’ prediction to our generation.

(Cont'd from page two)
 judgment upon Sodom and Gomorrah follows a few chapters thence. (Gen. 18, 19) Since Peter's argument mirrors the order events set out in Genesis, we may well conclude it is to these events he refers when he mentions the "angels" that sinned. Questions regarding the identity of these angels aside, an impartial analysis will own II Pet. 2:4 as the probable source of the John's imagery before Matt. 12:28, 29. There are no fewer than *five* points of contact between the imagery of Revelation twenty and II Peter two – more than twice the number of Matthew twelve. Moreover, there is a correspondence in the basic imagery of Revelation twenty and II Peter two that is missing from Jesus' parable in Matthew. Matt. 12:28, 29 speaks merely to the *binding* of the strong man and is silent about him being cast down and shut up in the bottomless pit. But, Revelation's imagery contemplates more than the mere *restriction* of the dragon's power postulated by Postmillennialism and Matthew 12:28, 29; it contemplates his *imprisonment* and *internment* in hades tartarus or the bottomless pit for a specific time. The disparity between the imagery of Revelation and Jesus' parable in Matthew militates against assigning the latter as either the source or substance of the former.

Being cast down to the bottomless pit is not unique to II Peter 2:4 and the "sons of God" or Rev. 20:1-3 and the dragon (Rome). The same figure is encountered numerous times in the Old Testament prophets. According to the *usus loquendi* of the prophets, casting down to the bottomless pit is a figure of personal or national defeat and debasement so complete as to all but equal *death*. Concerning the fall of Egypt, Ezekiel provides the following description: "Son of man, wail for the multitude of Egypt, and cast them down, even her and the daughters of the famous nations, unto the nether parts of the earth, with them that go down to the pit." (Ezek. 32:18) It also occurs in reference to Tyre: "They shall bring thee down to the pit, and thou shalt die the deaths of them that are slain in the midst of the seas." (Ezek. 28:8) Concerning Assyria Ezekiel said, "I made the nations to shake at the sound of his fall, when I cast him down to hell with them that descend into the pit."

(Ezek. 31:16) Nations described by Ezekiel as being cast down to the pit also include Elam, Meshec, Tubal, Edom, and Zidon. (Ezek. 32:22, 24, 26, 29, 30; cf. Isa. 14:9-23) Isaiah uses similar imagery to describe the fall of Assyria. (Isa. 30:27-33) The point of Revelation's imagery is that, as the "sons of God" who perished in the flood were confined to tartarus, and as various world civil powers had gone down to the pit in defeat, so the dragon suffered defeat in its war against the woman and the Christ child. (Rev. 12:16, 17) This near mortal wound (Rev. 13: 3, 14) caused the dragon to go down to the pit in defeat where it was symbolically confined for a time, only to be loosed for a little season to make a final assault upon God's people (Rev. 11:7; 17:8) before dawn of the Messianic age and the new heavens and earth.

The Angel as Emperor of Rome and King of the Locust Army

As already noted, the angel in Rev. 20:1-3 is not the only angel in Revelation possessing the key to the bottomless pit. In chapter nine, another angel is similarly depicted.

"And the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star fall from heaven unto the earth: and to him was given the key of the bottomless pit. And he opened the bottomless pit; and there arose a smoke out of the pit, as the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened by reason of the smoke of the pit. And there came out of the smoke locusts upon the earth: and unto them was given power, as the scorpions of the earth have power...And they had a king over them, which is the angel of the bottomless pit, whose name in the Hebrew tongue is Abaddon, but in the Greek tongue hath his name Apollyon." Rev. 9:1-3, 11

In chapter seven, the four winds are restrained to blow upon the land (Palestine) until the servants of God are sealed in their foreheads. (Rev. 7: 1-3) Once all who would obey the gospel had done so, the winds of war would be loosed to sweep across Palestine, destroying Biblical Israel forever. The imagery of chapter nine depicts the invading armies of Rome in the form of a locust army from the bottomless pit (the "abomination of desolation"), which denudes the land, subjecting it to sword and famine. The king over the army is the angel of the bottomless pit, the emperor Nero. The bottomless pit answers to the sea in Revelation; both serve as descriptive terms

for *heathendom*. The sea is a *geographic* description and refers to the Great Sea, a symbol of the Gentile nations of the Mediterranean. (Isa. 11:10-12) This was the land occupied by Gomer, Magog, Tubal, and the other sons of Japheth after the flood. (Gen. 10:2-5) It is set in contradistinction to the earth or land, the place of God's people. The bottomless pit (*tartarus*) is a *spiritual* description based upon heathendom's association with sin and death. In proof that the angel of the bottomless pit is the Roman emperor we note that the angel is described as a "star" (Rev. 9:1); stars are among the ruling orbs and are a common figure for ruling powers. (Cf. Isa. 14:12-14; 34:4; Matt. 24:29) The angel possesses the key to the bottomless pit; keys are figures in token of governmental authority. (Cf. Isa. 22:22) The angel is called the "king" of the locust army. (Rev. 9:11) Among the forces marshaled by the angel are the "four angels" bound at the river Euphrates (Rev. 9:14), a figure commonly interpreted as the four legions utilized by Titus in the siege of Jerusalem.³ Allowing that the four angels are Roman legions employed by Titus in the Jewish war, it naturally follows that the angel who is king over them is the Roman emperor. But if the angel in Rev. 9:1 *looses*, in Rev. 20:1 another angel *binds*. And if the angel with the key to the bottomless pit in Rev. 9:1 is the Roman emperor, Nero, does it not follow that the angel who binds in Rev. 20:1 is yet *another* emperor? Indeed, we believe it does.

II Thessalonians and "He who Letteth"

There is a general correspondence between II Thessalonians two and Revelation twenty, such that we believe that the latter is a symbolic representation of the essential facts underlying the former. Rather than reproduce the whole section, we give a brief

³ Titus employed four legions in his siege of Jerusalem - The fifth, tenth, twelfth, and fifteenth - drawn from the region of the Euphrates where they were wont to the quartered. (Josephus, *Wars of the Jews*, V, i, 6; III, iv, 2; Tacitus, *Histories*, V, i; *Annals*, V, v; Dio Cassius, IV, xxiii.) Cf. J. Stuart Russell, *The Parousia* (1887), p. 415; Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics* (1890), p. 362; Foy E. Wallace, *The Book of Revelation* (1966) p. 200.

synopsis of the relevant points: The Thessalonians were looking for the second coming of the Lord and the gathering of the church into the kingdom of the Messiah. However, Paul warns that that day was not immediately at hand; first there was to be a falling away, a renunciation of Christ and return to Judaism by many believing Jews and the full and final rejection of Christ by national Israel. This final rejection would come in the form of a persecution instigated by Jewish intrigue, conducted by the authority of Nero Caesar, the "man of sin" and "son of perdition." Although this "mystery of iniquity" was already at work and the Jews were actively seeking to procure official censure of the church that they might destroy it, they were unable as yet to accomplish their objective: The ruling emperor was unsympathetic with Jewish calumnies against the church and acted to protect it by the *religio licita*. This is the meaning of Paul's language to the effect that "only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way. And then shall that Wicked be revealed, who the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy by the brightness of his coming." (II Thess. 2:7, 8) To "let" is to hinder. "He who letteth" was Claudius Caesar. Claudius was unsympathetic to the Jews and actually banished them for their continuous rioting against Christians. (Acts 18:2; Suetonius, *Lives of the Caesars, Claudius*, XXV, iv) However, Claudius would be "taken out of the way" - Nero would take him off by poison, ascend the throne, and be revealed as the man of sin with "all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish." (II Thess. 2:10) Nevertheless, Christ would destroy both Nero and the Jews at his coming: Nero would commit suicide and the Jewish nation and temple, which stood in denial of Christ's divine Sonship, would be forever destroyed.

The points of contact between Rev. 20:1-10 and the historical setting underlying II Thess. 2:1-12 include the following:

Revelation 20:1-10	II Thessalonians 2:1-12
An angel with the key to the bottomless pit	Roman emperors Tiberius, Caius, Claudius
Casts down to bottomless pit	Persecution that arose over Stephen suffers defeat
Binds the dragon	Claudius restrains

	persecution, protects church
Dragon loosed to deceive nations and institute persecution of church	Claudius taken off by poison, Nero ascends throne, persecutes church at instance of Jews
Fire falls from heaven, consuming enemies of Christ	Nero and Jews destroyed by breath of Christ's mouth and brightness of his coming

The reader will observe that the emperors Tiberius, Caius (Caligula), and Claudius occupy the place in the above chart that answers to the angel of Rev. 20:1. This is because it is not strictly necessary to construe the angel as a single individual; as head of the empire, the throne of the emperor had a life and continuity of its own that existed independent of any particular occupant, and itself may be understood by the angel. During the reigns of Tiberius, Caius, and Claudius, the Jews were under imperial displeasure, Tiberius and Claudius both banishing them from Rome or Italy,⁴ and Caius threatening to destroy the nation if they did not allow his image to be set in the Jerusalem temple and worshipped as a god.⁵ Because of these emperors' animosity toward the Jews, after the collapse of the persecution that arose over Stephen, the Jews were unable to obtain imperial assistance in their war against the Lamb. Hence, these emperors, but Claudius in particular (for it was during his reign that II Thessalonians was written), "bound the dragon," not allowing its powers to be enlisted against the church. However, upon the ascent of Nero, the Jews found imperial favor and gained access to the throne: Nero's wife, Poppaea Sabina, was a Jewish proselyte who ingratiated the Jews to Nero and obtained favors from him on their behalf on several occasions.⁶ To gratify the Jews, and to divert suspicion that he had ordered the burning of Rome, Nero thus became the first emperor to persecute the church,

⁴ Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, XVIII, iii, 4, 5; Tacitus, *Annals*, II, lxxxv; Suetonius, *Lives of the Caesars, Tiberius*, XXXVI; Dio Cassius, *Roman History*, LVII, xviii, 5a; Acts 18:2; Suetonius, *Lives of the Caesars, Claudius*, XXV, iv.

⁵ Philo Judaeus, *Flaccus*, X; Yonge ed; cf. *On the Embassy to Gaius*, XVI-XX; Yonge ed. Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, XVIII, viii.

⁶ Josephus, *Life*, 3; *Antiquities of the Jews*, XX, viii, 11.

loosing the dragon from the bottomless pit. (Rev. 20:7-9)

Conclusion

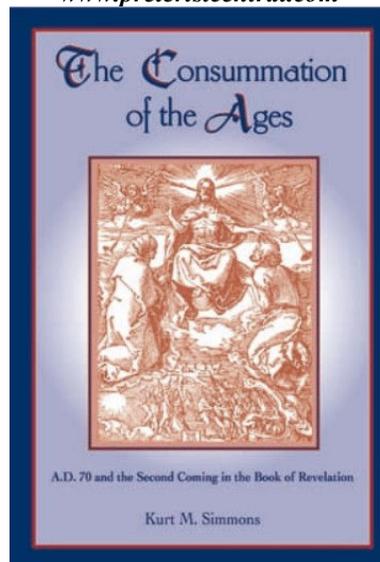
The angels of the bottomless pit were the Roman emperors, specifically Nero (Rev. 9:1) and Claudius. Nero loosed the locust army to begin the invasion of Palestine and destroy Jerusalem; Claudius restrained Roman officials from persecuting the church at Jewish instance. (Rev. 20:1-3) As long as Claudius was upon the throne the dragon was bound. However, the mortal wound to the beast's head suffered in the defeat of the persecution that arose over Stephen would heal. Nero would come to power, the Jews would find imperial favor, and enlist the emperor in the war against the Lamb. Nevertheless, the battle belonged the Lord: Nero and the Jews would go down in defeat and the church enter into its blessed rest in the eternal kingdom of the Son.

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Calvin On Baptism

The following are quotes from Calvin's *Institutes* on the ordinance of baptism. After reading, it is difficult to resist the conclusion that Calvin was really a “*Campbellite*” who believed that we receive the remission of sins in baptism.

"Nor must it be supposed that baptism is administered only for the time past, so that for sins into which we fell after baptism is would be necessary to seek other new **remedies of expiation** in I know not what other sacraments, as if the virtue of baptism were become obsolete. In consequence of this error, it happened in other ages that some persons would not be baptized except at the close of their life, and almost in the moment of death, that so they might obtain pardon for their while life - a preposterous caution, which is frequently censured in the writings of the ancient bishops. But we ought to concluded, that at **whatever time we are baptized, we are washed and purified for our whole life.** Whenever we have fallen, therefore, we must recur to the remembrance of baptism, and arm our minds with the consideration of it, that we may be always **certified and assured of the remission of our sins.**" (Calvin, *Institutes*, Vol. 2, p. 478; emphasis added.)

"I know the common opinion is that **remission of sins, which at our first regeneration we receive by baptism alone,** is afterward obtained by repentance and the benefit of the keys. But the advocates of this opinion have fallen into an error for the want of considering that the power of the keys of which they speak, is so dependent on baptism that it can not by any means be separated from it." (Calvin, *Institutes*, Vol. 2, p. 479; emphasis added.)

Commenting upon Romans 6:3-6, Calvin said: "In this passage he does not merely exhort us to an imitation of Christ, as if he had said that we are admonished by baptism, that after the example of his death we should die to sin, and that after the example of his resurrection we should rise to righteousness; but he goes considerably further, and

teaches us that **by baptism Christ has made us partakers of his death, in order that we may be engrafted into it...** Thus we are **promised, first, the gratuitous remission of sins** and imputation of righteousness; and, secondly the grace of the Holy Spirit to reform us to newness of life." (Calvin, *Institutes*, Vol. 2, p. 480; emphasis added.)

"Thus John first, and the Apostles afterward, baptized with the baptism of repentance, **intending regeneration** and, by **remission of sins, absolution.**" (Calvin, *Institutes*, Vol. 2, p. 481; emphasis added.)

"Ananias, therefore, only intended to say to Paul, 'That thou mayest be assured that they sins are forgiven, be baptized; **for in baptism the Lord promises remission of sins;** receive this and be secure.'" (Calvin, *Institutes*, Vol. 2, p. 487)

"By baptism, God promises remission of sins, and will certainly fulfill to all believers: that promise was offered to us in baptism; let us, therefore, embrace it by faith; it was long dormant by reason of our unbelief; now, then, **let us receive it by faith.**" (Calvin, *Institutes*, Vol. 2, p. 488)

"The virtue, dignity, utility and end of this ministry, have now, if I mistake not, been sufficiently explained. With respect to the external symbol, I sincerely wish that the genuine institution of Christ had the influence it ought to have, to repress the audacity of man. For, as though it were a contemptible thing to be baptized in water according to the precept of Christ, men have invented a benediction, or rather incantation, to pollute the **true consecration of the water.**" (Calvin, *Institutes*, Vol. 2, p. 490)

"The very word baptize, however, signifies **to immerse;** and it is certain that **immersion was the practice of the ancient Church.**" (Calvin, *Institutes*, Vol. 2, p. 491)

F. W. Farrar

The Early Days of Christianity

Book I
The World
Chapter I
Moral Condition of the World

“Quem vocet divum populus ruentis
Imperi rebus?
Prece qua fatigent
Virgines sanctae minus audientem
Carmina Vestam?”
Hor. *Od.* I, ii, 25

“Nona aetas agitur perjoraque saecula ferri
Temporibus, quorum scelere non invenit ipsa
Nomen, et a nullo posuit natura metallo.”
Juv. *Sat.* xiii, 28-30

“From Mummius to Augustus the Roman city stands as the living mistress of a dead world, and from Augustus to Theodosius the mistress becomes as lifeless as her subjects.” *Freeman's Essays*, ii, 330

The epoch which witnessed the early growth of Christianity was an epoch of which the horror and the degradation have rarely been equaled, and perhaps never exceeded, in the annals of mankind. Were we to form our sole estimate of it from the lurid picture of its wickedness, which St. Paul in more than one passage has painted with a few powerful strokes, we might suppose that we were judging it from too lofty a standpoint. We might be accused of throwing too dark a shadow upon the crimes of Paganism, when we set it as a foil to the lustre of an ideal holiness. But even if St. Paul had never paused amid his sacred reasonings to affix his terrible brand upon the pride of Heathenism, there would still have been abundant proofs of the abnormal wickedness which accompanied the decadence of ancient civilization. They are stamped upon its coinage, cut on its gems, painted upon its chamber-walls, sown broadcast over the pages of its poets, satirists, and historians. “Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee, thou wicked servant!” Is there any age which stands so instantly condemned by the bare mention of its rulers as that which recalls the successive names of Tiberius, Gaius, Claudius, Nero, Galba, Otho, and Vitellius, and which after a brief gleam of

better examples under Vespasian and Titus, sank at last under the hideous tyranny of a Domitian? Is there any age of which the evil characteristics force themselves so instantaneously upon the mind as that of which we mainly learn the history and moral condition from the relics of Pompeii and Herculaneum, the satires of Persius and Juvenal, the epigrams of Martial, and the terrible records of Tacitus, Suetonius, and Dion Cassius? And yet even beneath this lowest deep, there is a lower deep; for not even on their dark pages are the depths of Satan so shamelessly laid bare to human gaze as they are in the sordid fictions of Petronius and of Apuleius. But to dwell upon the crimes and the retributive misery of that period is happily not my duty. I need but make a passing allusion to its enormous wealth; its unbounded self-indulgence; its coarse and tasteless luxury; its greedy avarice; its sense of insecurity and terror;⁷ its apathy, debauchery, and cruelty;⁸ its hopeless fatalism;⁹ its unspeakable sadness and weariness;¹⁰ its strange extravagances alike of infidelity and of superstition.¹¹

At the lowest extreme of the social scale were millions of slaves, without family, without religion, without possessions, who had no recognized rights, and towards whom none had any recognized duties, passing normally from a childhood of degradation to a manhood of hardship, and an old age of unpitied neglect.¹² Only a little above the

⁷ 2 Cor. vii, 10; “Interciderat sortis humanae commercium vi metus,” Tac. *Ann.* vi, 19; “Pavor internus occupaverat animos,” *id.* iv, 76. See the very remarkable passage of Pliny (“at Hercule homini plurima ex homine mala sunt,” *H.N.* vii, 1).

⁸ Mar. *Ep.* ii, 66; Juv. vi, 491.

⁹ Lucan, *Phars.* i, 70, 81, Suet. *Tib.* 69; Tac. *Agric.* 42; *Ann.* lii, 18, iv, 26; “Sed mihi haec et talia audienti in incerto judicam est, fatone res mortalius et necessitate immutabilian forte volvantur,” *Ann.* vi, 22; Plin. *H.N.* ii, 7; Sen. *De Benef.* iv, 7.

¹⁰ Tacitus, with all his resources, finds it difficult to vary his language in describing so many suicides.

¹¹ See my *Witness of History to Christ*, p. 101; *Seekers after God*, p. 38. The ‘taurobolies’ and ‘kriobolies’ (baths in the blood of bulls and rams) mark the extreme sensuality of superstition. See Dollinger, Gentile and Jew, ii, 179; De Pressense, *Trois Premiers Siecles*, ii, 1-60, etc.

¹² Some of the *loci classici* on Roman slavery are: Cic. *De Rep.* xiv, 23; Juv. vi, 219, x, 183, xiv, 16-24; Sen. *Ep.* 47; *De Ira*, iii, 35, 40; *De Clem.* 18; *Controv.* v, 33; *De Vit. Beat.* 17; Plin. *H.N.* xxxiii, II; Plut. *Cato*, 21. Vedius Pollio and the lampreys (Plin. *H.N.* ix, 23). In the debate on the murder of Pedanius Secundus (Tac.

slaves stood the lower classes, who formed the vast majority of the freeborn inhabitants of the Roman Empire. They were, for the most part, beggars and idlers, familiar with the grossest indignities of an unscrupulous dependence. Despising a life of honest industry, they asked only for bread and the games of the Circus, and were ready to support any government, even the most despotic, if it would supply these needs. They spent their mornings in lounging about the Forum, or in dancing attendance at the levees of patrons, for a share in whose largesses they daily struggled.¹³ They spent their afternoons and evening in gossiping at the Public Baths, in listlessly enjoying the polluted plays of the theatre, or looking with fierce thrills of delighted horror at the bloody sports of the arena. At night, they crept up to their miserable garrets in the sixth and seventh stories of the huge *insulae* – the lodging-houses of the poorer quarters of London, there drifted all that was most wretched and vile.¹⁴ Their life, as it is described for us by their contemporaries, was largely made up of squalor, misery, and vice.

Immeasurably removed from these needy and greedy freemen, and living chiefly amid crowds of corrupted and obsequious slaves, stood the constantly diminishing throng of the wealthy and the noble.¹⁵ Every age in its decline has exhibited the spectacle of selfish luxury side by side with abject poverty; of –

“Wealth, a monster gorged
Mid starving populations:” –

But nowhere, and at no period, were these contrasts so startling as they were in Imperial Rome. There a whole population might be trembling lest they should be starved by the delay of Alexandrian cornship, while the upper classes were squandering a fortune at a single banquet,¹⁶ drinking out of myrrhine and jeweled vases worth hundreds of pounds,¹⁷ and feasting on the brains of peacocks and the tongues of nightingales.¹⁸ As a consequence disease was rife, men were short-lived, and even women became liable to gout.¹⁹ Over a large part of Italy, most of the freeborn population had to content themselves, even in winter, with a tunic, and the luxury of a toga was reserved only, by way of honour, to the corpse.²⁰ Yet at this very time, the dress of Roman ladies displayed an unheard-of splendour. The elder Pliny tells us that he himself saw Lollia Paulina dressed for a betrothal feast in a robe entirely covered with pearls and emeralds, which had cost forty million sesterces,²¹ and which was known to be less costly than some of her other dresses.²² Gluttony, caprice, extravagance, ostentation, impurity, rioted in the heart of a society which knew of no other means by which to break the monotony of its weariness, or alleviate the anguish of its despair.

“On that hard Pagan world disgust

Ann. xiv, 42-45) many eminent senators openly advocated the brutal law that when a master was murdered, his slaves, often to the number of hundreds, should be put to death. These facts, and many others, will be found collected in Wallon, *De l'Esclavage dans l'Antiquite*; Friedlander, *Sittengesch. Roms*; Becker, *Gallus*, E.T. 199-225; Dollinger, *Judenth. U. Heidenth.* ix, I, 2. It is reckoned that in the Empire there cannot have been fewer than 60,000,000 slaves (Le Maistre, *Du Pape*, I, 283). They were so numerous as to be divided according to their nationalities (*Tac. Ann.* iii, 53), and every slave was regarded as a potential enemy (*Sen. Ep.* xlvi).

¹³ *Suet. Ner.* 16; *Mart.* iv, 8, viii, 50; *Juv.* I, 100, 128, iii, 269, etc.

¹⁴ *Juv. Sat.* iii, 60-65; *Athen.* I, 17, 36; *Tac. Ann.* xv, 44, “quo cuncta undique atrociora aut pudenda confluent;” *Vitruv.* II, 8; *Suet. Ner.* 38. There were 44,000 *insulae* in Rome to only 1,780 *domus* (Becker, *Gallus*, E.T., p. 232).

¹⁵ Among the 1, 200, 000 inhabitants of ancient Rome, even in Cicero's time, there were scarcely 2,000 proprietors (*Cic. De Off.* II, 21).

¹⁶ See *Tac. Ann.* iii, 55. 400,000 sesterces (*Juv.* xi, 19). Taking the standard of 100,000 sesterces to be in the Augustan age L1,080 (which is a little below the calculation of Hultsch), this would be L4,320. 30,000,000 sesterces (*Sen. Ep.* xcvi; *Sen. Ad Helv.* 9). In the days of Tiberius three mullets had sold for 30,000 sesterces (*Suet. Tib.* 34). Even in the days of Pompey Romans had adopted the disgusting practice of preparing for a dinner by taking an emetic. Vitellius set on the table at one banquet 2,000 fish and 7,000 birds, and in less than eight months spent in feasts a sum that would now amount to several millions.

¹⁷ *Plin. H.N.* viii, 48, xxxvii, 18.

¹⁸ “Portenta luxuriate,” *Sen. Ep.* cx; *Plin. H.N.* ix, 18, 32, x, 51, 72. *Petron.* 93. *Juv.* xi 1-55, v, 92-100; *Macrobius Sat.* iii, 12, 13; *Sen. Ep.* lxxxix, 21; *Mart. Ep.* lxx, 5; *Lampridius, Elagab.* 20; *Suet. Vitell.* 13. On the luxury of the age in general, see *Sen. De Brev. Vit.* 12; *Ep.* xcvi.

¹⁹ *Sen. Ep.* xcvi. 15-29. At Herculaneum many of the rolls discovered were cookery books.

²⁰ *Juv.* i. 171; *Mart.* ix, 58, 8.

²¹ L432, 000

²² *Pliny, H.N.* ix, 35, 8.

And secret loathing fell;
 Deep weariness and sated lust
 Made human life a hell.
 In his cool hall, with haggard eyes,
 The Roman noble lay;
 He drove abroad in furious disguise
 Along the Appian Way;
 He made a feast, frank fierce and fast,
 And crowned his hair with flowers-
 No easier nor no quicker past
 The impracticable hours.”

At the summit of the whole decaying system – necessary, yet detested – elevated indefinitely above the very highest, yet living in dread of the very lowest, oppressing a population which he terrified, and terrified by the population which he oppressed – was an Emperor, raised to the divinest pinnacle of autocracy, yet conscious that his life hung upon a thread;²³ – an Emperor who, in the terrible phrase of Gibbon, was at once a priest, an atheist, and a god.²⁴

The general condition of society was such as might have been expected from the existence of these elements. The Romans had entered on a stage of fatal degeneracy from the first day of their close intercourse with Greece.²⁵ Greece learnt from Rome her cold-blooded cruelty; Rome learnt from Greece her voluptuous corruption. Family life among the Romans had once been a sacred thing, and for 520 years divorce had been unknown among them.²⁶ Under the Empire marriage had come to be regarded with disfavour and disdain.²⁷ Women, as Seneca says, married in order to be divorced, and were divorced in order to marry; and noble Roman matrons counted

the years not by the Consuls, but by their discarded or discarding husbands.²⁸

To have a family was regarded as a misfortune, because the childless were courted with extraordinary assiduity by crowds of fortune-hunters.²⁹ When there were children in a family, their education was left to be begun under the tutelage of those slaves who were otherwise the most decrepit and useless,³⁰ and was carried on, with results too fatally obvious, by supple, accomplished, and abandoned Greeklings.³¹ But indeed no system of education could have eradicated the influence of the domestic circle. No care³² could have prevented the sons and daughters of a wealthy family from catching the contagion of the vices of which they saw in their parents a constant and unblushing example.³³

Literature and art were infected with the prevalent degradation. Poetry sank in great measure into exaggerated satire, hollow declamation, or frivolous epigrams. Art was partly corrupted by the fondness for glare, expensiveness, and size,³⁴ and partly sank into miserable triviality, or immoral prettinesses,³⁵ such as those which decorated the walls of Pompeii in the first century, and the Parc aux Cerfs in the eighteenth. Greek statues of the days of Phidias were ruthlessly decapitated, that their heads might be replaced by the scowling or imbecile figures of a Gaius or a Claudius. Nero, professing to be a connoisseur, thought that he improved the Alexander of Lysimachus by gilding it from head to foot. Eloquence, deprived of

²³ Tac. *Ann.* v, 6; Suet. *Claud.* 35.

²⁴ “Coelum decretum,” Tac. *Ann.* 1, 73; “Dis aequa potestas Caesaris,” Juv. iv, 71; Plin. *Paneg.* 74-5, “Civitas nihil felicitate suae putat adstrui, posse nisi ut Di Caesarem imitentur.” (Cf. Suet. *Jul* 88; *Tib.* 13, 58; *Aug.* 59; *Calig.* 33; *Vesp.* 23; *Domit.* 13.) Lucan, vii, 456; Philo, *Leg. Ad Gaium passim*; Don Cass. Lxiii, 5, 20; Martial, *passim*; Tert. *Apol.* 33, 34; Boissier, *La Rel. Romaine*, I, 122-208.

²⁵ The degeneracy is specially traceable in their literature from the days of Plautus onwards.

²⁶ The first Roman recorded to have divorced his wife was Sp. Carvilius Ruga, B.c. 234 (Dionys. Ii, 25; Aul. Gell. Xvii, 21).

²⁷ Hor. *Od.* Iii, 6, 17. “Raque in hoc aevo ques velit esse parens,” Ov. *Nux.* 15. Hence the *Lex Papis Poppaea*, the *Jus trium liberorum*, etc. Suet. *Oct.* 34; Aul. Gell. I, 6. See Champagny, *Les Cesars*, I, 258, seq.

²⁸ “Non consulum numero sed maritorum annos suos computant,” Sen. *De Benef.* Iii, 16; “Repudium jam votum erat, et quasi matrimonii fructus,” Tert. *Apol* 6; “Corrumere et corrumpi saeculum votaur,” Tac. *Germ.* 19. Comp. Suet. *Calig.* 34.

²⁹ Tac. *Germ.* 20; *Ann.* Xiii, 52; LPlin. *H.N.* xiv, *proaem*; Sen. *Ad Marc. Consol.* 19; Plin. *Epp.* Iv, 16; Juv. *Sat.* xii, 114, seq.

³⁰ Plut. *De Lib. Educ.*

³¹ Juv. vii, 187, 219.

³² Juv. *Sat.* vix.

³³ Juv. *Sat.* xiv, *passim*; Tac. *De Orat.* 28, 29; Quint. I, 2; Sec. *De Ira*, ii, 22; *Ep.* 95.

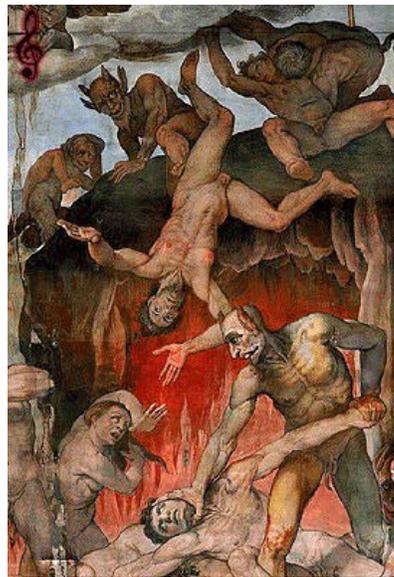
³⁴ It was the age of Colossi (Plin. *H.N.* xxxiv, 7; Mart. *Ep.* I, 71, viii, 44; Stat. *Sylv.* I, I etc.).

³⁵ “Popoygraphia. Cic. *Att.* Xv, 16; Plin. xxxv, 37. See Champagny, *Les Cesars*, iv, 138, who refers to Vitruv. VII, 5; Plin. *H.N.* xiv, 22, and xxxv, 10 (the painter Arelius, etc.).

every legitimate aim, and used almost solely for purposes of insincere display, was tempted to supply the lack of genuine fire by sonorous euphony and theatrical affectation. A training in rhetoric was now understood to be a training in the art of emphasis and verbiage, which was rarely used for any loftier purpose than to make sycophancy plausible, or to embellish sophistry with speciousness.³⁶ The drama, even in Horace's days, had degenerated into a vehicle for the exhibition of scenic splendour or ingenious machinery. Dignity, wit, pathos, were no longer expected on the stage, for the dramatist was eclipsed by the swordsman or the rope-dancer.³⁷ The actors who absorbed the greatest part of popular favour were pantomimists, whose insolent prosperity was generally in direct proportion to the infamy of their character.³⁸ And while the shamelessness of the theatre corrupted the purity of all classes from the earliest age,³⁹ the hearts of the multitude were made hard as the nether millstone with brutal insensibility, by the fury of the circus, the atrocities of the amphitheatre, and the cruel orgies of the games.⁴⁰ Augustus, in the document annexed to his will, mentioned that he had exhibited 8,000 gladiators and 3, 510 wild beasts. The old warlike spirit of the Romans was dead among the gilded youth of families in which distinction of any kind was certain to bring down upon its

most prominent members the murderous suspicion of irresponsible despots. The spirit which has come led the Domitii and the Fabii "to drink delight of battle with their peers" on the plains of Gaul and in the forests of Germany, was now satiated by gazing on criminals fighting for dead life with bears and tigers, or upon bands of gladiators who hacked each other to pieces on the encrimsoned sand.⁴¹ The languid enervation of the delicate and dissolute aristocrat could only be amused by magnificence and stimulated by grossness or by blood.⁴² Thus the gracious illusions by which true Art has ever aimed at purging the passions of terror and pity, were extinguished by the realism of tragedies ignobly horrible, and comedies intolerably base. Two phrases sum up the characteristics of Roman civilization in the days of the Empire – heartless cruelty, and unfathomable corruption.⁴³

(To be continued)



Christ Spoiled the Principality of Sin and Death in His Cross

³⁶ Tac. *Dial.* 36-41; *Ann.* xv, 71; Sen. *Ep.* cvi, 12; Petron. *Satyr.* I; Dion Cass. lix, 20.

³⁷ Juv. xiv, 250; Suet. Nero, ii; Galv. 6.

³⁸ Mnester (Tac. *Ann.* xi, 4, 36); Paris (Juv. vi, 87, vii, 88); Aliturus (Jos. Vit. 3); Pylades (Zosim. I, 6); Bathyllus (Dion Cass, liv, 17; Tac. *Ann.* I, 54).

³⁹ Isidor. xviii, 39.

⁴⁰ "Mera homicidia sunt," Sen. *Ep.* vii, 2; "Nihil est nobis...cum insania circi, cum impudicitia theatria, cum atrocitate arenae, cum vanitate sxsti," Ter. *Apol.* 38. Cicero inclined to the prohibition of games which imperiled life (De Legg. II, 15), and Seneca (l, c.) expressed his compassionate disapproval, and exposed the falsehood and sophism of the plea that after all the sufferers were only criminals. Yet in the days of Claudius the number of those thus butchered was so great that the statue of Augustus had to be moved that it might not constantly be covered with a veil (Dion Cass. lx, 13, who in the same chapter mentions a lion that had been trained to devour men.) In Claudius's sham sea-fight we are told that the incredible number of 19,000 men fought each other (Tac. *Ann.* xii, 56). Titus, the "darling of the human race," in one day brought into the theatre 5,000 wild beasts (Suet. Tit. 7) and butchered thousand of Jews in the games at Berytus. In Trajan's games (Dion Cass. lxxviii, 15) 11,000 animals and 10,000 men had to fight.

⁴¹ Suet. *Claud.* 14, 21, 34; *Ner.* 12; *Calig.* 35; Tac. *Ann.* xiii, 49; Plin. *Paneg.* 33.

⁴² Tac. *Ann.* xv, 32.

⁴³ Eph. iv, 19; 2 Cor. vii, 10. Merivale, vi, 452; Champagny, Les Cesars, iv, 161, seq. Seneca, describing the age in the tragedy of Octavia, says: -

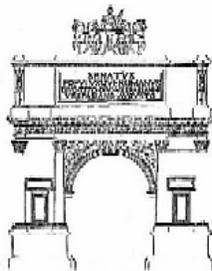
"Saeculo premimur gravi
Qou scelera regnant, saevit impieatas furens," etc.
Oct. 379-437.

EIGHT COMPELLING REASONS WHY: CHRIST IS COMING “VERY VERY SOON” #4

The article we are reviewing claims that one of the proofs that Christ’s coming is at hand is because of the current, “Explosion of travel and education.” An appeal is made to the Living Bible translation of Daniel 12:4, “travel and education shall be vastly increased.” It is lamentable that the current ability to travel so freely is offered as proof of the end of the world! I am sure all of the travel agents will be glad to know they are a sign of the end! Maybe we have a new candidate for the mark of the beast! (That’s a *joke!*)

It needs to be understood that the Living Bible is not a true translation, it is more of a commentary than anything else. As far as being reliable and true to the original text it leaves more than a little to be desired. Thus, to try to prove that the end is at hand based on a highly suspect “translation” is dubious at very best. I have examined all of the translations in my library, and have not been able to find one that agrees with the Living Bible rendition. The LXX (*The Septuagint*, the Greek version of the Hebrews Old Covenant scriptures. This is the version that Jesus quoted from very often) renders the verse, “until many are taught, and knowledge is increased,” not a word about the so-called explosion of travel!

In Matthew 24 Jesus alludes to Daniel 12 no less than three times. He predicted the time of the end (Daniel 12:4, 9/ Matthew 24:2-3, 14). He alludes to the unparalleled time of tribulation (Daniel 12:1/ Matthew 24:21). He speaks of the Abomination of Desolation (Daniel 12:11/ Matthew 24:15). There is no doubt therefore,



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that in Matthew 24, Jesus was drawing on Daniel’s prediction. And significantly, Jesus said all of these things would be fulfilled *in His generation* (Matthew 24:34)!

The author of the article also failed to notice that Daniel was told when his prediction would be fulfilled, and it was not to be in the twentieth century! In Daniel 12:6-7 Daniel records the following words, “One (angel, DKP) said to the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, ‘How long shall the fulfillment of these wonders be?’ (These *wonders* include *the time of the end* in verse 4, DKP) Then I heard the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, when he held up his right hand and his left hand to heaven, and swore by Him who lives forever, that it shall be for a time, times, and half a time; and when the power of the holy people has been completely shattered, all these things shall be finished.”

The holy people was the nation of Israel. Daniel was told that the time of the end, when “many shall run to and fro” would be when Israel was completely shattered! There is only one time in history that qualifies as the time of the fulfillment of this prophecy.

Daniel was written after the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B. C.. Yet he foresaw a time when Israel would be completely decimated. *That can only be the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.* This agrees perfectly with Matthew 24. Jesus said of Jerusalem’s fate, “The time is coming in which not one stone shall be left standing on top of another” (Matthew 24:2). That sounds like a complete destruction, does it not?

Daniel and Jesus agree. The time of the end was to arrive with the fall of Jerusalem, and that happened in A.D. 70. To apply Daniel 12 to any other event yet future is a denial of what he and Jesus said. All the travel agents can rest easy!