



The Sword & The Plow

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Why I am a Preterist Part II

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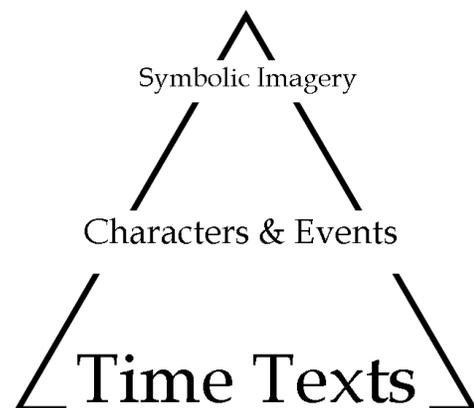
Introduction

In this article, we continue our study of Biblical Eschatology and *Why I am a Preterist*.

The Three-Story Pyramid of Biblical Interpretation

The body of scripture devoted to the topic of Eschatology may be divided into three categories: 1) Time Texts, 2) Characters & Events, and 3) Veiled Speech and Symbolic Imagery. The time texts are *direct statements* about *when* the things predicted would be fulfilled. The second group, characters and events, consists of passages describing *readily identifiable individuals and nations, and historically verifiable events* associated with Christ's second coming. The third group, veiled speech and symbolic imagery, does not provide new or different material from the others. Rather, it merely describes the time, characters, and events in a *different form or manner*.

Even though they merely describe the time, characters, and events in a different form, because such passages are susceptible to varying interpretations, it is useful, if not necessary, to assign them a separate place of their own.



It is a basic rule of hermeneutics that *difficult or obscure passages are to be interpreted in light of others that are open and plain*. Thus, as we approach the corpus of eschatological writings, the foundation of our interpretation should be *express statements* of time. Next, should come passages whose characters and events are *readily identifiable*. Last in order are passages that are of a *veiled or symbolic* nature. In other words, we interpret the symbolic passages in light of the other categories, and not vice versa.

This three-story pyramid is the foundation of the Preterist interpretation of eschatology. In our first article, *Why I am a Preterist Part I*, we reviewed 37 New Testament time texts, and saw that they unanimously placed Christ's return within the lives of the first disciples. In this article, we move to the second story of the pyramid, by examining readily identifiable individuals, nations, and historically verifiable events associated with Christ's return.

"Everything points to the Destruction of Jerusalem"

I remember almost 30 years ago when a friend of mine, who was serving as a youth minister, brought a young man to meet me. It seems this young man felt that the second coming was a past event. When I asked him why he had this view, he said "because everything points to the destruction of Jerusalem." I could not agree more. Indeed, almost all who become Preterists do so out of this same conviction. The number and variety of passages tying "end time" events to the A.D. 70 destruction of Jerusalem is truly remarkable. When it is then considered that these are fully consistent with the time texts, their combined testimony becomes virtually unassailable. Let's survey some of the many passages whose characters and events tie the second coming to the fall of Jerusalem.

Gen. 49:1, 10 - "And Jacob called unto his sons, and said, Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you that which shall befall you in the last days...the scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be."

This passage, spoken by the patriarch Jacob upon his deathbed, ties the "last days" to events bound up with Biblical Israel and the coming of Christ. Since the "last days" are tethered by this prophecy to Biblical Israel, when the nation terminated and ceased to exist so did the last days. Indeed, the "last days" are coterminous with the last end and closing days of the Jewish state. Jacob does not directly describe the destruction of the Jewish nation, but his saying "what will *befall you* in the last days" certainly carries ominous overtones

suggesting that event. In saying that the monarchial power would not depart from Judah until Shiloh (Christ) had come, Jacob alludes to the political end and existence of the nation. With the appearance of Christ, a new dynasty and world epoch would begin, in which the government would devolve upon Christ, who now reigns earth's nations from his throne in heaven. In transferring the government to heaven, Christ removed the mantle of authority from national Israel upon earth. And since the Jews murdered Christ and persecuted his church, Jesus sent and destroyed the nation by the armies of Rome.

Num. 24:14-25 - "And now, behold, I go to my people: come therefore, and I will advertise thee what this people shall do to thy people in the latter days...I shall see him, but not now: I shall behold him, but now nigh: there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab and destroy all the children of Sheth. And Edom shall be a possession, Seir also shall be a possession for his enemies; and Israel shall do valiantly."

This is Balaam's prophecy of events that would occur in the latter days. Like Jacob's prophecy, Christ was to appear in the latter days while Biblical Israel still existed. Jesus is referred to under the imagery of a "Star" and "Sceptre," and "he that shall have dominion." Christ's "possessing Edom and Seir" should be compared with the prophecy of Amos about the restored tabernacle (house/throne) of David, "that they may possess the remnant of Edom" (Amos 9:11, 12). James said the prophecy of Amos was fulfilled in the apostles' day, as Christ reigned from heaven and the Gentiles came into the church (Acts 15:16, 17). As Balaam's prophecy treats of the same events, it too was fulfilled in the first century. The last prediction in Balaam's prophecy states (Num. 24:24):

"And ships shall come from Chittim and shall afflict Asshur, and shall afflict Eber, and he also shall perish for ever."

The prophet Daniel mentions "Chittim" in a context that makes unmistakable reference to Rome (Dan. 11:30), and is witnessed by the Septuagint version of the Qumran community and the Vulgate in this place, both of which render "Chittim" "Romans."¹ "Asshur" is Assyria and represented the extreme eastern border of the Roman Empire. "Eber" was the forebear of Abraham (Gen. 10:21; 11:17, 26), and is believed to be the root of the word "Hebrew." In saying "he also shall

¹ Cf. Matthew Henry and Adam Clarke *in loc*

perish for ever," Balaam's prophecy becomes the first direct prediction the A.D. 70 destruction of Jerusalem by Rome. Spiritual Israel (the church) would do valiantly and conquer the world, but national Israel would be destroyed.

The Song of Moses & the Destruction of the Jewish State

The next passage we want to look at is the "Song of Moses." This is a long passage, taking up the whole of Deuteronomy 32, so we can only touch upon parts of it here. The prophecy describes the destruction of the Jewish nation, and it is cited by several New Testament writers as overtaking the first century Jews. Here is the introduction to the Song:

Deut. 31:28, 29 - "Gather unto me all the elders of your tribes, and your officers, that I may speak these words in their ears, and call heaven and earth to record against them. For I know that after my death ye will utterly corrupt yourselves, and turn aside from the way which I commanded you: and evil will befall you in the latter days."

This is the third occurrence of the phrase "latter days" we have encountered. In each instance the latter days are tied to the destruction of the Jewish nation and polity. Like Jacob's prophecy to his sons, Moses uses the identical language, describing what will "befall you in the latter days." Here are selections from the Song itself:

*Deut. 32:15-21 - "But Jeshurun waxed fat, and kicked: thou art waxen fat, thou art grown thick, thou art covered with fatness; then he forsook God which made him, and lightly esteemed the Rock of his salvation. They provoked him to jealousy with strange gods, with abominations provoked they him to anger. They sacrificed unto devils, not to God; to gods whom they knew not, to new gods that came newly up, whom your fathers feared not. Of the Rock that begat thee thou art unmindful, and hast forgotten God that formed thee. And when the LORD saw it, he abhorred them, because of the provoking of his sons, and of his daughters. And he said, I will hide my face from them, I will see **what their end shall be**: for they are a very froward generation, children in whom is no faith. They have moved me to jealousy with that which is not God; they have provoked me to anger with their vanities: **and I will move them to jealousy with those which are not a people; I***

will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation."

This passage addresses Israel's future apostasy using the "prophetic perfect" tense, describing future events as if they were already past or accomplished. The passage describes God's abhorrence of Israel, saying, he would *hide his face* from them and see what *their end* shall be. But before God brought about the nation's complete end, he would try to draw them to repentance by provoking them to jealousy with other peoples. This is quoted by Paul in the book of Romans as being accomplished in the first century, and refers to Gentile obedience to the gospel (Rom. 10:19).

*Deut. 32:29, 35, 36 - O that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end!...**To me belongeth vengeance and recompense**; their foot shall slide in due time: for the day of their calamity is at hand, and the things that shall come upon them make haste. For **the LORD shall judge his people**, and repent himself for his servants, when he seeth that their power is gone, and there is none shut up, or left.*

This portion of Moses' prophetic song again mentions Israel's latter end, saying God would be avenged upon the nation and judge his people. The destruction would be so great that it would *end the nation's political power* (existence) and there would *none shut up or left* (cf. Dan. 12:7). This passage is quoted by the writer of the epistle to the Hebrews, who cites it as evidence of Christ's imminent coming in vengeance and judgment upon the Jewish nation:

Heb. 10:30, 37 - "For we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people...For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry."

The epistle to the Hebrews addresses the nation's apostasy from God by clinging to the Old Testament temple ritual while rejecting the gospel of Christ. Persecuted by unbelieving Jews, the epistle warns believers against succumbing to pressure to renounce Christ and return to the law. If there is a passage in the Old Testament that describes this precise period shortly before Christ's return to destroy the nation, it is Isaiah 66.

Isaiah and the Second Coming of Christ

We looked at Isa. 66 in our first article in this series, but include it again since it is so critical to our study. Isaiah opens by describing the Jews adherence to the dead ritual of the law, calling the temple ritual an "abomination":

"He that killeth an ox is if he slew a man; he that sacrificeth a lamb, as if he cut off a dog's neck; he that offereth an oblation, as if he offered swine's blood; he that burneth incense, as if he blessed an idol. Yea, they have chosen their own ways, and their soul delighteth in their abominations. I also will choose their delusions, and will bring their fears upon them; because when I called, none did answer; when I spake, they did not hear: but they did evil before mine eyes, and shoes that in which I delighted not. Isa. 66:3, 4

Next, Isaiah addresses Christians who were being "cast out" (excommunicated) by their fellow Jews for Jesus' name sake. Even before Jesus was crucified, the rulers of the Jews had decreed that anyone who confessed Christ was to be cast out (Jn. 9:22, 34; 12:42). The "appearing" of the Lord refers to his second coming.

Hear the word of the Lord, ye that tremble at his word; Your breath that hated you, that cast you out for my name's sake, said, Let the Lord be glorified: but he shall appear to your joy, and they shall be ashamed. Isa. 66:5

Finally, we see the Lord's wrath upon the Jews as he came in providential judgment upon the nation.

A voice of noise from the city, a voice from the temple, a voice of the Lord that rendereth recompense 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 flames of fire." Isa. 66:3-6, 15

Stephen quoted this passage of Isaiah when tried before the Sanhedrin for saying Christ would destroy Jerusalem and remove the customs given by Moses (Acts 6:13, 14; 7:48-50). This shows the first century fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy and the coming of Christ in the destruction of Jerusalem by Rome.

Zachariah and the Day of the Lord upon Jerusalem

Zachariah 14:1, 2 - Behold, the day of the LORD cometh, and thy spoil shall be divided in the midst of thee. For I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle; and the city shall be taken, and the houses rifled, and

the women ravished; and half of the city shall go forth into captivity, and the residue of the people shall not be cut off from the city. Then shall the LORD go forth, and fight against those nations, as when he fought in the day of battle.

Here is express reference to the eschatological destruction of Jerusalem by one of the latter prophets. The phrase "day of the Lord" describes a time of divine judgment upon the world. The phrase occurs many times in the Old Testament when God brought the armies of the Babylonians and Mede-Persians upon earth's nations (Isa. 13, 34). The same usage occurs in the New Testament; it describes God's wrath upon the world, not the end of the cosmos itself. The "day of the Lord" is mentioned twice by the apostle Peter, once in the book of Acts and once in his second epistle. The citation in Acts quotes the prophet Joel, who also wrote about the destruction of Jerusalem (Acts. 2:17; Joel 1, 2). Peter's second epistle describes the same events, but in symbolic language in which the socio-political elements of the first century world are consumed, and the new heavens and earth of Christ's government and dominion assumes their place.

Malachi, Elijah, and the Day of the Lord

Zechariah is followed by Malachi, who predicted the opening of the eschatological period by the appearance of "Elijah". We know from Jesus' word in the gospels, that Elijah here referred to John the Baptist (Matt. 11:14). Notice that the coming of Christ is set in a Judean context:

Mal. 3:1, 2 - Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the LORD, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the LORD of hosts. But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap: And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the LORD an offering in righteousness.

Mal. 4:1- For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the LORD of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch... Behold, I will send

you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD: And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.

The Old Testament thus closes with eschatological warnings of the "day of the Lord" marked by the Messiah's coming, who would be preceded by the appearance of "Elijah" (John the Baptist). The period in which we are to look for the events predicted therefore belongs to that of the first disciples, not we who live thousands of years later.

New Testament Predictions of Jerusalem's Fall

The Old Testament closed with Malachi's warning of a coming day of wrath. The New Testament opens with John renewing those warnings, saying that the time was now fulfilled and the day was soon at hand:

Matt. 3:7-12 - But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance: And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance. but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire: 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.

John warned the religious rulers of his day that the axe was already laid to the root of the trees, indicating that the eschatological period had been upon. Christ would soon appear, who would gather his followers into heaven by martyrdom, but burn up the persecutors with unquenchable fire.

Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen

This parable is one of the more explicit in terms of Christ's coming to destroy the Jewish nation. The parable describes Israel as God's vineyard (cf. Isa. 5:1-5), let out to wicked tenants, who refuse to render the

owner his due. They kill the servants sent to them one by one, and finally, kill also the owners son. Jesus then ends the parable asking:

Matt. 21:40-46 - When the lord therefore of the vineyard cometh, what will he do unto those husbandmen? They say unto him, He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons. Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes? Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof. And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder. And when the chief priests and Pharisees had heard his parables, they perceived that he spake of them. But when they sought to lay hands on him, they feared the multitude, because they took him for a prophet.

The chief priests and Pharisees clearly understood that Jesus had spoken this parable against them, thus confirming the first century context of the prediction. The imagery of the Stone crushing its opponents evokes the prophecies of Psalm 2, 110, and Daniel 2.

The Great Denunciation upon Jerusalem

Shortly before Jesus' arrest, he made his "great denunciation" upon Jerusalem, pronouncing seven woes upon the scribes and Pharisees and Jerusalem itself, ending with a prediction of his coming and the nation's destruction.

Matt. 23:34-39 - Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: and some of them ye shall kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city: That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar. Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen

gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.

Here is explicit reference to Jesus' coming in the events that witnessed Jerusalem's fall for murder of Christ and those sent in his name. This prediction, which refers to events in history, should be coupled with related predictions of time in Matt. 10:23, 16:27, 28, and 26:64.

Jesus' Great Eschatological Discourse

After his Great Denunciation, Jesus left the temple and walked to the Mount of Olives a short distance away, where his disciples asked further clarification of his predictions. Jesus then devoted the whole of Matt. 24 and 25 to explaining world events that would transpire at his coming, including Jerusalem's fall:

Matt. 24:1-3 - And Jesus went out, and departed from the temple: and his disciples came to him for to shew 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 left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down. And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?

The disciples asked three questions: 1) when will these things be (e.g., the destruction of Jerusalem); 2) what shall be the sign of thy coming and of the 3) end of the world/age? The word rendered "world" (Gk. *aión*) is given as "age" in many modern translations. The disciples wanted to know what signs would precede the end of the world-age, which would yield to the kingdom and dominion of Christ. Messiah would put all enemies beneath his feet. Since the Jews and Romans set themselves up as the great enemies of the church and gospel, both were marked for wrath. But Jerusalem, since it was the font whence sprung the poison of hatred against the gospel, was delivered to utter destruction. The time set for fulfillment of the things described was the lifetime of the apostles, or "this generation" (Matt. 24:34; cf. Matt. 10:23; 16:27, 28).

The Destruction of Jerusalem in Revelation

The symbolism and imagery of Revelation belongs to the top story of our interpretative pyramid, but there is at least one explicit reference to Jerusalem in its pages.

Rev. 11:1, 2 - And there was given me a reed like unto a rod: and the angel stood, saying, Rise, and measure the temple of God, and the altar, and them that worship therein. But the court which is without the temple leave out, and measure it not; for it is given unto the Gentiles: and the holy city shall they tread under foot forty and two months.

Reference to the "holy city" Jerusalem being trodden underfoot for 42 months (3 1/2 years) should be compared with Luke's version of the Olivet Discourse, which uses identical language:

Lk. 21:23, 25 - "For these be the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled...and they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled."

The similarity of language fairly conclusively shows an identity of subject, and means that Revelation describes, at least in part, the destruction of Jerusalem. Indeed, given the continuous and repeated reference to the eschatological destruction of the Jewish nation beginning in Genesis and onward, it would be impossible for Revelation not to treat of this event. John continues his description as follows:

Rev. 11: 3-7 - And I will give power unto my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and threescore days, clothed in sackcloth. These are the two olive trees, and the two candlesticks standing before the God of the earth. And if any man will hurt them, fire proceedeth out of their mouth, and devoureth their enemies: and if any man will hurt them, he must in this manner be killed. These have power to shut heaven, that it rain not in the days of their prophecy: and have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to smite the earth with all plagues, as often as they will. And when they shall have finished their testimony, the beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit shall make war against them, and shall overcome them, and kill them. And their dead bodies shall lie in the street of the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified.

The identity of the "two witnesses" (Gk. "martyrs") is a matter of great dispute. We believe that this refers to Peter and Paul, whose martyrdom marked the beginning of the persecution under Nero and the Jews (the "beast" which ascends out of the bottomless pit), which continued 3 1/2 years ("three days and a half" v. 9, 11). But if the identity of the "two witnesses" is open to question, the "great city" is not, for John specifically tells us it is the city "where our Lord was crucified." If we trace the phrase "great city" throughout the rest of the book, we will find that Jerusalem, which is here spiritually called "Sodom and Egypt" is elsewhere called "Babylon the Great," the spiritual harlot that persecuted Christ's disciples and was the driving force behind Nero's war against the church (Rev. 14:8; 16:19; 18:2, 10). Destruction of the great harlot is one of the major themes of Revelation, and the language attributing to her the blood of all earth's martyrs tracks precisely Jesus' saying in the Great Denunciation:

Matt. 23:35

"That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar."

Revelation 18:24

"And in her was found the blood of prophets, and of saints, and of all that were slain upon the earth."

This short survey is but a fraction of the verses that connect the AD 70 destruction of Jerusalem with the eschatological kingdom and coming of Christ. From Genesis to Revelation, the fall of Jerusalem emerges as one of the leading characters and events, which would mark the end of the old world and the beginning of the new. The young man's statement to me thirty years ago that "everything points to the fall of Jerusalem" at the second coming of Christ is certainly correct.

The Roman Empire: The Thorne in Futurism's Side

The next great eschatological figure is Rome. We have already seen that Rome ("Chittim") would be the latter day nation that brought about the destruction of the Hebrew state ("Eber") (Num. 24:24). However, Rome's place on the eschatological stage is most often associated with the prophecies of Daniel and the fourth world empire, and its persecution of the saints.

The prophet Daniel lived during the Babylonian captivity. The Jewish nation was destroyed by the Assyrio-Babylonians invasions, culminating in the

destruction of Jerusalem 586 B.C. The prophet Daniel was carried into captivity as a young man, and was made an officer in the king's court. King Nebuchadnezzar was given a dream by God, which Daniel miraculously interpreted for the king by prophetic gifts. The dream showed four world empires, beginning with Babylon, but ending with the kingdom and coming of Christ. These four empires are universally recognized as Babylon, Mede-Persia, Greece, and Rome (see Daniel 2). The same succession of world empires before the coming of Christ is portrayed in Daniel 7, where they are represented by four beasts that rise successively in the earth. The fourth is a persecutor of the saints, but Christ comes and destroys the persecutor (portrayed as a "little horn" upon the beast), and the kingdom and dominion under the whole heaven devolves upon the saints (Dan. 7:23-27).

We can even pin-point the time in Roman history when these events had to occur, as described by the prophet Daniel. First, the period was one when the Roman Empire was marked by a ten-fold division of its political powers, portrayed in Nebuchadnezzar's dream by the images' ten toes and in Daniel 7 by the fourth beast's ten horns. We believe this points to the ten senatorial provinces created by Augustus in 27 BC, as a sop to the senate and to preserve the traditional form of republican government. The other terminus marking the coming of Christ was the persecution of the saints immediately before the destruction of the Jewish state. In Daniel seven, a little horn (Nero Caesar) persecuted the saints, but the persecution ends with the coming of the "Ancient of days." In Daniel 12, these same events are described as a time of "great tribulation" for the saints that ends when "Michael" (Christ) stands up on behalf of his people, culminating in the resurrection from Hades (Dan. 12: 1, 2). The vision expressly states that it would be fulfilled when the Jewish nation was destroyed:

"When he shall have accomplished to scatter the power of the holy people, all these things shall be finished." Dan. 12:7; cf. Deut. 32:36

Thus, the window for fulfillment is about 100 years (27 BC to AD 70). (See our commentary on Daniel for a full explication of these visions).

Although interpretation of Daniel's visions belongs in part to the third tier of our interpretative pyramid (veiled speech and symbolic imagery), it overlaps the second tier of *readily identifiable historical characters and events*. Rome's place as an eschatological figure is universally acknowledged, even by futurists. Futurists admit the succession of world empires portrayed in Daniel consist in *Babylon, Mede-Persia, Greece, and*

Rome. However, as Rome has disappeared from the world stage, they believe the Roman Empire will be *revived* before the end. The late John F. Walvoord, former president of the Dallas Theological Seminary and a vocal proponent of Dispensationalism, thus writes of the beast portrayed Revelation:

*"In the first ten verses of chapter 13, a character is introduced of central importance to the events of the great tribulation. This passage is first of all a revelation of the revived Roman Empire in its period of worldwide dominion...The identity of this beast is quite clear in its reference to the revived Roman Empire, as the description is similar to that found in Daniel 7:7-8...The wounding of the heads seems instead to be a reference to the fact that the Roman Empire as such seemingly died and is now going to be revived."*²

According to Walvoord, the dragon of Revelation is also the revived Roman Empire:

*"The second sign appearing in heaven is described as a great red dragon having seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns upon his heads. From the similar description given in 13:1 and the parallel reference in Daniel 7:7-8, 24, it is clear that the revived Roman Empire is in view."*³

Thus, Walvoord acknowledges that Rome is the world power scripture says would exist at the time of Christ's second coming. However, whereas normal exegesis based upon the identification of Rome as a central actor would require acknowledgement the prophecies describe events fulfilled in ages past, Dispensationalists argue that the prophetic clock for fulfillment was "suspended" and that we are now in a time of prophetic "limbo" until the Jews are ready to convert to Christ, when the clock will resume ticking. Dispensationalists believe that Christ came to set up a literal 1,000 year kingdom upon earth at his coming, but because the Jews rejected Christ, the kingdom and prophecies have all been temporarily put on "hold" until the Jews convert *en masse*, which will only then resume and the end come. However, since Rome is permanently fixed as an acknowledged character upon the world stage at the second coming, Dispensationalists are forced to "revive" the Roman Empire so that the prophecies can

² John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Moody Press, 1967), pp. 197-199.

³ *Ibid*, p. 189.

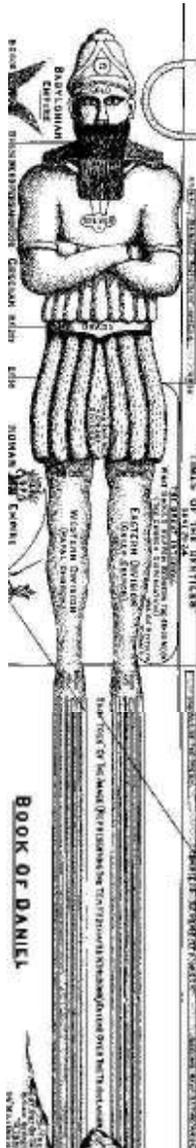
be made to predict future events. Certainly, this is dubious exegesis at best. In either case, it should be compared with the Continuous Historical model.

The Continuous Historical method believes that books like Daniel and Revelation portray a continuous panorama of history from the time of their writing until earth's supposed end. Like Futurists, the Continuous Historical school recognizes that the kingdom and coming of Christ are intimately connected Roman Empire. However, where Futurists argue for a *revived* Roman Empire, the Continuous Historical school extends the Roman rule and era, arguing that the Roman Catholic Church and Papacy assumed its mantle and were a continuation of its empire. According to this school of thought, the ten toes of the image of Nebuchadnezzar's dream (Dan. 2) and the ten horns of the fourth beast (Dan. 7) are ten nations or kingdoms that the Roman Empire allegedly divided into following the reign of Theodosius the Great (AD 295-347). Sir Isaac Newton thus wrote:

"The fourth Beast was the empire which succeeded that of the Greeks, and this was the Roman...This Empire continued in its greatness till the reign of Theodosius the great; and then brake into ten kingdoms, represented by the ten horns of this Beast."

The eleventh horn, which rose up among the ten (Dan. 7:8), is asserted to be the Catholic Church and Papacy:

It was a horn of the fourth Beast, and rooted up three of his first horns; and therefore we are to look for it among the nations of the Latin Empire, after the rise of the ten horns. But it was a kingdom of a different kind from the other ten kingdoms, having a life or soul peculiar to itself, with eyes and a mouth. By its eyes it was a Seer; and its mouth speaking great things and changing times and laws, it was a Prophet as well as a King. And such a Seer, a Prophet and a King, is the Church of Rome...With his mouth he gives laws to kings and nations as an Oracle; and pretends to Infallibility, and that his dictates are binding to the whole world; which is to be a Prophet in the highest degree...In the eighth century, by rooting up and subduing the Exarchate of Ravenna, the kingdom of the Lombards, and the Senate and Dukedom of Rome he acquired Peter's Patrimony out of their dominions; and thereby rose up as a temporal Prince or King, or horn of the fourth Beast.



Although this view was widely received during the Reformation, no respected scholarship believes it today. History has moved on and the Catholic Church's complete irrelevance in world events no longer allows us to suppose that it figures in the books of Daniel or Revelation, particularly as any sort of credible world power capable of leading world-wide persecution of the saints. Besides, the whole hypothesis runs counter to scripture in many places. Jesus expressly declared that his kingdom and coming would occur in the lives of the first disciples (Matt. 16:27, 28; 26:64; Mk. 8:38; 9:1; 14:62). But by this hypothesis, the kingdom and coming of Christ have not come after 2,000 years. Moreover, Daniel set 490 prophetic weeks from the order of Artaxerxes Longimanus to rebuild Jerusalem's wall (454 B.C.) to "seal up the vision and prophecy" (Dan. 9:24). Thus, apart from some theory suspending the prophetic clock like that used by Dispensationalists, the whole period covered by

Daniel's visions cannot reach beyond the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. The whole period from Babylon to Theodosius the Great was less than 1,000 years, which by the Continuous Historical method fills up the period from the head to the ankles in the image of Nebuchadnezzar's dream. But the feet and toes, which allegedly represent the period belonging to Papal dominion, represent almost 1,700 years. Thus, the feet and toes take up nearly twice the time span represented by the rest of the entire body. Those are very long toes and they grow longer every day!

In sum, Imperial Rome stands as a readily identifiable historical character, which scripture associates with the eschatological coming of Christ. Since there is no credible way to revive the Roman Empire or to extend its life, we are forced to place the second coming as a past event. And why shouldn't we in light of the time texts and other indicia pointing that way?

A Future Temple & Elijah

Other "end time" figures Futurists believe will be revived or reappear include the Jerusalem temple and Elijah. Destruction of the Jerusalem temple is an unmistakable part of Jesus' Olivet Discourse connected with his return. Ignoring the obvious historical context and Jesus' statement placing his return within his own generation (Matt. 24:34), Dispensationalists argue a "third temple" will be built sometime in the future. Regarding the temple portrayed in Rev. 11:1, 2, Walvoord states,

"The Temple here is apparently that which will be in existence during the great tribulation. Originally constructed for the worship of the Jews and the renewal of their ancient sacrifices, during the great tribulation it is desecrated and becomes the home of an idol of the world ruler."⁴

According to Walvoord, the appearance of "Elijah" who was to appear before the day of the Lord was only "partially" fulfilled in John the Baptist and will therefore in some form or manner appear again:

"Support for the identification of Elijah as one of the two witnesses is found in the prediction that Elijah will come 'before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord' (Mal. 4:5). This seem to be at least partially fulfilled by the coming of John the Baptist according to the discussion of Christ with his disciples."⁵

⁴ Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 176.

⁵ Ibid, 178, 179.

Why are Futurists forced to bring these ancient characters back onto the stage of history? It is owing to their belief in a literal kingdom upon earth and the sudden, cataclysmic end to the universe at Christ's return. In other words, they interpret the third tier of the pyramid - the symbolic speech and veiled language - literally, and are thus forced to ignore the time texts

and revive ancient historical characters. We leave to the reader to decide which paradigm is the more reasonable: The Preterist view, which takes the scriptures as it finds them, or the Future view, which is constantly forced to "fudge" in order to validate its views.



"Everything points to the destruction of Jerusalem"

The Bottomless Pit

By

Kurt Simmons

Among the imagery of Revelation, the bottomless pit holds a prominent place. The locust army bearing the image of “scorpion-centaurs” emerges from the pit. (Rev. 9:1ff) Also, the beast and dragon are shut up in the pit and rise from thence to make war on the saints. (Rev. 11:7; 17:8; 20:1-3; 7-11) Because the pit is central in the imagery of Revelation, particularly to the millennial binding of the dragon and beast, it is important that we understand aright the meaning of this symbol.

Historical Antecedents and Associations

The bottomless pit first occurs in Rev. 9:1, 2 where it is portrayed as a great smoking cavern, debouching smoke and fumes from the bowels of hell:

“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.” (Emphasis added)

The basic imagery of the *smoking furnace* hales from Genesis nineteen and the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah. Scripture records that God rained fire and brimstone upon the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, turning them to ash. In the morning, Abraham rose up and viewed the place where the cities had been “and lo, the smoke of the country went up as the *smoke of a furnace*” (Gen. 19:28, emphasis added).

Sheol & the Pit

The overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah made a permanent impression upon the human psyche; all subsequent literature, pagan and divine, portraying *hell* as a place of sulfurous fumes and continuous burnings probably derive from this source. Fire and brimstone become synonymous with the fate of the wicked. The basic imagery of Sodom’s overthrow is picked up and developed in the prophets where it becomes identified with *sheol* (the place of the dead), the *pit*, and

destruction. Concerning the king of Babylon Isaiah writes:

“*Hell* from beneath is moved for thee to meet thee at thy coming: it stirreth up the dead for thee, even all the chief ones of the earth; it hath raised up from their thrones all the kings of the nations...Thy pomp is brought down to the *grave*, and the noise of viols: the worm is spread under thee, and the worms cover thee...all the kings of the nations, even all of them, lie in glory, every one in his own house [sepulcher]. But thou art cast out of thy grave like an abominable branch, and as the raiment of those that are slain, thrust through with a sword, that go down to the stones of the *pit*” (Isa. 14:9-19, emphasis added).

Here, we see that hell (*sheol*), the grave, and the pit are closely related and involve the idea of a subterranean realm to which the dead descend. There seems implicit in the language of a “pit” and covering of worms the notion of a mass burial site, similar to the *puticuli* - corpse-pits - of the Romans, where the bodies of criminals and those killed in the arena were carelessly flung to rot and putrefy. In other passages, the image of a mass funeral pyre is employed. Concerning the destruction of 185,000 soldiers of the Assyrian host by the angel of the Lord, Isaiah wrote:

"For through the voice of the Lord shall the Assyrian be beaten down, which smote with a rod...For **Tophet** is ordained of old; yea, for the king it is prepared; he hath made it **deep** and large: the pile thereof is **fire** and much wood; the breath of the Lord, like a stream of **brimstone**, doth kindle it" (Isa. 30:31-33; emphasis added; cf. Isa. 37: 36).

Gehenna, Fire & Worms

Tophet is another name for the valley of Hinnom (*gehenna*) and answers to the **lake of fire** and **second death**. (Cf. Matt. 10:28; Jam. 3:6; Rev. 19:20; 20:14, 15.) (The Old Testament makes no distinction between the temporary place of the lost in *sheol* and their

permanent destruction in gehenna.) Tophet/gehenna was a place outside of Jerusalem's walls where the Israelites sacrificed their children to Molech (II Chron. 28:3, 33:6; Jer. 7:31; 19:2-6); it was later polluted by Josiah (II King 23:10) and afterwards made a place in which the refuse of the city was burnt. It was here that the Israelites buried and burned the 185,000 corpses of the Assyrian host, and for that reason became identified with the destruction and place of the lost. In a subsequent chapter, Isaiah refers to Tophet/gehenna and the mass burial and cremation of almost 1 million Jews who starved to death during the siege by Titus, saying, "their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched" (Isa. 66:24; cf. Mk. 9:44). The bodies of those who died in the siege were cast into Tophet beyond the city walls where they were eaten of fire and worms.⁶

In Ezekiel, **casting down** to the pit (sheol) is a poetic reference to the destruction of an enemy army or nation. Ezekiel describes the fall of Tyre thus: "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; emphasis added). 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; emphasis added). Other nations described by Ezekiel as being cast down to the pit also include Egypt, Elam, Meshec, Tubal, Edom, and Zidon (Ezek. 32:18, 22, 24, 26, 29, 30; cf. Isa. 14:9-23; 30:27-33).

Among the pagan poets and writers, the similarity of Revelation's image of hell as a great smoking, cavernous, furnace is equally pronounced. Thus, Virgil's *Aeneid*, an epic poem of the legendary founding of Rome, describes the underworld (*infernus*) as a pit, a deep cave, whose mouth gapes enormously, fuming up from its black throat lethal fumes to the vault of heaven, killing any bird that flies through its vapors. Hell itself has a place of blessing (Elysium) and a place of torments (Tartarus), engirdled by a burning stream and flaming torrent (see generally, lines 219-622). That the Greeks and Romans had partially correct conceptions about the after-life testifies to that all men are derived from a common stock, which, at its genesis, received certain basic truths about life-after-death that were handed down and later corrupted by pagan writers.

⁶ Josephus, *Wars of the Jews*, V, xii, 4; V, xiii, 7

In any event, it seems clear that both Jew and Gentile would have quickly recognized the imagery of Revelation's bottomless pit as referring to sheol or hades.

New Testament Testimony

The phrase translated "bottomless pit" is from the Greek *phreatos tes abyssou*, literally, "pit of the abyss." Where the term "abyss" occurs elsewhere in the New Testament it refers to *Hades*. Thus, in Luke 8:31, the unclean spirit in the Gadarean demoniac implored that he not be expelled into the abyss, or Tartarus, translated in our versions as "deep." Similarly, Paul speaks of Christ's death as involving a descent to the abyss, saying, "Who shall descend into the deep? [*Gk. abyssos*] (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead)" (Rom. 10:7).

Peter, in language very similar to Revelation's binding the dragon in the pit (Rev. 20:1-3) - indeed, its probable source - speaks of "angels" (probably the sons of Seth that sinned by marrying unbelieving women, Gen. 6:1-4), cast down to Tartarus, reserved under chains of darkness unto the judgment of the last day (II Pet. 2:4; cf. Jude 6). These same individuals Peter elsewhere refers to as spirits in *prison* (I Pet. 3:19). Therefore, Hades/Tartarus was not only represented by the image of a smoking cavern or pit, but a prison for the lost pending final judgment.

Finally, Rev. 9:11 describes the king of the locust army by the names of Apollyon (Greek) and Abaddon (Hebrew), which mean **destruction** or **perdition**, also plain references to sheol. The eighty-eighth Psalm demonstrates best the relative identity of the pit, sheol, and abaddon, or destruction:

"I am accounted with them that go down into the **pit**...free among the **dead**, like the slain that lie in the **grave**...Thou hast laid me in the lowest **pit**, in darkness, in the **deeps**...Shall thy loving kindness be declared in the **grave** [sheol]? Or thy faithfulness in **destruction** [abaddon]?" (Ps. 88:4-11; emphasis added).

Thus, by both Old and New Testament sources, the bottomless pit is a clear reference to sheol or hades.

Significance of Symbolism in Revelation

So much for the historical sources, what about the symbolism of Revelation? What is the meaning of the great smoking cavern depicted in Rev. 9, and the army it belches forth: Who is the king of the bottomless pit,

and what are the keys he holds? And, finally, what is the meaning of the dragon and beast being bound in the pit and what historical reference is alluded to by their being loosed?

We believe that John's symbolism of the bottomless pit has a dual meaning. First, it is a *spiritual* symbol pointing to the *realm of heathendom*, or the *kingdoms of the panim* (*pagan nations*). These people, who are also symbolized by the Mediterranean Sea, are associated with hell because they are "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world" (Eph. 2:12). They have citizenship in hell in the same way believers have citizenship in heaven (Eph. 2:19; Phil. 3:20; Col. 1:13). John therefore depicts the forces of heathendom as a vast army rising like smoke, debouched from the bowels of hell.

Keys are a symbol of power and authority. Jesus has the keys of hell and of death (Rev. 1:18), pointing to his power over the grave. He also possesses the key of David (Rev. 3:7; *cf.* Isa. 22:22), which signifies exclusive power to admit believers into the presence of the Father in heaven. In the same way, the key of the bottomless pit (Rev. 9:1) refers to authority over heathendom embodied in the Roman Empire. The king (angel) of the bottomless pit (Rev. 9:11) is the Roman emperor, Nero. Nero looses the **abomination of desolation** in the form of the Roman legions. It was under Nero that the Jews' 3 ½ year with Rome began. Nero commissioned Vespasian to undertake the campaign to crush the Jewish rebellion, which John portrays here as an invading army of locust-like men who devastate the land with sword and famine. The locusts are charged to hurt only those men that have not the seal of God in their foreheads (Rev. 9:4). This seal was placed on the 144,000 remnant sealed from the Jews by obedience to the gospel (Rev. 7:2ff), and therefore specifically points to God's wrath upon the Jews for refusing his offer of grace in Jesus Christ. The locusts have power to hurt men *five months* (v. 5). This seems to anticipate the siege of Jerusalem, which lasted from March/April to August/September, A.D. 70.

The second meaning attached to the bottomless pit points to Tartarus as a prison for the dead, the place where the defeated enemies of God were cast down, as we saw above in Ezekiel. Rev. 13:3 describes the beast (the persecutor of God's people) as having received a mortal wound (death-blow) to one of its heads. This death-blow caused the beast to be cast down into the bottomless pit, together with the dragon (Rev. 20:1-3). There are two persecutions portrayed in Revelation, each lasted 3 ½ years or 42 months. The

first is in chapter twelve and followed fast upon the heels of the ascension of the Man-child (Christ) to the throne of God. The second begins in Rev. 13 when the beast's mortal wound heals and it ascends anew from the abyss. It was to strengthen and prepare the church against this latter persecution that Revelation was written. The first persecution was already past when John wrote. We submit the first refers to the persecution that arose over St. Stephen, and that the mortal wound to the persecuting beast was received upon this persecution's collapse. This occurred by the removal of Caiaphas from the high priesthood, Pilate's departure from Palestine, and the conversion of St. Paul about A.D. 37-38. After Paul's conversion, Luke reports "Then had the churches rest throughout Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied" (Acts 9:31).

The period of peace and stability represented by the dragon's and beast's confinement in the pit was enforced by Claudius Caesar's policy prohibiting persecution of the church, affording it protection of law (the *religio licita*; *e.g.* legally recognized religions). This same period is represented by the four angels holding the winds of heaven until the 144,000 were sealed, after which the Great Tribulation ensued (Rev. 7). The four angels are probably Claudius, the Roman president of Syria, the procurator of Judea, and King Agrippa II who acted to restrain Jewish persecution and keep the peace against those that were for rebellion and war. Claudius is "he who lets" and "what withholdeth" of II Thess. 2:6, 7. As long as Claudius was upon the throne, the church enjoyed the protection of law. Claudius even banished the Jews from Rome for rioting against Christians (Acts 18:2; Suetonius, *Claudius*, XXV, 4). In Rev. 9, we saw that Nero had the keys of the pit and loosed the Roman legions to make war against the Jews. In Rev. 20:1-3, however, the keys (powers) of heathendom are held by another angel who restrains the dragon, binding it in Tartarus. Claudius is the angel of Rev. 20:1, which has the key of the bottomless pit to bind the dragon (the world civil power, imperial Rome), preventing it from persecuting the church. The thousand years speaks to the timeless nature of the spirit/hadean realm (*cf.* Ps. 90:4), and represents the period between the persecutions. Greco-Roman notions about hades had it that the dead remained there a thousand years, after which they were reincarnated to earthly life.⁷ This is exactly what happens with the dragon and beast.

⁷ See our article "Revelation's Millennia and Greco-Roman Notions of Hades." The "first resurrection"

Claudius would be removed and the “man of sin” and “son of perdition” (Apollyon/Nero) would come to the throne, and the church would come under empire-wide persecution. This is represented by the beast’s deadly wound being healed (Rev. 13:3, 14). The beast (and dragon) would rise anew from the pit to persecute God’s people and make war against the saints; a sort of antithesis of Christ’s resurrection to save his people from sin. The period during which the dragon and beast were confined to the pit is described, saying, the beast “was and is not and yet is and shall ascend out of the abyss” (Rev. 17:8; cf. 11:7). “Was” points to the earlier persecution under Caiaphas, Pilate, and Saul (Paul); “is not” points to the period when John wrote during which the beast/dragon were prevented to persecute the church; “yet is” points to the fact that Jewish hatred for the church had not ceased to exist, but was merely repressed – “the mystery of iniquity” was restrained, but still at work (cf. II Thess. 2:7).

“Shall ascend out of the abyss” points to the coming eschatological crisis when the beast would revive in the persecution under Nero. If Peter and Paul are the two witnesses (Rev. 11:3-10), then their deaths speak (v. 7) to their martyrdom at the conclusion of 3 ½ year period beginning with Paul’s imprisonment and trial before Nero. The deaths of Peter and Paul marked the outset of the persecution, which would last 3 ½ days (years), 42 months, or 1,260 days, or AD 64-68, when Nero died.

Conclusion

The bottomless pit is a reference to the hadean realm of the lost dead (Tartarus). In Revelation, the pit is a spiritual symbol of the realm of heathendom over which the Roman emperors sat as kings, holding the keys to the abyss. The pit is also a symbol of death and defeat of the church’s enemies during the period it is restrained to persecute the church; viz., from Claudius to Nero.

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(Rev. 20:4-6) symbolizes the souls of the righteous in hades paradise.

Sacred Criticism, No. XII. A Critique on Psalm XLV.

The Forty-Fifth Psalm, a Critique on which I now send you, may be considered, as the sequel of the foregoing chain of Prophecies, further illustrating, unfolding, and completing the description of the august and divine character of the Messiah – as of consummate grace and perfect Beauty; exercising the most tremendous vengeance on his enemies, and striking terror into all his foes; reigning triumphant for ever with delegated sway, as God and King of Righteousness; surrounded with glory and majesty; his Spouse the Church, most splendidly adorned, and highly favoured, for her beauty and devout submission; and his Sons, the eminently righteous, reigning as Kings and Priests throughout the world, under his auspices, and propagating his praise for evermore.

Several injudicious partisans of the *Literal Scheme of Prophecy* – Grotius, Patrick, &c. injuring the sublime and beautiful allegory, which pervades this enchanting composition, consider it chiefly, if not solely, as an *Epithalmium*, written on *Solomon’s* marriage with the King of *Egypt’s* daughter; and the chapter ground-work of that luxuriant composition, the *Canticles* [Song of Solomon]. But the concurrent and unanimous testimony of the primitive *Jewish* and *Christian* Churches, appropriates it to “a greater than Solomon” – to the Messiah, or Jesus Christ. Most express indeed is the testimony of the *Chaldee Paraphrase* – “*Thy beauty, O King Messiah, aboundeth above the son of man: the spirit of prophecy is stationed on thy lips*” – which is adopted by *David Kimchi*, *Abraham Ben Ezra*, and *Solomon Jarchi*, the three ablest of the Jewish commentators: and “*all the Rabbins agree, that this Psalm doth speak of the Messiah;*” as asserted by *Muir Arama*. And it is judiciously selected as one of the proper *Psalms* for the service of *Christmas* day, in our *Evangelical Liturgy*.

To this Psalm, John the Baptist evidently alluded; beautifully representing Christ, as the Bridegroom, and himself, as his Friend, or Brideman: “I am not the Christ, but am sent before him: *He that hath the Bride is the Bridegroom;* but the Friend of the Bridegroom, who standeth [by] and heareth his voice, rejoiceth with joy, on account of the Bridegroom’s voice. This then my joy is completed” (John 3.28). And thus, *our Lord*, pursuing the Allegory: “*Can the Sons of the Bridechamber mourn so long as the Bridegroom is with them?*” – finely contrasting the innocent cheerfulness of his own disciples, with the rigorous fasts and mortifications of “*John the Baptist’s* disciples,” formed on the usage of the *Jewish* devotees, remarkably recorded by three Evangelists, Matt. 9.15; Mark 2. 19; and Luk. 5. 34. And still further unfolded,

in the admirable and awakening *Parable* of the *Ten Virgins*, attendant on his marriage, Matt. 25. 1. And following up the same clue, the Apocalypse, represents the evangelical Church, “*prepared, as a Bride adorned for her Husband*” - “*The Lamb’s wife*” (Rev. 21. 2, 9) clearly illustrating the last part of this Psalm.

Psalm XLV

For the Precentor on the Hexachord; for [the Choristers] the Sons of Korah: A Hymn, An Anthem of Loves, [or, An Anthem for the Beloved.” Septuagint Title.]

1. My heart is teeming with a *good Oracle*;

I will utter my compositions touching the King:
My Tongue is like the pen of a ready Writer.
2. Thou art most beautiful above the Sons of *Adam*,

Grace is shed forth on thy lips;
Therefore, hath God blessed Thee forever.
3. Gird thy sword upon thy thigh, O thou Mighty,

In thy glory and thy majesty:
4. And in thy majesty, ride prosperously,

And thy right hand shall teach thee Terrible [exploits]:
5. Thy Arrows [are] sharp; Peoples [shall fall] under Thee;

The King’s Enemies shall fail in heart.
6. *Thy throne, O God [is] for ever and ever!*

A Sceptre of Equity [is] the Sceptre of thy kingdom!
7. *Thou didst love righteousness an hate wickedness,*

Therefore hath God, thy God, anointed Thee, With Oil of Gladness, above thy Fellows.”
8. Myrrh, Aloes and Cassia [perfume] all thy garments,

[Taken] out of the ivory Cabinets; wherewith,
9. Among thy treasures, Kings daughters gratify thee

At thy right hand is placed the Queen,
[Clad] in gold of *Ophir*:
10. *Hearken, O Daughter, consider, and incline thine ear,*

Forget thine own people, and thy Father’s House;
11. *So shall the King greatly desire thy beauty.*

For he is thy Lord, and worship thou Him.
12. And the *Daughter of Tyre* [shall come] with a Gift,

The Rich among the Peole shall supplicate thy presence.
13. The King’s Daughter is all glorious in her presence,

Her Vesture is of embroidered gold and needle work,
14. She shall be introduced to the King:

The *Virgins* in her train, her Companions, shall be brought unto Thee,
15. With joy and gladness shall they be introduced,

And shall enter into the King’s Palace.
16. *Instead of thy Fathers shall be thy Sons;*

Thou shalt make them Princes, in all the Earth:
They shall record thy name in every succeeding generation,
Therefore shall Peoples praise Thee for Evermore.

Among the various guesses concerning the import of the obscure Title prefixed to the Psalm; the most probable, seems to be, that *Shoshannim* denotes some kind of musical instrument with six strings (from ששנים, six), like as שלשנים, expresses one with three strings, I Sam. 18. 6; ששנים, one with eight strings, Ps. 6. Title; And נבל עשור, a lute or harp with ten strings, Ps. 32.2; and 144.9. The last clause, “An Anthem of Loves,” seems to be well explained by the Septuagint, applying it to the Messiah, “An Anthem for the Beloved.” Indeed, the remarkable length and precision of the Title, intimates sufficiently, in what High Estimation this Prophetic Hymn, was formerly held by the Jewish Church; as it is now in the Christian; it being one of the proper Psalms, appointed to be used on Christmas day, by our Liturgy: as celebrating the Spiritual graces, the conquests, the divinity of Christ; his everlasting and equitable Dominion; his mystical Union with the Church, or congregation of the Faithful; and the ministry of his Saints, in propagating his Praise throughout all the Earth, to the end of Time.

1. *My heart is teeming with a good Oracle;*

I will utter my compositions touching the King:

In this noble and animated exordium, the Royal Prophet represents himself, as actuated by the overflowing fullness of Divine inspiration, to give vent or “utterance,” to the might-subject with which his “heart” was “laboring.” The Heathen poets frequently adopt the same imagery: Thus Claudius, in his Epithalamium on the Goddess Juno:

*Junonis thalamus audaci promere cantu
Mens congesta jubet.*

And Martial has well expressed the Psalmist’s Pen of a ready Writer:
*Currant verba licit, manus est velocior illis;
Nondum Lingua, suum dextra peregit opus.*

I have rendered, **דבר-טוב**, “a good Oracle,” because the phrase is elsewhere used to denote a propitious prophecy, spoken by or from the Lord. Jer. 29.10; Isa. 39. 8. The Septuagint render it, Logon agapon, here, and in Isaiah; and in Jeremiah, where the oracular import is more strongly marked by emphatic articles, **אֵת דְּבַרֵי הַטּוֹב**: by the plural, **τὰς λέξεις μὲν τὰς ἀγαθὰς**.

And the word, **דבר**, Debar, singly, is frequently so understood; as for instance, in the following passage, Dan. 10.1 – “In the third year of Cyrus King of Persia, an Oracle was revealed to Daniel, (whose surname was *Belteshassar*) and the Oracle was true, and its martial import great; and he understood the Oracle, and understanding was [given] to him in the Vision.” In all these cases, the Septuagint rendering of *Dabar*, is Logos, which should be therefore rendered in similar cases, both of the Old and New Testament, “Oracle;” where “Word,” or “Thing,” or “Matter,” are inadequate to the occasion, or the context, as in John, 1.1 &c.

2. *Thou art most beautiful above the Sons of Adam.*

*Grace is shed forth on thy lips;
Therefore hath God blessed thee forever.*

Aben Ezra judiciously remarks that in the original verb, **יָפִית**, *Iaph-Iaphitha*, (from **יָפָה**, *Japh-ah*, “pulcher fuit”) the repetition of the first syllable of the Root, is intensivitive, and marks the perfection of personal beauty.

*3-5 Gird thy Sword upon thy Thigh, O thou Mighty,
In thy glory and thy majesty.
And in thy majesty ride prosperously,
For the cause of truth, meekness and righteousness:
And thy right hand shall teach thee terrible [exploits].”*

This is a magnificent description of the Messiah in his warlike character; going forth in all his terrors, to punish the adversaries of his kingdom, like “*A man of war*,” as described by *Moses*, in the drowning of the *Egyptians*, Exod. 15.3 and by *Ethan*, Ps. 89.10 and most sublimely, *Wisdom of Solomon*, 18, 14-18, on occasion of the destruction of the *First-born*, that last and sorest of the plagues, of *Egypt*:

“Although the *Egyptians* disbelieved all [the plagues] by reason of the enchantments; yet, on the destruction of the *First-born*, they confessed that the people [of *Israel*] were sons of God.”

*“For when the world was wrapt in still silence,
And might, in her proper speed, holding her middle course;
Thy Almighty Oracle, leapt down from Heaven,
Out of the royal thrones, a fierce warrior,
Into the midst of a land [doomed to] destruction
Wielding a sharp sword – (thin unfeigned command) –
And standing there, did fill the whole with death:
He touched the Heaven indeed, but trode upon the Earth.”*

And the destruction of the enemies of God and of his Christ is also most sublimely described, Rev. 19. 11-16, in a similar imagery, recording both his *primitive* and *new* Names:

“And I beheld the Heaven opened, and lo, a white horse;
And his Rider was called Faithful and True;
And in Righteousness doth He judge and war:
His eyes were as a flame of fire,
And on his head, many Diadems;
Having a Name written, which none but Himself Knoweth; and clad in a vesture dyed in blood:
And his name is called the Oracle of God.
And the armies in Heaven attended him,
On white horses, dressed in linen, white and clean:
And out of his mouth proceedeth a sharp sword,
To strike therewith the Gentiles; For “He shall rule them
With an iron scepter,” and Himself tread the wine press
Of the indignation and wrath of God Omnipotent.
And on his vesture and on his thigh
He hath the Name written: King of Kings
And Lord of Lords.”

5. *“Thy arrows [are] sharp; peoples [shall fall] under Thee; the Kings enemies shall fail in heart.”*

In the usual way of rendering this obscure passage, “Thine Arrows [are sharp] (the people shall fall under Thee) in the heat of the Kings enemies.” The Hyperbaton or “transition,” marked by the Parenthesis, is abrupt and unnatural; wherefore to make the sense plainer, our Public Translation, transposes the words – “Thine arrows [are] sharp in the hearts of the Kings enemies; [whereby] the people fall under Thee.” But the ingenious emendation proposed by *Darell*, in his Critical Remarks, seems much preferable: He refers the verb, ---, to the following (not the foregoing) words of the sentence; and renders it “they shall fail,” or be “dismayed,” or “cast down,” in which sense, the verb is also used in parallel passages: “Let no mans heart fail” (---) 1 Sam. 17, 32. “And they were much cast down (---) in their own eyes.” Neh. 6, 16. This furnishes a most noble climax to the sentence: representing first, the sharpness of Christ’s arrows; next, the havoc they spread and lastly, the general dismay and consternation produced thereby in the heart of all the King’s enemies; even of those who were not engaged in the battle. And the whole accords perfectly with the representations of Holy Write. In another sublime vision of the Apocalypse, Christ triumphant, is thus represented, Rev. 6, 2.

“And I saw, and lo a white horse; and his rider having a bow: and there was given to him a crown: and he went forth conquering and in order to conquer.”

Thus marking his present and future conquests and the later are thus magnificently described, after the opening of the sixth Seal: Rev. 6, 12.

“And lo, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as hair sackcloth, and the moon, as blood; and the stars of heaven fell to the ground, as a fig tree casteth its early figs, when shaken by a great wind: and the heaven departed, as a scroll rolled up, and every mountain and island were removed out of their places.”

And the effects of these tremendous judgments, on the heart of all beholders, is thus awfully represented in the sublimest imagery, 6, 15.

“And the Kings of the earth, and the nobles, and the rich, and the captains, and the mighty, and every servant, and every freeman, hid themselves, in the caves, and in the rocks of the mountains: And they say to the mountains and to the rocks: Fall upon us! And hide us from the face of Him that sitteth on the Throne,

and from the wrath of the Lamb: for the great day of his wrath is come, and who shall be able to stand!”

6-7. *“Thy Throne, O God, [is] forever and ever; A Sceptre of Equity is the Sceptre of the kingdom; Thou didst love righteousness and hate wickedness, Therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee With oil of gladness above thy fellows.”*

We are fully authorized to understand the passage in the usual construction, as descriptive of the divinity of Christ, of the duration of his kingdom, and of his transcendent exaltation, in consequence of his superior wroth and excellence, above his fellows: or the angels; as understood by the Introduction of the Hebrews, 1,7-9, far above every principality, and jurisdiction, and power, and dominion, and every name that is name, not only in this world, but also in the future” Eph. 1, 21. “Angels and jurisdictions and powers having been subjected unto Him,” 1 Pet. 3, 22, “to whom all authority was given in Heaven and in earth,” at his resurrection. Matt. 28, 18.

The following sublime description of his Throne, and of the general Judgment, is also furnished by the Apocalypse, 20, 11-14.

“And I saw a great white *throne*, and Him that sat thereon; from whose face the earth and the Heavens fled; and there was found no place for them: And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before the *Throne*; and the Books were opened, and another Book was opened, which is [the Book] of Life: and the dead were judged out of the things written in the Books according to their works: and *Death* and *Hades* were cast into the Like of Fire: (This is the second Death) and whosoever was not found written in the Book of Life, was cast into the Lake of Fire.

Verses 8-9. “Myrrh, aloes, and cassia, [perfume] all thy garments, [taken] out of the ivory cabinets: wherewith, among thy treasures, kings daughters gratify thee.”

Various and perplexing are the queries of translators and commentators, ancient and moder, respecting the meaning of this obscure and elliptical passage in the original: I have given the meaning that seems to suit it, but with the letter, and with the context, as descriptive of the magnificence of his dress, and the quality of his attendants, the --- (Hicheli,) I render with *Durell*, “Wardrobes, or Cabinets,” – who ingeniously supposes, with others, that it was the root of the Greek word, *χηλοι*, frequently used in that sense by Homer. Odys. xxi, 51

*“She then went up to the lofty floor, where the cabinets,
Stood: in which lay perfumed garments.”*

Verse 9. *“At thy right hand is placed the Queen,”* &c. As Christ is seated “at the right hand of God,” Ps cx, 1. So “The Church,” or congregation of the faithful, his mystical spouse, is placed at his *right hand* also, like the “sheep,” at the last or general judgment, Matt. xxv, 33. And accordingly the same imagery is pursued in the Apocalypse, xxi, 2-9, when *“the New Jerusalem, the Lamb’s wife,”* is represented in vision, *“coming down from God out of heaven; as a bride adorned for her husband.”* Hence, in the Prophetic Scriptures, the idolatry of the Jews and Israelites is so often represented under the symbol of *adultery*: and that our Lord styles his profligate and apostate countrymen, *“a wicked and adulterous generation!”*

Verse 11. *“For He is thy Lord, and worship thou Him.”* To distinguish the *religious worship*, to be paid by the *Queen*, or “the Church” to Christ, from the ordinary *adoration*, or homage paid to earthly kings by the queens. (See the beautiful description of Queen Ester coming into the presence of *Achaserus*, or *Artaxerxes Longimanus*, to intercede for his people, in the Apocryphal Book of *Ester* xv, 1-16.) Our old liturgical translation renders

“For he is thy Lord (God), and worship thou Him.”

As more correctly printed in the older editions; the word God, included in the parenthesis, being intended as explanatory, to distinguish the spiritual Lord, meant from the merely earthly *lord* or *husband*.

Ver. 12. *“And the daughter of Tyre [shall come] with a gift.”* This intimates the conversion of the *Gentiles* to Christ; analogous to *“the Kings of Seba and Saba shall bring gifts.”* Ps. Lxxii, 10.

Ver. 13. “The King’s Daughter is all glorious in his presence,” &c. By “the King’s daughter” is meant “the Queen.” To a more minute description of the splendour and magnificence of whose person and dress, the Psalmist returns; and as ---, Panimo, signifies “His presence,” Ps. 1.11-17. So by analogy, ---, Panimah, should signify “her presence,” rather than “inwardly,” or “within.” The description evidently referring to her external appearance, and the pompousness of her procession to be introduced to the King.

*Ver. 14 – Instead of thy Fathers, shall be thy Sons;
Thou shalt make them Princes in all the earth:
They shall record thy name in every succeeding
generation,
Therefore shall people praise thee for evermore.*

This is addressed to the King, not to the *Queen*, as is evident from the context. *“His Fathers,”* according to the flesh, were the *Patriarchs and Prophets* of former dispensation. *“His Sons,”* the Apostles and evangelists of the new – Wherever the Messiah, or “the Son of Man,” is styled, “Father of the age to come,” Isa. ix, 6. And he promised his Apostles, that “in the regeneration, they should sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”

The harmony of sentiment and arrangement subsisting throughout between this divine hymn and the Apocalypse, (which is surely its finest and noblest comment,) may serve to establish the divine authority of both, as dictated by one and the same Spirit, more concisely to the earlier, more explicitly to the later prophet; and also to repel that strange misconception and perversion of the external evidence, adduced by the skeptical Michaelis, to render the authenticity of the Apocalypse doubtful; which originally, in the primitive Church, was the least questioned or disputed of any of the Canonical Books.

I shall close this work with an admirable Epilogue to the Prophetic Psalms, furnished by The Last Words of David. II Sam xxiii, 1-7.

*“David, the Son of Jess, saith,
Even the Person highly exalted, saith,
The anointed of the God of Jacob,
And the sweet Psalmist of Israel;
The Spirit of the Lord speaketh in Me,
And his word is on my tongue;
The God of Israel hath said,
The Rock of Israel, hath spoke touching Me.
[Of thy seed] The Just, shall be Ruler among Men,
Ruling in the fear of God.
As the morning light shall a Sun arise,
A morning, unclouded in brightness;
[As] the tender herb, after a shower,
[Springeth up] from the ground:
For [shall] not my House [be] so, with God?:
Because He made with me, an everlasting covenant,
Ordered, and established in every [age]:
Because [He] is all my salvation, and all my desire.
For [Sons of] Belial shall not blossom,
All they [shall be consumed] like prickly thorns:
But the Man who shall touch them,
Shall be armed with iron, and the staff of a spear;
At the [appointed season of] rest.”*