**Which Way To The End?!**

*A Primer on Eschatology and the Message of Revelation*

Bill Wepfer, Oct 2018

### Where To Start?

At the Great Smokey Mountains, a trailhead offers several alternate paths. Once you’ve chosen a trail, the destination is foreordained, and every twist or turn seems “obvious” as you stroll along the attractively green but sometimes muddy trail. This is much like eschatology, the study of last things or the end times. Once you’ve committed to a certain viewpoint, your path will seem “obvious,” and you may even shout invectives at ones on an alternate route – “Hey, you’re going the wrong way!” Historic Premillennialism, Postmillennialism, Amillennialism, and Dispensationalism alike sound convincing when forcefully forwarded by their respective proponents, but which one is correct, if any? What about outlooks on the book of Revelation itself – what “path” will you choose? The eschatological cafeteria offers stainless steel bins heated by the underlying hot water of its various promoters, though some seem to have been sitting out a bit too long. What would you like, sir? Futurist Fries, Historictist Ham, Idealist Ice Cream, Preterist Pie, or Eclecticist Egg Rolls? What do all of these terms even mean, anyway? Which trail am I supposed to take to arrive at Biblical conclusions? What theological foods will nourish my soul and which will spiritually starve me, generating more heat than light, more animosity and aggravation than intimacy with the Savior?

Before diving into the particulars, we should consider how we make such decisions in the first place. “Oh, that’s easy – I just go with what the Bible says!” Would that it were so simple! 10 horned beasts, Armageddon, locusts that don’t harm the crops, Gog and Magog – it’s quite a prodigious prophetic pile to sort through, so most turn to their theological “betters” for assistance; but how do you know who to read and trust on the subject? Yes, many “experts” sound quite convincing, but what if they have an unspoken agenda? How would you even know if you’re being misled by a blind guide? As Ferguson has said, when studying the Revelation, it’s best to only use one commentary; you may not be right, but at least you won’t be confused. So how do you choose the “right” one, if such an one even exists?

I was raised and weaned on wild end times speculations. “Look at all the signs of the times! The Secret Rapture is coming soon! The clock is at 11:59pm! It’s almost midnight and Jesus will return any second now – are you ready?!” I believed what I was taught by those more experienced in the Lord for about a year after conversion, but then I recall how bewildered I became trying to find these things myself in the Scriptures during my sophomore year of college. It all looked so nice and neat on the charts, but the Biblical facts were decidedly more messy. What?! Just about everything in Isaiah, written 700 years before Jesus’ day, would not be fulfilled until the Millennium to come, at least 2,700 years later?! So I was informed by my brand new Ryrie Study Bible, but this simply convinced me that something was eschatologically askew. As a physics major, I was reminded of the times I couldn’t correctly derive the known solution, so using some mathematical sleight of hand, “a miracle occurred” and I got the answer that was in the back of the book. Some, it seems, revert to Revelation 20:1-6 as the answer in the back of the book and craft all to fit it, often employing a swift hermeneutical sleight of hand when an uncomfortable passage doesn’t quite fit their presuppositions. And what of the Secret Rapture? Read the alleged proof text (1Th4:16) and you’ll see that the Rapture doesn’t sound very secret at all; rather, it looks to be a deafening event, what “with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God.” Others have defended the Secret Rapture with the “white space” (no text section) between Revelation 3 and 4. With this and other mysterious and magical conclusions, something seemed rotten in the Dispensational state of Denmark!

Isn’t it curious that for some people the doctrine of last things is remarkably central to their outlook on the whole Bible? When a couple of seminary students asked the seminary president and noted head pastor which of two commentaries he preferred for a book of the Bible, he responded – without having read either – “... the one that's premill.” Wow, really?! One’s approach to a book of Scripture that has little end times content still hinges upon its eschatological perspective? Like a whole cantaloupe, this seemed a bit tough to swallow. Let’s step back from this example and ask if the Scriptures anywhere set up eschatology as the core of doctrinal purity. The answer is in the asking. Eschatology is NOT the locus of Biblical truth. OK, then what is? As Jesus told the Jews, “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me” (Jn5:39). Christ did likewise for the two on the road to Emmaus; “beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.” (Lk24:27). Later in the chapter, the Messiah tells the 11, “These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures” (Lk24:44-45). Paul and the Apostles pick up this same theme in their writings. In speaking to Agrippa, Paul says, “So, having obtained help from God, I stand to this day testifying both to small and great, stating nothing but what the Prophets and Moses said was going to take place” (Acts26:22). Like any good preacher, Paul presses home the point by asking, “King Agrippa, do you believe the Prophets? I know that you do.” (Acts26:27). Agrippa understood the import of the query and responded, “Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?” (26:28). The implications of these and a host of additional passages make clear that the center of all the Scriptures, both Old and New Testaments, is not eschatology, but Jesus and His work of redemption. We can emphatically state that if an end times view does not promote the gospel of Jesus Christ, then it is wrong and leads the flock of God astray. If the aim is something other than magnifying the Son’s work on the cross, then it is to be rejected out...
of hand. Jesus as the center is the ONLY Scriptural bullseye, for eschatology or any other dogma. An incorrect center cannot Biblically hold and will ultimately be defeated in coming generations. The eschatological donkey must lay down before the unseen but angry Almighty who stands astride its path with drawn sword in opposition to any end times view that does not exalt Jesus. One need only examine a small sampling of church history to see that the Lord has given His church enough Scriptural keel to right the ship from the strong winds of end times error and stay the course towards the gospel goal.

I once tried to find a Bed-n-Breakfast in a small Welsh town. Unfortunately, all I’d been given were relative directions – “take the 2nd right, then the 3rd left, go straight past the brick house” and so forth. What is assumed with such instructions? That I had started in the right spot! If one began at a different crossroads, as happened to me, then one will end up in a muddy field, where I nearly got the rental car stuck. What’s worse, on occasion it seemed that the instructions aligned with my travels, so I thought I was going the right way when all the while I was way off track. It is the same with end times prophecies (eschatology). If your initial assumptions are off then you’ll end up in a twisted, muddy Scriptural mess. It may seem that you’ve made some of the correct turns – some things will appear to line up with the Bible – but in fact you will have gotten nothing right at all. This is akin to John Reisinger’s example of his wife’s sweater. If she’s off on the 1st button, all the rest seem to fit, but how many buttons are in the right holes? None! Stepping back and looking at the incorrectly buttoned sweater, the error is clear. Maybe stepping back and taking a holistic eschatological overview would help point out where we may have erred at the outset; this will enable us figure out how to start at the right spot while driving, or how to put the first button in the proper sweater hole.

But where do we begin? Fortunately, the Bible itself directs us towards the correct starting point so that we don’t have to lurch about randomly in the Welsh darkness. If we heed them, there are enough chronological clues in the Scriptural texts to guarantee that we begin at the right prophetic crossroads, and then the Biblical relative directions – each turn based on the preceding one being correct, each preceding button being in the right hole – will bring us to the proper conclusions about the last things.

This, of course, is the crux of the matter; namely, does God’s Word direct us on how to explore the prophetic texts, or have we already imported extra-Biblical concepts and then attempted to fit the Scriptures to initial, unproven and typically unspoken assumptions (a priori)? Alas, there can be alternate starting points that put you into that doctrinal muddy field. “Well, this is what I’ve always been taught. My dearly departed grandmother, God bless her soul, sat me down and explained the Secret Rapture, the Great Tribulation, the Millennium, and all that. How dare you imply that she’s wrong!” Tradition is comfortable and popular, but that doesn’t make it right. Others take a decidedly more post-modern approach – “Well, this view of the end of the world makes sense to me.” Yes, but what if your upbringing were altered, if you were raised a Presbyterian or were a Christian in South Sudan – would it “just make sense” then? Biblical truth is not constructed from “what it means to me” tissue paper, easily destroyed by the waters of opposition. Another significant segment of Christians seem emotionally driven by eschatology. “Isn’t it exciting to be living in the last days?! Jesus could come any second now! Look at what’s going on in the Middle East!” Such excited hyperventilating has often produced erroneous predictions concerning Jesus’ return, but, unaunted, the false prophets keep right on falsely predicting. An emotional commitment to eschatological fads will burn out its practitioners as they leap from one crisis to the next, trying to shanghai the Bible into explaining current cultural events, but always after the fact (ex post facto). “Scriptural stability” is hardly an apt description of such emotionally charged prophetic novels. Finally, others may turn to the “great men” argument. “Scofield, Chafer, MacArthur, and a host of my seminary professors all believe this way, so of course I’m going with them. Who are you to call them into question?!” Such men may indeed be influential, but they themselves would admit that they fall far short of infallibility. What if on some things they are in error? Will we uncritically follow theologians and be led like lemmings off the eschatological cliff? Truth is not established by a nose count of theologians, as even they themselves will admit. Luther didn’t launch out against Rome based on then-present theological sentiments, and neither should we democratically evaluate Biblical truth. If a popular vote sets the standard, then should we not all become Bible-denying agnostics like the majority in the world?

Great men, “it just makes sense to me,” traditions, and emotions are logically of a piece, and may not be based very squarely on the Scriptures. To those who hold end times views derived from one of these sources, crossing them often results in a visceral response. Why? Because you defend a truth the way you hold it. If one’s attachment to an eschatological viewpoint is grounded in feelings, then he can offer no rational defense when faced with an alternate viewpoint, and the only possible reaction is to get very, very upset or to feel hurt. Consider the example of the 19th century Scotchman, James Grant:

The millenarians [Dispensationalists] were most zealous in defense of this position [prophetic literalism] – zealous to the point of intolerance and uncharitableness, Grant stated. In conversation with an eminent and gentle Christian lady Grant had challenged the soundness of her literal interpretation of a biblical passage and found himself asked, “What! Do you refuse to believe God Himself when he speaks in his Word?” (Grant 1866 End of All Things, in Sandeen p108). This is an all too common non-argument. “Either you agree with me or you stand against God and the Bible” is an intolerant, uncharitable non-response to a fellow follower of Jesus. Unwilling or unable to defend one’s eschatological foundations, those gently queried turn like cornered beasts and lash out with extended claws, as if any who contradict their firm but fanciful end times convictions are the embodiment of Satan himself who must be attacked with teeth bared, drooling the saliva of hatred. Similar encounters could be repeated ad nauseam, as the author himself has often experienced.

“You’re amill?! So you deny Biblical inerrancy, don’t you?! Do you even take the Bible seriously?! Will you soon baptize infants?!”
What About The Millennium? Five Views

Postmillennialism, Historic Premillennialism, Dispensational Premillennialism, Amillennialism, and the tongue-in-cheek Pan-millennialism – what are each of these and what are their objectives? First off, “millennium” is Latin for a thousand years, referenced several times in Rev20:1-6, a timeframe explicitly given nowhere else in Scripture. Does the Millennium take place after Jesus’ Second Advent? This is PREmillennialism (abbreviated “premill”), where 1000 years of Jesus’ physical presence and rule follow His return. Historic Premillennialism and Dispensationism fit under the premill umbrella. Does Jesus reign during the millennium through His church and then return, ushering in the eternal state? This view represents both POSTmillennialism and the poorly named Amillennialism. Postmillennialism (abbreviated “postmill”) is typically optimistic about the gospel prospects this side of eternity; Amillennialism (abbreviated “amill”) says that gospel progress will wax and wane before the 2nd Advent, with a remnant alone being saved. Pan-millennialism is typically a reactionary stance, the “pannies” often seeking refuge from the Dispensational storm. Let us briefly consider each of these in turn, trying to understand the goal each has in view.

(1) Postmillennialism. The most common Postmill flavor, the modern version often attributed to Whitby (1638-1726), posits that the gospel will expand to the nations and become dominant so that culture itself will be transformed around the globe. Some Postmill promotors say that the church age is the time of millennial gospel advance and will be followed by Jesus’ 2nd Advent; others suppose that in the future, the effects of the gospel will be so pervasive that a golden age of 1000 years (or so) will be ushered in, after which Jesus will come again. The “Postie” hope, then, is for gospel progress in this present age, with the church militant triumphantly advancing either now or in the future.

Who would hold to such a view, especially since the prevailing evangelical notion in the 20th and early 21st centuries is that things are getting worse and worse while the church is becoming increasingly apostate, the supposed Laodicean last phase of church history? In fact, numerous theologians of substance are or were Postmill. As shown by Iain Murray, Postmillennialism was THE Puritan outlook. Worldwide societal improvement linked to the advance of the gospel would increasingly become normative. Given the Reformation and subsequent Great Awakenings, what with whole towns being converted to the last man, all bending the knee to the cross, is it not understandable why this view would become so popular? According to Postmillennialism, gospel power would overcome worldly opposition, ushering in a utopian golden era – what’s not to like about this view? “Christendom” would be ever increasing, victorious over the forces of darkness, and then the end would come. Postmill advocates of varying proclivities include such notables as OT Allis, Athanasius, Augustine, Greg Bahnsen, John Calvin, RL Dabney, Jonathan Edwards, Eusebius, AA Hodge, Charles Hodge, J Marcellus Kik, J Gresham Machen, Iain Murray, John Murray, Gary North, John Owen, RJ Rushdoony, WGT Shedd, Augustus Strong, JH...
Thornwell, and BB Warfield (Sproul p198). With so many weighty advocates, the Postmill view hardly deserves the rapid dismissal it often receives today, though its eschatological optimism does not comport well with our day’s prevailing dour outlook on gospel progress. “Posties” are quick to point out that theirs is an eschatology of optimism about the power of the gospel not shared by any of the other views; their hope is for a wheat field with some tares in it, not for a tare field with a little bit of wheat (cf Mt13:24-30) at Jesus’ return. Upon further investigation, Postmillennialism has more Scriptural support than some suppose, and surely it does not deserve the summary execution it often receives at the theological guillotine of the ill-informed.

[Note: What if one held to this “things are ever improving” outlook but denied the gospel? (Make no mistake, Postmills definitely do NOT teach this!) For example, suppose a brilliant child were raised in an optimistic, things-are-ever-improving Postmill Christian home, yet he remained unconverted to adulthood? How might he implement similar beliefs while excluding the gospel? From such a one we would likely get the social gospel, where the world is getting better and better via man’s efforts. The struggle towards man’s enhancement was clearly the rule of a now bygone era. The 19th century saw the rise of upward progress and revolutionary improvement in the theories of Darwin, Marx, and so forth. These are all in keeping with the Hegelian dialectic – thesis / antithesis / synthesis, with a continual path towards perfection itself. Immanuel Kant struck a similar chord, with perpetual peace being achieved through democracy and international cooperation. The underpinnings of the non-Christian Enlightenment and Modernist views are quite evident – man pulls himself up by his bootstraps and improves the culture. The Gilded Age, where man was always progressing towards higher accomplishments, suddenly had a “sinking” feeling with the 1912 downward plunge of the Titanic; an entire “ever upward” hope sank with that great ship. Hard on the heels of that seminal disaster came the inappropriately named War to End All Wars (a.k.a., The Great War, or World War I), where “Christian” Europe tore itself apart in a bloodbath; the Roaring 20s were sinfully exciting, but thereafter came the despair of the Great Depression in the 1930s; then along came World War II, the destructive epilogue to The Great War; and finally the nuclear fear of the Cold War. Maintaining an “ever improving” stance became increasingly problematic for both humanists and Christians after these events had crushed the progressive spirit. Optimism looks pretty shabby in a pessimistic era.]

[Again, please note that Postmills do NOT support the Christ-rejecting, man-centered conclusions that the world is progressing upward by man’s efforts. Postmillennialism is the Christian version of “things are ever improving,” while the Enlightenment, Modernism, and the social gospel are its Christless philosophical equivalents. Postmill advocates may decry this equation, citing this as the genetic fallacy (the origin of a view makes it false) or “guilty by association” (You’re trying to tie Posties to Darwin!). While acknowledging these concerns, let us be clear that the Postmill outlook is very Christ-centered, seeking to exalt the progress of the gospel and its consequent effects upon society. However, Postmillennialism rose to prominence during a bygone age during which the prevalent notion was that progress would usher in some form of Utopia. Indeed, in the chicken-egg argument, I think one can make a convincing argument that godly Postmillennialism – the certainty of gospel progress – preceded all of these worldly philosophies. The Reformation and the Great Awakening, for example, gave many Christians great hope for worldwide gospel expansion, and these came long before Darwin. Unfortunately, the Christian view of an expanding wheat field was later usurped and corrupted by Christ-rejecting forces to become a utopian belief in the advancing prospects of man via his own efforts (humanism), God being set aside while lightly acknowledged, thank you very much. As often happens, the natural man takes a Biblical outlook – a Christian hope for worldwide gospel advancement – and thrashes it like a rented mule to become a man-exalting creed.]

(2) **Historic Premillennialism.** Historic Premillennialism was coined (by Ladd) to demarcate this theological strand from its Dispensationalist brethren. Historic Premills – alas, there’s no handy abbreviated nickname, like “Dispies” or “Posties” (I prefer “Histie-Ps”) – generally believe that after the church age, Jesus will return to earth and set up His 1000 year reign (the Millennium), after which comes the final conflagration and judgment. This view lacks the Secret Rapture, the Great Tribulation, “imminence,” and other features that characterize Dispensationalism (detailed below). Historical Premillennialism leaves open the question of the Jews and the land in our era or in the future. Overall, it is a fairly barebones system, thus making it logically attractive and easy to explain. For Histie-Ps, the gospel waxes and wanes as it has throughout the centuries, then Jesus comes and sets up His Millennial Kingdom, followed by the final judgment. No up/down/up/down of Jesus or the church, no empty cockpits or missing cab drivers – the simplicity itself makes it quite appealing. Proponents include Erdman, Irenaeus, Justin Martyr, Papias, Tertullian, and RA Torrey (Sproul). In truth, every single premill advocate prior to the 19th century should be characterized as Historic Premill, since that was the only available premill flavor from the eschatological ice cream stand; what became Dispensationalism was unknown prior to the 1830s, a flavor not yet invented for marketing and distribution at the local doctrinal confectionary franchise. Today, it seems that Histie-Ps are in the ascendency. Histie-Ps can count many current and recent major theologians as club members, including Ladd, Mohler, Piper, Francis Schaeffer, DA Carson, Gordon Clark, and CFH Henry (Wiki). Could it be that many of these have forsaken the intricacies and foibles of Dispensationalism while still seeking to remain in the yet dominant non-Presbyterian premill camp?]

[Note: If you want to be “safe” (avoiding being needlessly berated about eschatology) outside of the Reformed tradition, then the Histie-P outlook is your admission ticket. “Are you premill?” asks the prospective church’s search committee, assuming that “premill” entails the sweeping spectrum of Dispensationalism; with honesty the pastoral candidate can answer “Yes!” but this Histie-P man actually means something vastly different by the “premill” term. Being Histie-P is an entirely adequate city of refuge for the M.Div. student who wants a job in the “left behind” church landscape. A Histie-P pastor takes an end times position that he can strongly hold, while simultaneously not taking any particular stand on how the latest war or earthquake speaks of the Lord’s soon return.]
(3) Dispensationalism. Dispensational Premillennialism, or simply Dispensationalism, is heavily favored by many American evangelicals and also crops up where the same have spread their end times beliefs through missions activities. For those familiar with recent paperback and media presentations, Hal Lindsey’s seminal The Late Planet Earth (1970) and Tim LaHaye’s extensive publications and “Left Behind” movie series represent the popular expression of Dispensationalism. One of Dispensationalism’s hallmarks is “imminence” — that is, Christ may return at any moment. The Secret Rapture is where Jesus will come part way down from heaven and whisk away His church, both the living and the just-resurrected dead saints, to heavenly safekeeping just before the soon-coming seven year Great Tribulation. This is Dispensationalism’s first resurrection (Rev20:4), though some hold that the 1st resurrection is after the Great Tribulation (curiously, this would be the second 1st resurrection). The majority report is that this Rapture will take place just before the Great Tribulation (“pretrib”). A minority of Dispies, however, believe that the Rapture will occur in the middle (“midtrib” or “prewrath”) or after (“posttrib”) the Great Tribulation. The timing of the Rapture affords abundant ammunition for extensive, aggressive Dispie internecine warfare. On the following additional points, though, the Dispies appear remarkably united and less combative. Following the Great Tribulation, Jesus will return again (the 2nd Advent, part 2) with His church, though some older school Dispies say that the church will remain in heaven during the Millennium. While the masses assume that the Secret Rapture is the 2nd Coming, in fact Dispensational theologians consistently teach that it is not; rather, it is at the second 2nd Coming, after the seven year Great Tribulation, that Jesus will come all the way to earth (He’d only come part way at the Rapture). Christ will subdue all opposition and rule with a rod of iron from the Davidic throne in Jerusalem for 1,000 years. The character of the Millennium is decidedly Jewish, where God particularly fulfills the land promises to Abraham’s physical descendants. The 3rd (or Ezekiel’s) Temple will be reconstructed, with the reinstitution of bloody sacrifices, this taken from Ezk40-48. After the Millennium’s completion, Jesus will exit (the explanation of this is left fairly murky) and a great uprising will take place (Gog and Magog). This foolhardy mortal opposition to the Son of God by those who’ve lived through the Millennium will be summarily squashed when Jesus reenters the fray (the 2nd Advent part 3?), followed by the resurrection of the wicked (the saints were already raised at the Rapture) and the final judgment. The resurrection of the righteous who lived from the Rapture to the final judgment (Bema) is likewise somewhat opaque, requiring additional resurrections not mentioned in the Scriptures.

In certain quarters, Pretribulational Dispensationalism is the most extensive and popular expression of Dispensationalism, being virtually synonymous with the term. It’s well known advocates include John MacArthur, Scofield, Ryrie, Gleason Archer, Chafer, Barnhouse, Darby, DeHaan, Charles Feinberg, Geisler, Ironside, Kaiser, Hal Lindsey, Pentecost, and Walvoord (Sproul p198). Those who run in these circles are often mystified when finding that there are other Biblical end times options besides Dispensationalism. Gas-plus-a-match explosions can take place when one from the Dispie camp encounters an opposing view, since they’ve been taught from childhood that they are the only ones who take the Bible seriously and that an eschatological error will take one down the slippery slope towards Bible-denying liberalism. This helps illuminate why Pretribulational Dispensationalism is an immovable rock of dogma for some churches, being on a par with affirming the virgin birth as a membership requirement. “Either you agree with us on eschatology or you’re outside the fellowship of the saints.” Such certitude about the debatable is regrettable, and leads to separation over historic teachings being untrustworthy. The reader is told that as he studies the Gospels he must free his mind from the historic teachings being untrustworthy. The reader is told that as he studies the Gospels he must free his mind from the great commentators say, God did not see fit to enlighten them (italics mine).

The Scofield Bible also cautions its readers that its teachings are the opposite of those of historic Christianity, those historic teachings being untrustworthy. The reader is told that as he studies the Gospels he must free his mind from the beliefs that the church is the true Israel, and that the Old Testament foreview of the kingdom is fulfilled in the church. Scofield admitted that this belief was “a legacy in Protestant thought” (p989).

In speaking of the dispensational teaching that the church was not prophesied in the Old Testament, HA Ironside (Mysteries of God p50) boasts of the fact that this teaching was non-existent until introduced by Darby in the nineteenth century.
In fact, until brought to the fore, through the writings and preaching of a distinguished ex-clergyman, Mr. J. N. Darby, in the early part of the last century, it is scarcely to be found in a single book or sermon throughout a period of 1600 years! If any doubt this statement, let them search, as the writer has in a measure done, the remarks of the so-called Fathers, both pre and post-Nicene, the theological treatises of the scholastic divines, Roman Catholic writers of all shades of thought; the literature of the Reformation; the sermons and expositions of the Puritans; and the general theological works of the day. He will find the “mystery” conspicuous by its absence.

Writing in the introduction of a book by LS Chafer (The Kingdom in History and Prophecy p55), Scofield said:

Protestant theology has very generally taught that all the kingdom promises, and even the great Davidic covenant itself, are to be fulfilled in and through the Church. The confusion thus created has been still further darkened by the failure to distinguish the different phases of the kingdom truth indicated by the expression “kingdom of Heaven,” and “kingdom of God.”

John Walvoord, in an article in Bibliotheca Sacra (Jan/Mar1951 p11) points up the fact that his millennial thinking is a departure from that of the great Reformation theologians.

Reformed eschatology has been predominantly Amillennial. Most if not all the leaders of the Protestant Reformation were Amillennial in their eschatology, following the teachings of Augustine.

These quotations serve to prove at least two things concerning dispensational theologians: (1) their actual contempt for the thinking of historic Christian theologians, and (2) the fact that dispensational doctrines (note especially their teaching that the church is separate from Israel) are of comparatively recent origin.

Gerstner (p14) agrees with this historic assessment of the Reformed outlook, telling us that the Augsburg and Second Helvetic Confessions both explicitly reject the Jewish dream of a Millennium prior to the last judgment. In balance, one cannot say he walks in the Reformed tradition while promoting premillennialism of any stripe, especially the Zionist outlook of Dispensationalism.

As the self-promoting keepers of the divine eschatological key, the disdain displayed by some towards those outside of Dispensationalism is fiercely flagrant and bellicose. Often on display is an intolerant and uncharitable nature that seems remarkably characteristic of Dispensationalism, one with which I myself have often been accosted. When one disputes their brand of alleged literalism, the response is, “What!? Don’t you take God’s Word seriously?!” Said differently, “My Biblical outlook is synonymous with the voice of God; disagreeing with me is disagreeing with God’s Word!” “Arrogance” hardly begins to describe such shallow self-assurance. Sandeen calls it “the usual omniscient millenarian [dispensational] style” (p91). I was once in a class on the end times where the “other views” besides standard Pretribulational Dispensationalism was said to be mid-trib and post-trib, the instructor not even acknowledging the existence of the three additional major eschatological positions (Amill, Postmill, and Historic Premill). To him, the other widely held views on the end of time were simply out of bounds, unworthy of mention, let alone explanation. I have had the same discussion with some Dispensational seminary students, pleading with them that in their M. Div. pursuits they should at least learn about the other end times schools and understand why they disagree with them, rather than just practicing their arm motion for lobbing hand grenades of empty mockery at their brethren who think differently. What happens when they face a full-throated, red-blooded, Scripturally-armed Amill or Postmill? They will wilt; or, more likely, they’ll just ratchet up the ad hominem intensity (“Well, you’re just stupid and don’t believe the Bible!”). Alas, an effective way to keep the sheep in line is to sternly warn them against even looking into anything other than what they have been taught on eschatology in popular paperbacks or in the short and often conflicting notes of their Study Bibles.

Even its advocates admit that Dispensationalism is one of the more complicated systems to explain and defend, with many nooks and intricate crannies causing detailed debates. Indeed, heated discussions are a mainstay of the Dispises. The Scofield Reference Bible (or SRB), originally published in 1909 and soon thereafter updated (1917), was critical to spreading the message originally systematized by JN Darby (1800-1882) of the Plymouth Brethren. [Interestingly, both Darby and Scofield did NOT hold to the secrecy of the Rapture (Allis p191).] Though most proponents in the USA eschewed the Brethren’s sectarian separationist propensities (Sandeen), yet it seems that the sour future outlook of Dispensationalism struck a chord in North America, resulting in the rapid expansion of its tenets (see Marsden). A strongly pessimistic streak seemed to square nicely with the American Christian experience, since the culture was in the process of rejecting Christianity in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Marsden). Acceptance of Darby’s Dispensationalism did ultimately lead to a fair degree of separationism in the USA, giving rise to a movement that was later coined “Fundamentalism” by Curtis Lee Laws (JJul1920 Watchman-Examiner; Sandeen p246n). “Fundies” became the hardcore Bible thumpers, independent and distinct from the denigrated “mainline” denominations. Indeed, Fundies often split amongst themselves over nearly every disagreement, giving rise to the ditty that a church would split “over the color of the carpet.” In the Dispensational clique, questioning Scofield or Ryrie’s Study Bible was a treasonable offense, like questioning the Bible itself. As Marsden points out, the combative spirit was and is core to the Fundies. Since Fundamentalism arose under the shadow of the Scopes Monkey Trial (1925) and the battle for Biblical Inerrancy (then called Infallibility), their martial spirit is understandable; not, however, when their machine guns are directed down their own trenches and against their fellow Christian troops who hold and Biblically defend an alternate end times view, as often has sadly been the case.
The Punch and Judy show has been performed since the Middle Ages. At certain points, the puppet with the bat beats its fellow puppet while all laugh. I have been through seminary classes where the Dispensational bat puppet beats the mute non-Dispensational puppet while the obligatory laugh track was played (after North). “You’re not literal, so you don’t take the Bible seriously!” is all too typical (the “poisoning the well” fallacy), as if Jonathan Edwards or Augustine weren’t serious about the Scriptures. Guilty by association is another logical fallacy that often rears its ugly head in Dispensational discussions – “If you’re not Dispensational, you’ll start baptizing babies or become a Bible-denying liberal!” This is akin to saying, “All of my tennis playing friends shop at Kroger, so if you take up tennis…” Other allegations faced by non-Dispies include, “If you’re not premill, you’re borderline anti-Semitic!” as if only Dispies cared about the ethnic Jews. I note with a smile, though, that the supposedly pro-Israel Dispensational system typically has the Jews receiving future abuse and near extermination at the hands of the Antichrist (sounds rather Anti-Semitic). “Not being Dispensational is tantamount to a denial of Biblical inerrancy!” an assertion proven false by history’s many non-Dispisc Biblical stalwarts, the signers of the Chicago Statement on Inerrancy (1978) being a good modern example. “If you get your eschatology wrong, you’ll be off on how you handle all of the Bible!” I suppose this is true if you’re goal is to prove Dispensationalism, but otherwise it is certainly false, since nowhere do the Scriptures forward one’s view of the end times as central to the body of all divinity. Making eschatology the key to all the Scriptures is like trying to balance the whole, heavy Biblical pyramid on its point, on one passage at the end of Bible. Ah yes, with minimal Scriptural justification for its overweening pride, the Dispie puppet shoulders the eschatological bat against any brother puppet who dares breathe a word against it; but how quickly they cry “Foul!” when any point out the system’s apparent inconsistencies! They rapidly call for charity when they offer little in return. Does not the repeatedly emotional – yea, visceral or primeval – response to the slightest opposition indicate some doctrinal termites are feasting on the Dispensational foundation?

Why can some Dispensationalists be so combative compared to those of other eschatological schools of thought, turning every perceived slight into a theological food fight? Why such spurning of Paul’s admonition in Rom14:1,4, “Accept the one whose faith is weak, without quarreling over disputable matters… Who are you to judge someone else’s servant?” In one sense, Dispensationalism is just a view of the end of time; but in another very real sense it is an all-embracing view of the Scriptures, a whole system for understanding the Bible. For those who view their Dispensationalism simply as an eschatology, they see no cause for dividing over adiaphora (Biblical non-essentials), shaking their heads when they learn of fellow Dispies who exclude from fellowship those who disagree about the end of time. For other Dispensationalists, however, their eschatology is a give no quarter, fight to the last man hill to die on. They recognize that the only way to arrive at Dispensational conclusions is to begin with them – circular reasoning based on an a priori – and one must fully defend every corner of the frail Dispensational house of cards lest the entire structure collapse. This particular strain of Dispensationalists understand that the system must of necessity encompass all of the Scriptures, lest alternate (non-Dispie) conclusions be drawn.

A pastor once told me that one of the elders, a DTS (Dallas Theological Seminary) graduate, was going to teach a class on hermeneutics. I replied, “You know, he’ll actually be teaching Dispensationalism.” “Oh, no,” he returned, “it’s just a class on how to interpret the Bible.” “So you may suppose,” I replied, “but given his view of the Bible, he is most assuredly teaching a class on Dispensationalism.” Events were to prove this to be correct, as even the pastor later conceded. Why do Dispies give such prominence to hermeneutics? Of course, it is a noble task to learn Biblical interpretation, but Dispensationalism MUST begin with hermeneutics to arrive at its Israel/Church dichotomy, the centerpiece of Dispie eschatology. One can therefore easily see why hermeneutics is so central to the Dispensational message and becomes the “back door” for its promotion. Once a person begins with the Dispie a priori (that which is assumed beforehand without proof) that the physical Jews and the church have separate identities and destinies, this will color his whole understanding of the Scriptures. Rather than a non-essential (adiaphora), it is easy to see why some Dispies will go to the wrestling mat, scratching and verbally maiming any opponent on the subject of Biblical interpretation (hermeneutics) and excluding from fellowship those who do not begin with their assumptions (a priori). In a very real sense, they’d be cheaply selling the Dispie farm if they did not fight any perceived slight with tooth and claw. Fortunately, such sectarianism is on the wane in a less combative, more tolerant age; but the pendulum may be swinging towards obscurantism, an ignorance-is-bliss approach to all truth, and this surely is not a positive spiritual development.

No less a Dispie luminary than MacArthur (1993 Appendix) understands the Israel/Church distinction as THE defining characteristic of Dispensationalism. Dispensationalism as a system is not about seven ages of God’s dealing with men (the so-called seven dispensations), nor about the church, nor even about the cross of Jesus Christ. The cornerstone, according to Dispie dogma, is that the church is ever separate from ethnic Israel, the latter having its own promises yet to be fulfilled in the future Millennium that are decidedly NOT fulfilled in the church. Critics claim that Dispies are merely Christian Zionists and that the Bible does not support their notion of God having a separate plan for the Jews apart from the church. Citing such Scriptures as Eph2:11-3:13 (the dividing wall between Jew and Gentile is broken down in the church), Gal3:29 and Rom4 (those of faith are Abraham’s offspring) and 1Pt2:9 (Israel’s promises are used of the church by Peter), their criticism seems justified. Indeed, looking at Rom9-11, Paul seemed to have the perfect forum for explaining future Messianic glories in a coming golden age for Israel, but he does nothing of the sort. Paul, why didn’t you tell of the Millennium in a section (Rom9-11) about the future of the Jews? Did you leave something out? If Paul really believed in a separation between the church and the ethnic Jews, he should have illustrated the situation as TWO olive trees, one active and growing tree for the church and the other now-dormant tree for the unbelieving Israelites. Instead, Paul used only ONE olive that unites those of faith like Abraham’s. Isn’t Jesus a bigamist (two wives) if He has His bride, the church, whom he sets aside during the Millennium to return to his ex-wife, Israel? Additional arguments against the division between the ethnic Jews and the church have been multiplied in many books critical of the Dispensational movement (Crenshaw and Gunn;
Bahnson and Gentry; Allis; etc), but criticism from within the movement itself is typically muted because of the virulent response usually meted out against all traitors who would examine the Dispie underpinnings. The faintest quizzical touch upon its tenets is perceived as a vicious pulling on the Dispie spinal cord, and pity those blessed by the resulting wrath.

(4) Pan-millennialism. Have you ever had a person who was your “friend” until you crossed him, at which point you were thrown under the buddy bus and verbally run over? So it is with some aggressive Dispensationalists. Their arm is around you until you start questioning their system’s intricacies, after which you’ll face their acidic “tender mercies.” This quarrel-some situation explains the rise of the consequent view, “Pan-millennialism” – the tongue-in-cheek name for those who shrug their shoulders on eschatology and say, “It’ll all pan out in the end.” Having faced or witnessed the vitriolic accusations and pejoratives spewed forth by some harsh Dispies against those who disagree with their allegedly (but highly selective) “literal” approach, and not being able to find the Secret Rapture, Millennium or Antichrist under every Scriptural rock or newspaper headline, Panmills simply surrender, ceding all of their eschatological territory to the invading, aggressive Dispensational cohorts. Panmills are typically “ethnic Dispensationalists” – those raised in American Bible or Baptist churches where Dispensationalism was taught. However, they are non-combatants who’ve taken issue with some of the Dispie system but who want to avoid becoming collateral damage, civilians seeking underground shelter from the Dispensational firebombing against any perceived slights. Defectors from the system are viewed by many Dispies as Quislings, traitors who deserve the harshest of sanctions. Indeed, some churches make Pretribulational Dispensationalism a litmus test for membership, a cardinal doctrine right up there with Biblical Inerrancy and Jesus’ resurrection on the 3rd day. Such eschatological certainty (conceit?) is obviously not warranted from the variegated prophetic scenery, yet that does not keep some from declaring their fealty to loving God while holding in contempt any brethren who come to differing end times conclusions. Charity is extended by the Dispies on many other fronts, but not on eschatology; on that subject alone many Dispensational troops dig in and fling verbal grenades filled with nasty pejoratives at their brothers in Christ. Harsh, burning, napalm language is reserved by some Dispies for use only against their fellow Christians who question the Dispie dogmas. Well, do you really want to fight this ridiculous battle over what seems like almost nothing, a few verses nearly at the end of the Bible? Better to raise the white flag and give up all the eschatological terrain that the belligerents demand!

How will those within such churches cope with the combative? “Tolerance” – that wonderfully post-modern code word – tolerance to keep the peace is the Panmill watchword. Find a Panmill foxhole, climb in and play dead. With no dog in the fight, no system to defend, the Panmills effectively ignore the dicey prophetic Scriptures vehemently argued by some of their blusterings Dispensational fellows. Unfortunately for Panmills, it’s hard to shake the notion that they are NOT shrinking back “from declaring ... the whole counsel of God” (Acts20:27). Does the Lord permit that some areas of His revealed truth can be set aside as irrelevant? Could not similar “keep the peace” logic be used to not bring up the gospel with unbelievers, or the Doctrines of Grace (a.k.a. Calvinism) with freewillers (Arminians / Semi-Pelagians)? Saying an arena of truth is off limits to avoid conflict cannot be consistently applied, and is like telling God, “Thanks for revealing these end times truths to us, but you really shouldn’t have. I’m going to stay away from eschatology altogether – believe me, Lord, I know better than You about how this should be handled to keep the peace.” Of course, no one has the right to shun certain topics of God’s divinely revealed Word, tacitly declaring them unnecessary because it raises the ire of some.Tacless swagger by a minority doesn’t make the Fundies right. “Big mouth don’t make a big man” (J Wayne “The Cowboys” 1972); folly triumphs when good men do nothing (paraphrasing Burke); or, more Biblically, “... the fool rages and scoffs, and there is no peace.” (Pr29:9). Panmills have no Scriptural warrant for retreating and implicitly declaring the loud-mouthed Fundies victorious just to achieve Chamberlain’s empty Munich Pact of “peace in our time.” Aggressive and confrontational argumentation is certainly not Christlike, but tolerance plus pacifism is never a Scriptural solution to antagonism.

Histie-Ps, Posties, Amills, Dispies – I have listed several names attached to each school of thought, attempting to demonstrate that all of these views have prominent conservative theological advocates and thus are all well within the pale of orthodoxy. With nothing to advocate or defend, certainly Panmillennialism must also fall within the pale – there are no actual teachings worthy of a heresy trial and the resultant Panmill expulsion! However, of necessity Panmills have no strong proponents, though their swollen ranks are ever-expanding, especially within the Fundie/Dispie camp. Since they publish no works defending their tacit “It really doesn’t matter” stance, no résumés can be sullied by association with the reactionary Panmill label. The Panmill closet door remains firmly shut and dead-bolted, though many are crowded inside who won’t divulge their names. If ever a compare and contrast book is written (a la Gundry and Bock), it will never be entitled, “Five Views on the Millennium,” with someone drawing the short straw to defend Panmillennialism, that which by design is indefensible.

(5) Amillennialism. “Amillennium” is a mixed language moniker of recent origin (coined by Kuyper? Riddlebarger p31) – “millennium” being Latin for 1000 years, while the “a” negation is Greek. The inapaptly named Amillennialism implies that there will be NO Millennium, but in truth every single Amill believes that Rev20:1-6 instructs the church about a Millennium. At issue is not whether there will be a Millennium, but rather the character of this Millennium. Amills teach that the church age IS the Millennium, the reign of Jesus on earth through His church. While shocking to the sensibilities of those anticipating the Millennium as a future earthly golden age, either before (Postmill) or after (Premill) the 2nd Advent, Amillennialism has been a widely held end times view descended through church history. Such luminaries as RC Sproul, Jay Adams, Berkouwer, Berkhof, Wm Hendriksen, Anthony Hoekema, Abraham Kuyper, Bruce Waltke, Mark Dever, and James White are Amill, men who cannot be accused of Biblical carelessness even by those who disagree with their eschatological system. As even Walvoord, a staunch DTS (Dallas Theological Seminary) Dispensationalist and sharp Amill critic, admits:

Because amillennialism was adopted by the Reformers, it achieved a quality of orthodoxy to which its modern adherents can point with pride. They can rightly claim many worthy scholars in the succession from the Reformation to
modern times such as Calvin, Luther, Melanchthon, and in modern times, Warfield, Vos, Kuyper, Machen and Berkhof. If one follows traditional Reformed theology in many other aspects, it is natural to accept its amillennialism. The weight of organized Christianity has largely been on the side of amillennialism. (Mill Kingdom 1959 p61; in Riddlebarger p32)

Its [Amillenialism’s] most general character is that of denial of a literal reign of Christ upon the earth. Satan is conceived as bound at the 1st coming of Christ. The present age between the 1st and 2nd comings is the fulfillment of the millennium. ... It [Amillenialism] may be summed up in the idea that there will be no more millennium than there is now, and that the eternal state immediately follows the 2nd coming of Christ. (p6; in Cox p1).

As evidenced by an opponent’s definition, Amillennialism has to be the simplest end times outlook to explain. The gospel continues to increase and decrease the world over; when the last of the elect are gathered in, there will be a final rebellious explosion (Gog and Magog), and then Jesus returns and ushers in the eternal state. That’s it! No complicated charts, no postulates about a globe-covering golden age, and no far-fetched futuristic speculations. Amills appeal to Jesus’ own words about only two ages, this age and the age to come, with no intervening utopian middling age (a Millennium) that consists of an admixture of the present and the future. The emphasis is on the gospel being spread to the nations, with the 2nd Coming being the final exclamation point and the end of the redemptive story. Though there may be some dispute over the future of the Jews, many (most?) Amills understand from Rom9-11 that there will be a great ingathering of ethnic Jews prior to the end of all time. Certainly Calvin held this position. Some believe this recognition by the Jews of their Messiah will usher in an era of earthly gospel blessings before the 2nd Advent, but most Amills who write about the Jewish question think that the end of all time will come hard on the heels of the Jewish ingathering (Rom11:12,15). Murray informs us that the dominant Puritan view was that the Jews would be converted close to the end of the world (p52). A pithy Rom11 summary from the pen of premillennialist Moo (p683), entirely in accord with the Amill outlook, is that Israel’s rejection of Jesus as the Messiah is neither total (11:1-10) nor final (11:11-32). Amills point out that this salvific standpoint is actually pro-Semitism (not Anti-Semitism) at its finest. The Jews don’t get some semi-arid piece of nearly valueless real estate, followed by political dominance over the nations with Jerusalem at the center of all things. Rather, according to Amillennialism, in the future the Jews receive Jesus as their Messiah and inherit something far better, an eternal city that will never perish, life eternal and everlasting peace with God. Salvation through Jesus for “all Israel” just before the 2nd Coming is the climax of Amillennialism’s “pro-Semitism.”

“You’ve told me a million times.” In today’s phraseology, this doesn’t mean that if you tell me again, you will have told me a million one times. “A million times” just indicates a large number, probably something just over four or five ... so please stop telling me! Amills are often taken to task for their alleged “non-literal” rendition of 1,000 years, verbally thrashed for contending that it’s an indefinite time period constituting the church age. That purveyor of deep theological truth, “The Word Origin Calendar,” provides some assistance. According to the calendar from 26Dec2014, the infinity symbol ∞ was used in Roman times to indicate “mille” (1,000), which in common Roman parlance meant “a whole lot.” John Wallis employed the infinity symbol ∞ mathematically in 1655 in that same indeterminate sense. The point is that 1,000 (or the Latin mille, from whence we get “Millennium”) often meant “a whole lot” during the days of John the Apostle and may well have been used in that indefinite sense in Rev20:1-6. In other words, a thousand during the days when the Revelation was penned could mean that exact number, but often was used in an indeterminate sense. It is not unreasonable, therefore, to conclude that “mille” (or 1,000) in Rev20 points not to an exact number, but to a large, indefinite number, much like saying, “You’ve told me a thousand times!”

Many Scriptural illustrations are available to support the indefinite use of 1,000. For instance, in Ps50:10 God says, “For every beast of the forest is Mine, the cattle on 1,000 hills.” Does this passage teach that the cattle on the 1,001st hill do not belong to the Lord, or that the herds in the valleys and plains belong to somebody else? Obviously not. This is simply poetic language saying that all of the cattle on all of the hills, valleys, and plains belongs to God. Here in Ps50:10, then, is just one instance where 1,000 is Biblically used for “a large, indeterminate number,” and this is how Amills understand the Millennial of Rev20:1-6. Examples can be quickly multiplied, showing that 1,000 is often used figuratively (not literally) in Bible. May the Lord increase you 1,000 times and bless you (Dt1:11); God keeps His covenant to 1,000 generations (Dt7:9; Ps105:8); How can I man chase 1,000? (Dt3:20; Jos2:10); He cannot answer Him 1 time out of 1,000 (Job9:3); If there be an angel mediator, one of 1000 to remind a man (Job33:23); 1,000 may fall at your side (Ps91:7); A day in Your courts is better than 1,000 elsewhere (Ps84:10); Though he live 1,000 years twice told (Ecc6:6); Where there were 1,000 vines, valued at 1,000 shekels of silver (Is7:23); 1,000 shall flee at the rebuke of one (Is30:17); A little one shall become 1,000 (Is66:22); The city that went out 1,000 strong has 100 left (Am5:3); A day is as 1,000 years with the Lord, and 1,000 years as a day (2Pt3:8). Need more be said? 1,000 is often employed figuratively in the Bible; why not in Rev20?

Rev20:1-6 itself testifies to the non-literal nature of its fulfillment, since it gives many additional aspects of the passage are not taken literally by ANYONE. Is there really a literal chain to hold Satan, a spiritual being? What of a literal key? And is it a dragon, a serpent, the devil or Satan? Is this entity who is bound four different beings all at once? The angel and Sa-
tan are spiritual beings; why couldn’t the 1st resurrection and the 2nd death likewise pertain to spiritual realities? Indeed, the 2nd death is usually understood to be about eternal perdition or spiritual death, so doesn’t it make sense that in like manner the 1st resurrection is figurative of spiritual life? Another literalist conundrum is this — how on earth does the mortal John “see” the souls of those beheaded? Can souls really be observed by the eyes of flesh? Note that this is reminiscent of Rev6:9-11, where John sees the souls under the altar who call for vengeance against those who have shed their innocent blood. Both 20:4-5 and 6:9-11 have the mortal Apostle John seeing souls, so maybe Rev20 is connected with the Lord’s answer to the plaintiff plea of these very souls in 6:9-11.

With all of the symbolic aspects of Rev20, it is really not very surprising that the number 1,000 is similarly used in a symbolic fashion. Indeed, 20:4 specifically says that those raised and seated on thrones to reign with Christ for 1,000 years are only “those who had been beheaded because of their testimony of Jesus,” yet many of our “literalist” friends curiously make this out to be every Christian down through church history who have fallen asleep in death, very few of whom were actually beheaded — how can this be? This doesn’t sound very “literal,” does it? The point is that few take the bulk of the details in 20:1-6 literally, yet many still insist that the Millennium must be literally 1,000 years, often vigorously asserting this with surprising belligerence. The inconsistency is palpable, especially applied to a book of word pictures like the Revelation. Is there some unspoken agenda that requires some to take 1,000 literally while figuratively understanding the balance of the details in 20:1-6? How can one defend taking 1,000 literally while simultaneously taking a symbolic stance on mortal John’s seeing souls, saying that all of the church is resurrected when only those beheaded are specified, and holding an obviously non-literal understanding with respect to the chain, key, door, dragon, serpent, and so forth? There must be some trout around here; “fishy” hardly begins to describe the inconsistency. As Stafford puts it:

That there was a Jewish expectation of a Millennium of some kind, and that it has had some influence upon Christian eschatology, is freely admitted. But that this Jewish notion is found in the New Testament is denied. This false idea, like many other false ideas, has come into Christian thought from Judaism, but does not belong there. ...

The idea of a civil government on earth for a thousand years is not found in a single utterance of Jesus, Paul or Peter; much less that Christ is going to “set it up” when He returns. ...

The king business, like the priest business, belongs to the tutelage of the race. It is a thing of the past, not of the future. And yet many associate the golden age of the world with actual kings [such as we are acquainted with] and thrones and all the accompanying regalia and paraphernalia. ... Imagine me, for example, sitting on a literal throne somewhere, say on the Mount of Olives! But every other Christian is sitting on a little throne too. There would not be room enough on the Mount of Olives, or indeed in all Palestine, to plant our thrones. There we all sit, with shining crowns, flourishing our golden sceptres, and not a subject to black our boots. I abdicate my throne right now.

In sum, Amillennialism does not make Rev20:1-6 central to its understanding of the Scriptures, nor is this passage even necessary to the Amillennialist. The balance of the didactic portions of the Bible indicates two ages, this present age and the eternal age to come, with no middling golden era (or “Millennium”). Nothing new is introduced by the Lord in the last book of the Bible; the Millennium of Amillennialists is just this present era, with the gospel going forth to all the earth and the elect being gathered in.

What, then, of Satan’s being bound, the seeming Amill Achilles’ heel of Rev20? Let us note carefully what in fact the passage says, not reading in more than is actually present. The devil is bound “so that he would not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were completed” (20:3). Note what the passage does NOT say, namely that Satan is bound so as to be inactive. Every Amill believes that Satan currently “prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour” (1Pt5:8). No, the Amill view, in accordance with Rev20:3 itself, says that the devil is restrained so as to not deceive the nations as he had done so previously. This begs the obvious question, “To deceive the nations with respect to exactly what?” Since we are dealing with spiritual truths and spiritual beings, we might anticipate that the “un-deceiving” of the nations pertains to their spiritual understanding; however, we must visit other Biblical passages to determine what this alteration in Satan’s deceptive power might be, since Rev20 is not explicit. It would make sense that this lack of deceptive power by Satan was with respect to Jesus Christ, that the gospel would shine forth to all the nations, unhindered by Satan’s cloaking the nations in spiritual darkness. This is precisely what Paul had said at the Areopagus, that the nations had lived in ignorance prior to the coming of the gospel, but that “God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent” (Acts17:30). Note the expansiveness of the gospel’s impact on all nations without exception, a certainty that every missionary takes with him to every foreign nation. Previously the Adversary had covered the nations in spiritual darkness, but now the gospel light was breaking through, as Paul testified to the Athenians. Could not the removal of the devil as a gospel impediment be exactly what is being given to us in the highly wrought symbolic language of the Revelation, that Satan, the serpent, the dragon, the devil is bound “so that he would not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were completed” (20:3)?

An additional interesting feature is brought forth by Adams (p85); namely, that there have been no world dominating empires since Rome. Why might this be? This observation is in keeping with the Colossus of Dan2. The empires from head to toe were Babylonia, Persia, Greece, and finally Rome. The rock cut without hands, the kingdom of Christ, crushed the statue and now fills the earth. Note that Christ’s Kingdom is of an entirely different composition, not being built from, originating in, nor standing upon the preceding empires. Since the time of Rome, there has truly been only one world-encompassing, ever-expanding empire, the church of Jesus Christ. Is this not a solid manifestation of the very fact that Satan is now bound so that he can no longer deceive the nations? The deceptive power of Satan over the nations was crushed at the cross, and thereafter there have been no more worldwide empires. The cross conquers all!

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THE BINDING OF SATAN

... some of the important problems it [Rev20:1-10] poses for the interpreter must now be considered. In the first place, John describes the binding of Satan, who is seize and thrown into the bottomless pit and there secured and sealed for a thousand years (vv. 1f.). The premillennialist takes this to mean that for the period of one thousand years when Christ, following his second coming, reigns on earth Satan will be immobilized and placed under duress, thus ensuring that this will be a time of peace and blessedness unspoiled by his activities. The purpose of Satan’s binding, however, is defined as being in particular “that he should deceive the nations no more,” till the thousand years were ended” (v3); and this is better understood, within the perspective of the New Testament, as referring to the present “times of the Gentiles” when the Devil is held under restraint as the Gospel is preached to all nations.

The advent of Christ has brought about a change in the relationship between Satan and the nations. “In past generations God allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways,” Paul told the Gentile crowd at Lystra. But now things are different. That is why he and Barnabas had come to the Gentile territory of Lycaonia and were pleading with them to turn from their vain superstitions to the living God who is the Creator of all (Acts 14:15ff.). Later, when he came to Greece, the apostle announced this same change in the situation of the nations to the intellectual audience that had gathered to hear him in Athens. Hitherto, he tells them, “God has overlooked the times of ignorance,” that is to say, the times of Gentile ignorance, during which, so to speak, the nations were in the wings and only the people of Israel were on stage; “but now,” he adds, “he commands all men everywhere to repent.” Why? Because since the advent of Christ, in whom there is blessing for every nation on earth, for Gentile as well as Jew, all men have been brought fully into the scene and it is by him that God “will judge the world in righteousness” (Acts 17:30f.).

Prior to the coming of Christ the nations had been permitted to remain in the darkness and ignorance of that superstition which resulted from Satan’s deception. They had “walked in their own ways.”

No longer, then, are the nations left in the shadows. No longer is Satan permitted to blind the nations with his deception. For God’s salvation has been “prepared in the presence of all peoples” and Christ is “a light to lighten the nations” as well as the glory of God’s people Israel (Lk 2:30-32). Christ’s witnesses are now to proclaim the gospel message to the farthest parts of the earth so that the fullness of the nations may be brought in (Mt 24:14; Rom 11:25). The power of Satan over the nations has been broken by the power of the Gospel. The darkness of his deception is dispelled by the light of him who declared, “I am the Light of the world” (Jn 8:12; 9:5). Thus the presence of Jesus in “Galilee of the nations” means for Matthew the fulfillment of the words spoken by the prophet Isaiah: “The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned” (Mt 4:13-16; Is 9:11).

In Rev 20:21 the binding of Satan is specifically limited in reference to his deceiving of the nations. The considerations we have given point to the reason for this particular sphere of reference. His binding, therefore, does not preclude the possibility of his continuing activity in the world within the lives of individuals or of society in general. As “the god of this world” his evil work is apparent in his “blinding of the minds of unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ” (2 Co 4:4). He is still “our adversary the devil” who “prows around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour” (1 Pt 5:8). But his binding in relation to the nations is nonetheless real as the Gospel multiplies its conquests throughout the world.

THE STRONG MAN BOUND

... When the scribes accused Jesus of being “possessed by Beelzebul” and of casting out demons by “the prince of demons,” he responded by pointing out that this amounted to an absurd proposition, namely, that Satan was casting out Satan. The only reasonable conclusion, which they were unwilling to draw, was that it was by the Spirit of God that he was casting out demons, and therefore that the power of God was manifestly at work in their midst. Did they really think that Satan could be fighting against himself? And then he added: “No one can enter a strong man’s house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man; then indeed he may plunder his house” (Mt 12:24ff.). Christ’s casting out of demons was an evidence not only that the strong man’s house was being plundered but also that Satan had been bound. Christ is the one who is stronger than Satan, and that is why, when the seventy whom he had sent out returned rejoicing that even the demons were subject to them in his name, he could say to them: “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Behold, I have given you authority over all the power of the enemy” (Lk 10:17-19; 11:21f.). That is why, as he approached the ordeal and the victory of the cross, he could declare: “Now is the judgment of this world, now shall the ruler of this world be cast out; and I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself” (Jn 12:31f.) – for the binding of Satan that he should deceive the nations no more makes the casting of the gospel net over all men possible. That is why, again, the risen Lord can encourage his apostles and commission them with these words: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations” (Mt 28:18f.). With Satan effectively bound, and all authority concentrated in Christ, their evangelical charge is one that leads them to all the nations of the world.

[Note: Hoekema (p229) points out that the same word used in Rev 20 for the binding of Satan is used in Mt 12:29 for the binding of the strongman (also Satan). Jesus also said, “Now judgment is upon this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out” (Jn 12:31) – again, the same “cast out” word as used in Rev 20.]

Paul writes to similar effect in the Epistle to the Colossians, when he says that God “disarmed the principalities and powers and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in Christ’s cross” (Col 2:15); and in the Epistle to the Hebrews there is, if anything, an even more explicit statement where the writer asserts that in the incarnation the Son of God partook of our human nature, “in order that through death he might render ineffective him who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong bondage”
worship the beast who are singled out for the 1st resurrection and consequent Millennial reign in Rev20. How some miraculously twist this passage to speak of every Christian who has ever lived being resurrected and seated on millions of little thrones in dusty Jerusalem’s Millennial environs is an astounding hermeneutical hat trick. Aren’t these “literalists” the very people who look for a future world-dominating Antichrist who mandates the mystical mark of the Beast? How can any Christians from the 1st century until the present time fit the description of avoiding the mark and not worshipping the Beast, since the Beast has had the temerity to not yet reveal himself? If the Beast is yet unknown, then who could possibly have received his mark or worship him? The current tally of Beast-worshiping, mark-bearing men is exactly zero, using the accounting implied by Rev20 literalism. Moreover, only those martyred by beheading are in the other group delineated by John; these are the only other Christians singled out for special Millennial treatment, all other Christians being grouped with “[t]he rest of the dead” who must await the end of the Millennium for their resurrection. It is a simple fact that throughout church history only a very few martyrs for the faith have been beheaded. Employing literalistic logic, it therefore appears that not very many saints will be included in the number of those partaking in the 1st resurrection and subsequent Millennial reign with Jesus. Those beheaded for the faith cannot number more than a few thousand up to the present time, while exactly zero have yet avoided the Beast's mark and worship, the supposedly future Antichrist having inconveniently not yet shown himself to the world. Literally parsing the very verses used to support speculative premillennialism produces just a paltry handful of beheaded saints who will be raised to reign with Jesus in the future Millennium. By no means whatsoever can “the souls of those beheaded” and “those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark on their forehead and on their hand” include every Christian who has ever lived.

Once again, please notice what the passage does and does not say. It is the souls of the beheaded plus those who don’t worship the beast who are singled out for the 1st resurrection and consequent Millennial reign in Rev20. How some miraculously twist this passage to speak of every Christian who has ever lived being resurrected and seated on millions of little thrones in dusty Jerusalem’s Millennial environs is an astounding hermeneutical hat trick. Aren’t these “literalists” the very people who look for a future world-dominating Antichrist who mandates the mystical mark of the Beast? How can any Christians from the 1st century until the present time fit the description of avoiding the mark and not worshipping the Beast, since the Beast has had the temerity to not yet reveal himself? If the Beast is yet unknown, then who could possibly have received his mark or worship him? The current tally of Beast-worshiping, mark-bearing men is exactly zero, using the accounting implied by Rev20 literalism. Moreover, only those martyred by beheading are in the other group delineated by John; these are the only other Christians singled out for special Millennial treatment, all other Christians being grouped with “[t]he rest of the dead” who must await the end of the Millennium for their resurrection. It is a simple fact that throughout church history only a very few martyrs for the faith have been beheaded. Employing literalistic logic, it therefore appears that not very many saints will be included in the number of those partaking in the 1st resurrection and subsequent Millennial reign with Jesus. Those beheaded for the faith cannot number more than a few thousand up to the present time, while exactly zero have yet avoided the Beast’s mark and worship, the supposedly future Antichrist having inconveniently not yet shown himself to the world. Literally parsing the very verses used to support speculative premillennialism produces just a paltry handful of beheaded saints who will be raised to reign with Jesus in the future Millennium. By no means whatsoever can “the souls of those beheaded” and “those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark on their forehead and on their hand” include every Christian who has ever lived.

Is Satan currently bound? If by this statement you mean that he is entirely inactive, all Christians (including Amills) resoundingly answer, “No!” If, however, we are talking about Satan preventing the nations from coming to Christ, Amillennialism steadfastly affirms a position that all Christians pragmatically assent to, that Satan is now bound with respect to deceiving the nations – all peoples everywhere can and must repent, and they cannot use “the devil made me do it” excuse for their unbelief. In the era after the cross and before the 2nd Advent, the gates of hell will not prevail against gospel conquest. This current age, then, is the time of the Millennium, when Satan and his minions can no longer cloak the nations in so much spiritual darkness that the church cannot penetrate it. With certainty the good news about Jesus Christ will triumph before the 2nd Coming – this is the great Amillennial hope!

Another set of questions arise about the Amill position concerning those resurrected and reigning with Christ for 1,000 years. Can this actually be referencing our present time? If so, how are saints now resurrected and reigning with Jesus in any meaningful sense? Our literalist brethren contend that this is playing fancy with the facts, ignoring the literal meaning of Rev20 and “spiritualizing it away.” The operative passage reads:

Then I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark on their forehead and on their hand; and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years” (Rev20:4-6).

I’m so sorry, Sam Suburban of Middle America, USA, you will most definitely be “left behind!” You don’t even know who the Beast is, so you certainly cannot avoid his worship and mark. This knocks you and all other church-going, “salt of the earth” Christians out of category one of the ranks of those partaking of the 1st resurrection and who then reign during the Millennium – rats! Wait! There’s another category – maybe you can make it into that one?! Well no, probably not. In the very unlikely event that you are martyred for the faith, it surely won’t be by beheading. Lethal injection is more likely these days; chopping blocks are an execution style long gone out of style. So, then, we can confidently conclude that the vast majority of those in Christ like you, Sam, will not participate in the 1st resurrection nor be seated upon little, obscure Millennial thrones somewhere in the vicinity of Jerusalem. I apologize that your end times paperbacks have led you astray, Sam!
You are merely part of the rabble, the leftovers, the great unwashed Christian masses, a member of “[t]he rest of the dead” who will “not come to life until the thousand years” are over. Bummer! I have an idea, Sam! Maybe you should lobby your congressman to reinitiate the guillotine for the capital punishment of Christians – then you’d have a better chance of making the Millennial reign roster! “Hey, Chris Congressman! I can’t avoid worshiping the Beast or getting his mysterious mark, since he uncharitably hasn’t shown up yet, but I’d still like to make it in on to the Millennial team. How about this? I’d very much like to try plan B, getting my head lopped off for Christ so I can get into the Millennium. Can you introduce a bill to that end? I’m sure our leftwing ‘friends’ in Congress will be all for executing Christians this way, and then I’ll partake of the first resurrection and be given an inconsequential Millennial throne.” Then again, Sam Suburban, if you’re into the King James Version of the Bible (a.k.a. Good News for 17th Century Man), maybe you should take up your lament over your Millennial exclusion with the Bible’s author after the manner of Martha (Jn11:39): “But Lord, this stinketh!”

To the matter at hand, how can saints in any sense be currently resurrected and seated on thrones and thus reigning with Jesus? Doesn’t something seem askew with saying that this is now the state of affairs for Christians, as forwarded by Amillennialism? At issue is what resurrection and reign are being referenced? As it turns out, one passage from the quill of the Apostle Paul provides substantial assistance, a plainly worded didactic section with exactly analogous concepts as in the figurative language of Rev20; see if you can spot the similarities.

And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus (Eph2:1-6).

In Ephesians, Paul says that the spiritually dead are raised to newness of life with Jesus and “seated ... with Him in the heavenly places.” This sure sounds a lot like the same idea forwarded in the Apocalypse, that the spiritually dead are resurrected and now reign with Christ. It may well be that Paul states plainly what John tells us figuratively, that all who are in Christ are raised and seated with Him.

Looking more closely at the “1st resurrection” spoken of in Rev20, we note that this is contrasted with the “2nd death.” At no time does Rev20 explicitly state that there are two physical resurrections separated by 1,000 years; it only states that those who partake of the 1st resurrection are spared from facing the 2nd death, implying strongly that the 2nd death is well worth avoiding. Most understand the 2nd death to be the eternal spiritual death in the lake of fire spoken of in 20:10, 14, and 15 — in other words, the torments of hell. If the 2nd death is spiritual, then by Scriptural symmetry would this not imply that the 1st resurrection is likewise spiritual? This accords well with many passages that speak of regeneration of the soul as a resurrection (souls are in view in Rev20:4-6, after all). Adam was told that he would die if he ate the forbidden fruit (Gen2:17). Well, did he physically die on the spot when he partook? Of course not — Adam physically lasted another 900+ years on earth! The principle of physical death was initiated in Gen3, but, more importantly, Adam’s Fall brought spiritual death to the human race (see Rom5). What do the spiritually dead need? As Eph2 says, those dead in sin need a spiritual resurrection. Besides the Eph2 passage, consider a few of the many verses referencing the new life in Jesus, speaking of it as a spiritual resurrection and contrasting it with the pains of God’s wrath in spiritual death.

Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life. Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. (Jn5:24-25)

... you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions (Col2:12-13)

Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin (Rom6:4-6)

We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death. (1Jn3:14)

But Jesus said to him, “Follow Me, and allow the dead to bury their own dead.” (Mt8:22)

There really can be no doubt that the New Testament often speaks of man’s deadness in sin and of those in Christ being spiritually resurrected to life eternal; over such eternal perdition — the fires of hell or the 2nd death — has no power. Is it so strange to suppose that this same metaphor is being employed in Rev20 with prophetic pictorial language? These and other passages should settle the question that the 1st resurrection can, indeed, be a spiritual one, in contradistinction to the spiritual 2nd death.

Rev20 is speaking of the spiritual 2nd death and, by symmetry, a spiritual 1st resurrection. This outlook is hermeneutically a lot safer than supposing that the Apostle John introduced entirely new concepts never before given in the Bible. For instance, some would have us believe that Rev20 cuts from whole cloth several brand new ideas seen nowhere else in the Scriptures, such as establishing multiple physical resurrections and a Millennial Jerusalem heavily dotted with insignificant little thrones scattered about the arid landscape. Isn’t it remarkably strange for God to bring to light an entirely new paradigm in the last book of the Bible, appearing for the very first time in the third chapter from the end of His revealed
truth? And are these shiny new Millennial ideas to then control one’s outlook on the rest of the prophetic Word?! As some have asserted, making Rev20 the locus of all prophetic insight is like balancing a massive Egyptian pyramid on its point – everything is upside down! With a physical Millennium in view, one must now go back to a host of Scriptures and reinterpret them in light of this new bug caught in your hermeneutical eye, a foreign body better to be removed than accommodated. One must reread about the sheep and the goats in Mt25 and figure out how to insert 1,000 years between the resurrection of the sheep and that of the goats; or reconsider the wheat and tares, sticking 1,000 years in there somewhere between the wheat being gathered in and the tares being bundled and burned; or review Jesus’ statements about “this age” and “the age to come” and calculate how to interleave a middling age that is neither this age nor the age to come, but rather contains some previously unrevealed third age called the Millennium. The Millennium becomes like a wedge driven with force and alacrity between all other passages of Scripture, separating events which God hath joined together.

Some would have us believe that, in accord with Rev20, Christ does not yet reign as king, but He will only do so in the future earthly Millennium. The obvious corollary is that if Christ is not reigning now, then Christians likewise do not yet reign with Him, but will do so in the coming Millennium. If Jesus isn’t a present monarch, then of necessity His co-heirs also have their reign postponed. Some have offered the gloss, “Well, Jesus is a king now, He just doesn’t yet have a kingdom.” A monarch without a realm makes as much sense as saying, “I’m a billionaire now, I’m just waiting for someone to give me a billion dollars.” Of course, one need not travel very far in the Bible to completely unravel the Futurism that puts Jesus’ (and Christians’) reign entirely in the Millennium. 1Co15:25 says of Jesus that “He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet.” Heb1:3 says that Jesus now sits at the right hand of God. Can either of these passages be made to fit the notion that Christ does not presently reign? As for Christians, the Eph2 passage given above shows that believers now reign with Jesus, with nary a hint that this is postponed to some future state. As Yerby (p8, emphasis added) puts it:

Through a device that can only be described as fraud by fable, believers have been systematically robbed of the truth of the present reign and kingdom of Jesus Christ, and of the companion truth of their present reign with him. They have been tricked into swapping present reality for future fantasy. They have given up legacies for legends. You have been a victim of what may be called the great reign robbery if you have been taught, and have accepted, the recent system of Bible interpretation that says no crown or throne, no kingdom or reign, no power or glory, were given to Christ at his first advent. You have been defrauded by fable if you have been taught that those honors will be bestowed upon the Lord only in a future 1,000-year earthly kingdom during which the governing code will be the ancient laws and ordinances given to Moses at Mount Sinai. You have lost a fortune in spiritual riches if you are unaware that you are now, today, in this life, reigning with the reigning Christ and that you, and not some unbeliever [ethnic Jews], are “the apple of his eye.”

Forcing the Millennium upon the rest of Scripture is a high interpretive price to pay on behalf of one figurative passage in the third chapter from the Bible’s end! Maybe our Futurist brethren should count the cost before erecting such a hermeneutically expensive structure that takes glory away from Christ and His church.

With these and other interpretative machinations, it is well to note exactly what is NOT in Rev20. Nowhere in Rev20 does there appear anything about the ethnic Jews; nowhere is there any evidence of a physical Jerusalem; absent is any discussion of a political rule of Jesus on a physical Davidic throne for 1,000 years – besides, isn’t Christ’s kingly reign forever, not limited to just 1,000 years (Is9:7; Lk1:32-33)? Indeed, physical saints are not even addressed in Rev20, the only reference being to the SOULS of those beheaded. If Rev20:1-6 could cry, that portion of your Bible would be constantly wet from all of the foolishness foisted upon it without Scriptural warrant, a host of fanciful notions burdening this hapless passage by some who claim to be the friends of God but who alter His Word by reading in their own agenda (eisegesis) to suit their own end times speculations.

Amillennialism is attractive because it has only ONE Second Coming, ONE general bodily resurrection, ONE final judgment, and ONE age to come, rather than the multiple ones necessary to fit alternate eschatological systems. With Amillennialism, no rereading of previous Scriptural statements is needed to insert the foreign body of a Millennium, a parasite that draws life from both this age and the age to come to form a middle-of-the-road semi-utopian era.

Returning to Rev20, what can we surmise concerning the souls now reigning with Jesus? Besides the Eph2 reference given above that explicitly says that those raised to new spiritual life are now reigning with Christ, other references teach a very similar idea. Let us begin with one from the selfsame book of Revelation. To the church at Laodicea, Jesus said:

“He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My THRONE, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.” (Rev3:21)

Is this not the same idea as given in Eph2:6, that the saints are seated with Christ and ruling with Him? And, we believe, it is likewise in Rev20. A similar idea is also forwarded in Rev5;

And they sang a new song, saying, “Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth.” (Rev5:9-10)

Like the kingdom coming not with signs to be observed (Lk17:20-1), so the reign of Christians upon the earth is very real, though it doesn’t presently look much like much to the world at large – much like Jesus’ ministry itself, by the way. Paul concurs on the reign of believers with Jesus on this side of eternity:

For if by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will REIGN in life through the One, Jesus Christ. (Rom5:17)
Clearly Paul agrees with the Revelation (3:21; 5:9-10; 20:4-6) that Christians now reign in life with Jesus, but in a decidedly spiritual sense. While not referenced as frequently, we can conclude that the concept of believers in Jesus now spiritually reigning with Christ is clearly forwarded in the New Testament.

Note also from Rev20:6 that besides being resurrected and reigning with Jesus, those singled out will also “be priests of God and of Christ.” Little verification is required to establish the priesthood of all believers in Jesus. Citing only one passage should suffice. “But you are a CHosen RACE, a ROYAL PRIESTHOOD, a HOLY NATION, a PEOPLE for God’s own POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1Pt2:9).

Those dead in sin are resurrected to newness of life, seated with Christ in the heavens, and made priests – these are the basic Christian dogmas brought forth in the much-abused Millennial passage. With Rev20, outrageous eschatological conjectures should be left at the door like a pair of muddy boots.

Now what of the issue given mocking treatment above, the puzzling Rev20 aspect that it is only “the souls of those who had been beheaded” plus “those who had not worshiped the beast or his image” who are singled out as being resurrected to reign with Jesus? No matter what Millennial school one subscribes to, this interpretive problem must be addressed. We have shown above that being spiritually resurrected and now reigning are principles taught in the didactic portions of the New Testament as applying to all who are in Christ, so why are those beheaded souls and those who don’t worship the beast marked out in Rev20:4, to the explicit exclusion of “[t]he rest of the dead” who “did not come to life until the thousand years were completed” (20:5)? Does this mean that those beheaded and those who spurned the worship and mark of the beast are the only disembodied souls now reigning with Jesus? While difficult, we believe that these particulars are included as time references to the fulfillment of the famous Millennial passage. How?! There can be little doubt from reading Rev2-3 that the seven churches were facing intense persecution. As forwarded by Danz and 7, the iron-toothed beast was the Roman Empire contemporary to the days of the Asia Minor churches. Therefore, avoiding the widespread emperor worship (worshiping the Beast) and being figuratively “marked” as belonging to the Roman Empire were things the Asia Minor believers could actively avoid. In addition, beheading was the accepted method for executing a Roman citizen during the early church age; for example, tradition holds the Roman citizen Paul was martyred via decapitation. Both beheading and the beastly worship and mark are grounded in the 1st century AD, and therefore point to a fulfillment during the time of the seven Asia Minor churches. These were the very Christians being called in the Apocalypse to faithfulness during an era of intense persecution by Nero from 64-68AD (more on this below). These chronological references are inserted into the Millennial passage to highlight the timeframe in which the Revelation would come to pass. In other words, beheading and avoidance of the Beast’s worship and mark are included as poignant reminders to the Asia Minor churches – the very churches that received this epistle of the Revelation of Jesus Christ in the 1st century AD – to stand firm to the end and thus be saved (Mt10:22; 24:13), despite the lure of self-preservation. Rev20 does not upend the notion that all Christians are spiritually raised and now presently reign with Jesus (Eph2:1-7); it only highlights the chronology of application, that the 1st century AD Asia Minor churches were to stand firm against the worship and mark of the Roman Empire (the Beast), possibly even suffering martyrdom (beheading if they were Roman citizens) for their steadfastness to the gospel.

The Amillennial position, then, is that Satan is firmly bound with respect to his ability to deceive the nations concerning the gospel truths. All may not agree on this, but effectively every missionary goes forth with a firm conviction of its truthfulness, that the gospel will call in the elect from the four corners of the earth, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it. As Paul put it, he was commissioned by Christ “to open their [Jewish and Gentile] eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among the forgiven” in Jesus (Acts26:18). Moreover, all Christians know the truth of Col1:13-14, “For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” The strong man’s house is being plundered of inhabitants; Satan is helpless to prevent Christ and His sent ones from abducting men from the dominion of darkness and transferring them to the Son’s kingdom. This is the sum and substance of the amillennial position on the binding of Satan, in complete accord with the firm statement that the devil is bound “so that he would not deceive the nations any longer” (Rev20:3).

As the late, great RC Sproul said, “Though Reformed theology is by no means monological regarding eschatological systems, the majority report among Reformed thinkers tends to be amillennialism” (p195). Having spent an extended portion describing Amillennialism, it is well to give the summary by Hoekema (p174):

Amillenialists ... understand the binding of Satan mentioned in the first three verses of this chapter as being in effect during the entire period between the first and second comings of Christ, though ending shortly before Christ’s return. They teach that Christ will return after this heavenly millennial reign.

Amillenialists further hold that the kingdom of God is now present in the world as the victorious Christ is ruling his people by his Word and Spirit, though they also look forward to a future, glorious, and perfect kingdom on the new earth in the life to come. Despite the fact that Christ has won a decisive victory over sin and evil, the kingdom of evil will continue to exist alongside of the kingdom of God until the end of the world. Although we are already enjoying many eschatological blessings at the present time (inaugurated eschatology), we look forward to a climactic series of future events associated with the Second Coming of Christ which will usher in the final state (future eschatology). ... The amillennialist therefore expects the bringing of the gospel to all nations and the conversion of the fulness of Israel to be completed before Christ’s return. ...

The amillennialist understands the Second Coming of Christ to be a single event, not one that involves two phases. At the time of Christ’s return there will be a general resurrection, both of believers and unbelievers. After the resurrection, believers who are then still alive shall be transformed and glorified. These two groups, raised believers and transformed believers, are then caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. After this “rapture” of all believers,
Christ will complete his descent to earth, and conduct the final judgment. After the judgment unbelievers will be consigned to eternal punishment, whereas believers will enjoy forever the blessings of the new heaven and the new earth.

**Five Millennial Views Review**

Let us now briefly encapsulate the five views on the end of time described above:

1. **Postmillennialists** ("Posties") generally hold that the gospel is advancing and will fill the earth, which is the Millennium; afterwards, Jesus will return ("post" or after the Millennium). It is optimistic about gospel progress, a key selling point on the position. Posties are typically a minority within the Reformed tradition.

2. **Historic Premillennialists** ("Histie-DPs") say that Jesus will return to earth and establish a 1,000 year reign, after which comes the end. Few particulars are detailed, and Histie-DPs are most noted for what they are NOT — namely, Pretribulational Dispensationalists. Histie-DPs generally hold a minority position within the broader premill camp, but it does seem to be an eschatological school on the rise. Many churches make “being premill” a pastoral litmus test, so a candidate can be a Histie-DP and yet qualify in a traditionally Dispensational church. Subscribing to Historic Premillennialism is also currently one of the safest North American eschatological positions. A Histie-DP pastor remains within the general premillennial camp while not partaking of the perplexing and often bewildering Dispensational distinctives and consequent combativelessness. One who wants to pastor in the premill domain and who actually wants to hold an end times position (contra Pan-mills) but who eschews Dispensationalism is almost certainly a Histie-DP.

3. **Dispensational Premillennialists** ("Dispies") have an intricate system, traceable to JN Darby and unknown before 1830, whose primary (though often unacknowledged) distinction is that the church and Israel are ever disconnected and have separate destinies. "Distinctionalism" would be a more apt moniker for the system (and "Distincties" an appropriate nickname for the proponents). Because of this church/Israel distinction, the church must be evacuated — the Secret Rapture and the 1st resurrection — prior to God’s returning to His earthly dealings (land and king promises) with Israel during the seven year Great Tribulation and subsequent Millennium. The second 2nd Coming takes place at the end of this seven years, and Jesus establishes pure Zionism in Jerusalem, with a returning to the full operation of the Old Covenant Temple, Levitical priesthood and bloody sacrifices. Israeliite hegemony ensues; the Gentiles are in subjection to the Jews for 1,000 years on earth, Jesus ruling with an iron rod from Jerusalem. [One can hardly slip a dime between this Dispie hope and that of the Jews during Jesus’ day, by the way.] After this earthly Millennium, it seems that Jesus exits (this is left a bit foggy), Gog and Magog rise up in opposition, and then Jesus quickly reappears, putting down the rebellion and ushering in the eternal state. Dispies often appeal to their alleged literal hermeneutic, that the above and more are “obvious” from a “plain reading” of the Scriptures. That it took over 1800 years after the close of the canon for any to light upon these supposedly self-evident truths makes one wonder if an alternate agenda is being foisted upon us under the “obvious” rubric. None of the original purveyors of Dispensationalism said anything other than that these truths were unknown until Darby’s day; they even gloated in these things being hidden until their own day (see references by Ironside, Chafer, Scofield, and others to this effect in Cox, chapter 1). Because of its church/Israel separatism, Dispensationalism (or Distinctionism) is actually a bit more than an eschatological view; instead, it is a whole Bible-encompassing system. One must start with the separation of the church and Israel to arrive at the Dispie conclusions (circular logic); and this in part explains the prominence of hermeneutics for Dispies, the back door through which Dispensationalism is propagated. Those who incorrectly see Dispensationalism as merely an eschatological position are typically not very combative over the end times. Those who properly understand the all-embracing character of the Dispie system of necessity use it as a litmus test for fellowship, brook no rivals, allow no discussion of alternate views, and can become verbally violent against those who question Dispie orthodoxy. Dispensationalism is widely spread in what was the Bible Institute movement (mostly begun as one or two year degrees to train missionaries) and many Bible churches. Dispensationalism’s popularity seems singularly limited to North America and those affected by the missionaries sent out by the same.

4. **Panmillennialists** ("Pannies" — not a very attractive moniker, to be sure) have typically been beaten up by some bell-cose Dispies, or they fear that such will take place if they voice their concerns about the Dispensational system, so they give a collective shoulder shrug about eschatology — “Who cares?! Let’s just keep the peace.” Such post-modern tolerance does not comport well with any of our Lord’s instructions; this, plus having nothing in particular to defend, places Pannies in a nonviolent but unenviable position. Pannies mostly inhabit traditionally Dispensational haunts. Secretly, they may even be approaching a majority among Dispies, and is certainly extensive among those “ethnic” Dispies who actually sit down with their Bibles and find that they are unable to verify what they have been taught about the end times. However, “I don’t care and you shouldn’t either!” is a tough sell in public, so no one will ever know the breadth of Pannie propagation.

5. **Amillennialists** ("Amills") believe that the church age is the Millennium, but (unlike Posties) they make no particular assertion concerning the conversion of a great part of the earth. The church of Jesus Christ waxes and wanes the world over as the elect — ever a remnant, never a majority — are gathered in. That this is currently and always has been true for the church age can hardly be debated. Amills are most commonly found in the Reformed camps and are probably the majority report in that tradition. Many “converted” Dispies are Amill as well, including the author.

The Revelation: Six Views

When it comes to the book of Revelation, things get even more mystifying. A dizzying array of terms are attached to interpreting this, one of the most debated books of the Bible. Often the Apocalypse becomes the happy hunting ground of
cranks and crackpots who insist that they alone possess the key that unlocks the truths concerning the end times; alas, many listen to their unstable and rapidly varying babblings propagated by film, TV, paperbacks and social media. Futurism, [Continuous] Historicism, Recapitulationism, Idealism, Preterism [Full or Partial], and Eclecticism are all offered as solutions to the Revelation puzzle, each with strongly credentialed advocates. Born again Christians can enjoy the rich blessings of Colossians or Romans without a doctoral degree in theology, but the book of Revelation seems cut from an entirely different cloth, and many set it aside as too bewildering – “I can’t waste my Christian life arguing about bowls, seals and trumpets!” As stated above, Ferguson said you’re better off using just one commentary when studying the Revelation; you may not be right, but at least you won’t be confused. For the Revelation, maybe Panmillennialism isn’t that bad after all … just shrug your shoulders and walk away from the interpretive maze, surrendering to the bloviating, bombastic backers of end times intricacies. Though dissatisfying, giving up is at least peaceful, a bucolic Biblical happy place in the midst of belligerence; but it does leave that unsettling sense that one has set aside a large chunk of the full council of God, and this without divine justification. Assuming that all genuine Christians have been issued a search warrant to investigate all of the Scriptures – we cannot willy-nilly overlook any of what the Bible says – let us consider each of the 6 views offered for interpreting the Apocalypse.

(1) Futurism. The Futuristic position on Revelation has been quite popular over the last few hundred years and is the dominant view in some sectors of the 21st century American Evangelical movement. This opinion holds that except for the introduction (Rev1) and the seven 1st century Asia Minor churches (Rev2-3), the balance of the Revelation (Rev4-22) is future to our day. The four horsemen of the Apocalypse, Babylon, the Harlot, the two witnesses, massive earthquakes, the sun and moon being darkened, and all else will come to pass in days yet future to us in ways we cannot now explain, though many popular advocates attempt to pierce the veil of uncertainty and give fanciful details with grandiloquent certainty. The Futuristic stance is attractive because of its appeal to the supernatural while leaving the details tantalizingly fuzzy, yet fully fleshed out by the latest self-appointed prophecy “expert.” How can the sun be darkened without killing off everything on earth? How can a star be given a key? How can locusts look like horses and not harm the plants? “Amazing miracles will take place in our near future” is a bit of an opaque answer, but some find the grasping pull of supernaturalism incredibly attractive in a Bible-denying era, especially with the pervasive (a priori) liberal rejection of Biblical supernaturalism. “You reject the supernatural, Mr. Liberal?!” the Futurist incredulously replies; “Well, I’m going to double down and say that as much of the Bible as possible is explained by the supernatural!” This regal posture and straightened backbone against anti-Biblical antagonists is noble indeed. Many sign on with the Futurists for this very reason, a militaristic bearing opposing those traitors who pretend to support Christ when they in fact are undermining the faith. Liberalism is a parasite on true Christianity, and lovingly crushing the liberal bug in the corner of the church is a worthy task for those who follow Jesus. However, at the end of the Futuristic document, in small print it contains the contractual rider that if you ever disagree with them on the “Futurism and supernaturalism explains pretty much every prophecy” presupposition, then you too are a closet liberal and exceedingly close to denying the Bible. If you start to think that some of their beloved futurist Scriptural passages were, in fact, fulfilled in history, then you have voided the Futurist contract and will be treated with criminal harshness. How dare you question our view of the future?!? To the guillotine with the infidel!

Returning to its attractiveness, with Futurism one can apparently retain the appearance of interpretative literalism while still allowing wide berth for rather radical allegorical divergences. For example, Lindsey’s widely read book contends that the locusts of Rev9 are Cobra attack helicopters, an obviously sub-literary view by a supposed literalist. No justification is given – or, apparently, required by the Futurist true believers – to support such interpretive license. Indeed, one of Futurism’s most appealing features is that it grants significant interpretive flexibility within the supposedly “literal” framework. The four horsemen could be accounted for in any number of figurative ways, quite adaptable to the journalistic headlines of our day. Another alluring aspect of Futurism is that at any given point in time, one cannot call such prognosticators to account. “How can you say this WON’T happen in the future?!?” is the retort to opposition. “God will do surprising things in our near future. Do you deny the Bible and the supernatural?! Don’t you take the Bible literally?!” Many Futuristic forecasts cannot be proven false until many decades have passed, and by then the author has made his money from book sales or film royalties, and profitably the prophet moves on. The wise in heart Futurist writer will be sufficiently vague and swerve past the orange barrels and pylons of date setting. Those foolish enough to actually set dates and predict near term fulfillments are quickly swept under the rug once their calculations fail to materialize, though some of them have surprising staying power, even after repeated forecast fiascos. Well, people like a good fantasy, and the Futuristic paperbacks and media provide what a willing audience wants to consume. As Van der Waal says (p13), there is a “boom in doom” – people enjoy a good scare, the specter of future terror – after being removed via the allegedly Secret Rapture and observing the apocalyptic events at an appropriately safe distance, of course. It’s the equivalent of watching an eschatological circus freak show but not being asked to directly participate. I’m sure the suppliers of Futurism’s fantasies are grateful that the Dt18:20-22 death penalty against false prophets is no longer enforced under the New Covenant!

Surely the more level-headed Futurists find uncomfortable their association with conspiracy theorists and wild prophetic opportunists with whom they dwell in such close proximity. Their neighborhood is being destroyed by loud-mouthed, trashy, prophetic ranting renters who decrease the value of the other Futurist properties. The headlines of the 1950s or 1960s were applied to Russia (Wilson) while today those selfsame texts are pinned on Muslim extremists. The application of these speculative techniques will likely be adjusted by Futurists as events unfold in the coming decades, should the Lord tarry. With 20-20 hindsight the prophetic word can be molded to account for just about any recent events, but proving everything actually proves nothing; and alas, the predictive power of this approach has been repeatedly found empty, with few if any of the far-fetched forecasted affairs coming to pass. And where, pray tell, are any useful prophetic predictions, ones that would truly warn the faithful of impending doom? Which of our end times prognosticators predicted the Twin
Tower destruction of 9/11 (2001) in New York? Who forewarned the Israelites of the Arab surprise at the Yom Kippur War (1973)? With surprising consistency, Futurism has failed to foresee what actually comes to pass, though *ex post facto* (after the fact) they often unhelpfully detail how the Scriptures foretold these events. “That’s nice, you guys, but couldn’t you have told us BEFORE it happened so we could be prepared?” Ah, I suppose a gloss like, “But then what was prophesied would not have happened!” could be offered, but that begs the question of why the nations after the Rapture could not do the same and NOT invade Israel during the Great Tribulation (see Yerby quote in Appendix). Won’t all of the literature and media be “left behind” when the church is Secretly Raptured? And couldn’t those who remain read all of the books, watch the films and avoid what has been forecast from the Revelation that is take place during the Great Tribulation? Even worse than the lack of predictive accuracy, what things these Futurists have positively foretold from the prophets have almost never taken place. Who even remembers the Futurist 19th century applications of the prophetic Scriptures to Napoleon III or the Turks, let alone the more recent, *88 Reasons Why The Rapture Will Be In ’88* (Whisenant)? After experiencing decades of crying wolf by the speculative Futurists, is it any surprise that many have forsaken the fervor of the fantasy farm? For how long can one be told that the end is at hand before apathy finally sets in? “Crying prophetic wolf” surely begets glassy-eyed disillusionment. Yet no clairvoyance is required to know that Futurism’s fables will continue to be a popular approach to the Revelation, what with its boundless flexibility (“wax nose”) grabbing the imagination of many about what might happen at the end of time, with no possibility of being called to account in the near term – “Well, it COULD happen!” Besides, Futurism “goes with everything I wear!” Eschatological voyeurism never goes out of style. Saying that everything will take place in our future contains the twin jewels of no historical facts with which to reckon while according nicely with an innate desire to escape coming troubles (Allis p196), so its popularity will continue unabated for the foreseeable “future.”

(2) **Historicism.** Surprisingly close to Futurism is the Continuous Historical (or simply Historical) school of thought concerning the Revelation. This view holds that the Apocalypse is a syllabus or blueprint of church history down through the ages, a chronology of what would happen in the (western) world subsequent to the 1st century AD. Before one discounts this as unfamiliar and maybe even a little bit silly, please consider that this was THE Reformation view for applying the Revelation, with the Pope as the spiritual Antichrist (plus the Turks as the physical Antichrist, according to Luther). An example of the Historicist approach from Pieters (p35-D36) is a good starting point:

Perhaps the fairest way to give the reader an idea of this system is to transcribe, in outline, the fulfillments traced by Barnes (Notes on Rev pXXXIX), as follows:

- **First Seal**: fulfilled in the state of the Roman Empire from the death of Domitian, 96 AD to the accession of Commodus, 180 AD. [all subsequent dates AD]
- **Second Seal**: from the death of Commodus, 193, and onward.
- **Third Seal**: the time of Caracalla, 211 and onward.
- **Fourth Seal**: the time of Decius to Gallienus, 243-268.
- **Fifth Seal**: fulfilled in the Roman Empire in the persecutions, particularly in the time of Diocletian, 284-304.
- **Sixth Seal**: the invasions of the barbarians, 365 and onwards.
- **Seventh Seal**: fulfilled in the Trumpets, as follows:
  - **First Trumpet**: Invasion by Alaric the Goth, 395-410.
  - **Second Trumpet**: Invasion by Genseric the Vandal, 428-468.
  - **Third Trumpet**: Invasion by Attila the Hun, 433-453.
- **Fourth Trumpet**: Final conquest of the Western empire by Odoacer, king of the Heruli, 476-490.
- **Fifth Trumpet**: The Mohammedans.
- **Sixth Trumpet**: The Turks.
- **Chapter 10**, the Great Angel — The Reformation. The Little Book open is the Bible, restored to general reading. That the angel cries with a loud voice is symbolical of the Reformation. The seven thunders heard, but not recorded are the anathemas hurled against the Reformation by the Pope.
- **Chapter 11** — The Measuring of the Temple: the determining of what constituted the true church at the time of the Reformation. The two witnesses represent those who testified against the errors of Rome. The Seventh Trumpet: the final triumph of the church.

This is considered to be the end of the first series of visions. What follows is not a chronological continuation, but a view of the church internally. This second section, in the view of these interpreters, is concerned almost exclusively with the Roman Catholic Church. The woman in chapter 12 is the true church. Her fleeing into the desert represents the condition of the church while the Papacy was in the ascendancy. The wrath of Satan against the “remnant of her seed” represents the attempt of the Papacy to cut off individuals when open and general persecution no longer raged.

- **The First Beast**: The Roman secular or civil power that sustained the Papacy.
- **The Second Beast**: The Papal ecclesiastical power.
- **The Seven Vials**: All interpreted as blows at the power of the Papacy. The first vial, the French Revolution, the second, its scenes of blood and carnage, the third, the French invasions of northern Italy, the fourth, the overturning of the governments that sustained the Papal power, the fifth, the capture of the Pope himself and the seizure of Rome by the French, the sixth, the decline of the Turkish power, the seventh, the complete and final overthrow of the Papal power (still to come). The Great Harlot—the Papacy.
- **The Destruction of Babylon**: the fall of the Papacy.
One intractable dilemma faced by Historicism is also what makes it popular; namely, its nearly limitless elasticity. Any author during any era can generate a scheme using this malleable system for interpreting the Revelation. For instance, Bickersteth in 1845 said that all interpreters agreed that the 6th trumpet of Rev9:13ff applies to the Turks (Allis), while others have plumbed Revelation’s depths, looking for the French revolution, Napoleon, the Reformation, the War of the Roses, and so forth (Terry p443). Mede thinks that the seven seals are a syllabus of Roman history, the seven trumpets are God’s judgments upon Rome after Constantine’s time (barbarians), and so forth, while Vitrina applies the continuous historical method to the seven seals from the Roman empire down to the Reformation and on to the final consummation (after Stuart v2 p149-150). Other examples show the method’s inconsistency. This interpretive variability calls into question the very method itself; again, proving everything proves nothing. Besides, would such a church history syllabus supply any comfort at all to the original 1st century readers?

It is a curious fact that Historicism is employed by some Futurists to the seven churches of Asia Minor, saying that they represent seven stages of the church down to the present time (LaHaye). This application of an entirely alternate method by the Futurists is understandable, since they seek to get chronologically from the Apostle John’s day in Rev1 to our own supposedly immediate future in Rev4. If you can assert (without proof) that the seven churches represent seven stages of church history right up to the present day, then we are in the Laodicean (or lukewarm) church age, just before the Secret Rapture, a seminal event inexplicably unmentioned in the “white space” between Revelation chapters 3 and 4. Unfortunately for this application of the Continuous Historical technique by some Futurists, the inconsistency is palpable. As pointed out by Gentry (footnote in Brown), for many Futurists the Secret Rapture is imminent (can occur at any moment); but the Continuous Historical method applied to Rev2-3 means that seven whole church ages had to transpire before we arrive at imminence in our own era. In other words, the Secret Rapture could NOT have been imminent for 2000 years, until our epoch, since seven church ages had to come to pass beforehand.

Though they declare their fealty to a Futurist scheme, many of today’s “stir up the masses” applications of prophecy actually use the Continuous Historical technique, erratic applications of which are familiar to most American Christians. “The end is near!” “He’s the Antichrist!” “That invasion was foretold in the Scriptures!” These are patchy and sometimes incoherent uses of Historicism by some Futurists. The stated (Dispensational) belief is that Jesus could return at any moment (imminence) without any preceding events to tip us off that the end of time is close at hand. How can there be “signs of the times” when there are NOT supposed to be any such signs prior to the Secret Rapture? The consistent Dispensational theologian asserts that the prophecies of Revelation and elsewhere will take place once the church is whisked away to heavenly safe-keeping, so how can these prophecies meant for our future be applied to our present? This troublesome point is mostly ignored or smoothed over as any available prophetic text is Shanghaied for use by the American church and myopically applied to the political history of the USA. The destruction of the Twin Towers (9/11) by some radical Muslims? That was foretold in the Scriptures (stated ex post facto). Hitler? Mussolini? A looming invasion of Europe by the Russian Bear? Hey! We find that all of these were Biblically foretold, say our latter day, self-anointed and often unlettered prophecy experts. Yes, sometimes these prognosticators have seemed right, but even a blind squirrel occasionally finds a nut; and their method appears similar to that used with the opaque statements of Nostradamus, where events are ex post facto said to have been clearly “foretold” by that medieval mystic and apothecary hundreds of years beforehand.

We note in passing the transparent Western Christian nearsightedness when employing the Continuous Historical scheme. Only the history of the western (North American and Western European) world is considered when applying this interpretive method. What of Christians and world events in China or India? These nations are consistently omitted from the English prophetic math books calculating the Continuous Historical equation. The Han or Ming Dynasties or the pressures related to the East India Company or invading Mongols surely never appear in English language Continuous Historical products, though these were exceedingly important national events for China, Russia and India. Oh no, the diligent application of the Historical school to “world” events is narrowly focused, rarely containing anything but what affects the writer’s own western culture. This alone makes the Historical interpretive technique entirely suspect. We can only echo Pieters’ assessment (p150):

[The Continuous Historical school] is so thoroughly artificial, so completely out of touch with the circumstances of the age in which the Revelation was written, and so tied up with time calculations which the event has falsified [e.g., “He’s the Antichrist!” which ends up being false], that I think we may quietly allow it to die a natural death – which it seems to be in the process of doing.

Alas, the expectation of a near term demise for the Historical prophetic method for the Revelation, penned by Pieters in 1946, has likewise proved false. The apparently slain beast of Historicism yet lives!

Concerning the ongoing application of the Continuous Historical method, I can confidently predict that it will live on, and this hypothesis has four attending postulates. Postulate 1: Should the Lord tarry, we can safely assume that others will continue to “adjust” their analysis of the Revelation (and other vague or apocalyptic prophetic passages), applying these to the news headlines of their day (ex post facto, of course). Postulate 2: Since they’ve been incorrect with every past historical treatment, the purveyors of the Continuous Historical technique will continue to be erroneous in the future, though from sheer statistics they may occasionally get something close to right (a loudly trumpeted rarity). Postulate 3: The Continuous Historical school begets end times apathy in the church rather than raising anticipation for the 2nd Advent. Crying wolf only arouses the attention of the citizenry the first few times. “Pan-millennialism” is a certain by-product of the erratic and unpredictable use of the malleable, wax nose Continuous Historical method. Postulate 4: The “signs of the times” fervor will be strongest amongst those who know little about its pathetic prophetic track record. Those who advocate socialism prefer to bury or overlook its dismal and bloody history; likewise historical ignorance is the proper pH for the soil that advances the consistently erroneous Historical method. Conspiracy theories and Historicism alike are immune to evi-
dential and logical refutations among a certain segment of Christianity. Besides, the “signs of the times” makes for greatly hyped media presentations on eschatology. What end times movie could there be without the special effects of massive invasions and supernatural interventions appealing to the novitiate?

(3) Recapitulationism. A close cousin to Historicism is the Recapitulationist Historical method. Less familiar than the preceding Futurism or [Continuous] Historicism schools, Recapitulationism is more narrowly focused on the Revelation itself, attempting to explain the replicated sets of sevens. The basic theory is that the seven churches, seals, trumpets and bowls, plus three other less obvious sevens, are the same historical church events viewed from different angles, or recapitulated in each succeeding seven (e.g., Hendriksen p16ff). When one reads a trumpet judgment, for example, he may be reminded of some familiar phraseology in a preceding seal judgment. The parallel features are explained by asserting that these are, in fact, the selfsame chronological events from church history described somewhat differently and possibly with slightly altered sequencing. The two groups of 144,000 are the same; the great earthquakes are the same; and so on. The Recapitulationist technique thus ends up being comparable to the Continuous Historical school. For the Recapitulationist, the Revelation is yet a compendium of church history subsequent to the Apostle John’s day and right up to our very own, but it is NOT continuous; rather, the Revelation presents repeated pictures of the same incidents out of the ecclesiastical syllabus from the 1st to the 2nd Advents. With some deft interpretive skill, in fact, the four obvious sevens (churches, seals, trumpets, bowls) can be augmented by three more for an attractive total of seven groups of 7, all of which deal with the blueprint of church history following the writing of the Revelation. The fact that seven beatitudes, or blessings, also appear in the Revelation (1:1; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7,14) is not lost on the Recapitulationists, a seemingly subliminal verification of their theory.

Stuart (p464-5) informs us that Mede (1627) was the first synchronistic (or Recapitulationistic) proponent; but Hendriksen has to be the strongest recent advocate. Unfortunately, the Recapitulationist Historical school suffers from the same problems presented above for the Continuous Historical method. The uneven and variable application of the Recapitulationist theory is similar to that seen amongst their Continuous Historical brethren. Subsequent events disprove or alter the delivered prophetic products, and the “certain” relevance to past or current events effortlessly bobs up and down, floating on the sea waves of different protagonists, generating anything but certainty. If one wants to use either Historical system, it is best to stick with the input of just one author; reading another will only decrease one’s prophetic confidence.

Intermission: Futurism and Historicism Critiqued

Mohler often uses the illustration that the worst way to learn about water is to ask a fish. The fish cannot even consider being there any other way to live than surrounded by water, so if it could talk, it would be at a loss for words to explain the water in which it swims. It is often likewise for one’s approach to the Revelation. Having assumed but not proven the Futurist or Historicist system, no real proof is offered on behalf of the fundamental assumptions. This is the heart of an a priori, that which is assumed as self-evident and thus requires no proof. Where exactly in the Revelation do we have it stated that the book contains a syllabus of church history from the 1st to the 2nd Advents? No chapter nor verse can be produced to demonstrate that the purpose of the Apocalypse is to provide a blueprint of western ecclesiastical and political history. Yes, one can assert that it “works” with some creative and adaptive exegesis; but firmly held assertions are not produced to demonstrate that all of these picturesque prophecies are necessarily future to us in the 21st century. With some deft interpretive skill, in fact, the four obvious sevens (churches, seals, trumpets, bowls) can be augmented by three more for an attractive total of seven groups of 7, all of which deal with the blueprint of church history following the writing of the Revelation. The fact that seven beatitudes, or blessings, also appear in the Revelation (1:1; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7,14) is not lost on the Recapitulationists, a seemingly subliminal verification of their theory.

[The Apostle John] furnishes no “continuous historical” record of the progress of Christianity in the Roman empire. We should no more look in the prophecies of this book for a syllabus of the petty feuds of medieval Europe than for an account of modern missions in India, China, and Japan. Too long have false presumptions led men to search in apocalyptic pictures for predictions of such events as the French Revolution, the fall of Napoleon Bonaparte, the Protestant Reformation, and the Wars of the Roses. One might as well expect to find in Scripture predictions of the discovery of America and the invention of the steam engine and the electric telegraph. The mind that gives itself to discover such things in Biblical prophecy misapprehends the mind of the Spirit. The fallacy of such procedures in exegesis lies in a total misconception of the nature and scope of apocalyptic writing. As for Futurism, there can be little doubt that the Revelation contains things future to John’s day. The Apostle was explicitly told to “write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which WILL TAKE PLACE after these things” (1:19). From this verse alone, it is transparent that at least some of the Revelation was future to John. However, where exactly is it said that all of these picturesque prophecies are necessarily future to us in the 21st century? In fact, there are quite a few positive indicatORS from the Revelation itself that the things prophesied were nearer term to John’s day than the Futurist scheme allows. A few instances will suffice to make the point, beginning with the first verse. “The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants, the things which must SOON take place” (1:1). By what measure is “soon” some 2,000 years later? This defies the Greek language itself. Likewise, 1:3 says that “The time is NEAR.” How can a “near” fulfillment be a few millennia later? Other supporting verses come from the didactic sections – the teaching portions of the Revelation (chapters 1-3 and 22) that are not filled with as much of the highly wrought visionary and symbolic language found in the balance of the book:

“And he said to me, ‘These words are faithful and true’; and the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent His angel to show to His bond-servants the things which must SOON take place.” (22:6)

“And behold, I am coming QUICKLY” (22:7)

“And He said to me, ‘Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is NEAR.’” (22:10)

“Behold, I am coming QUICKLY” (22:12)
“Yes, I am coming QUICKLY” (22:20)

The pattern can hardly be missed, and does not square up very well with the notion of a couple thousand year delay before the prophesied events transpire (see Adams). Some measure of a near term fulfillment must accompany a proper understanding of the Apocalypse, a view that is almost entirely absent from Historicist and Futurist treatments of the wildly interpreted and thus often maligned book of Revelation.

Was John himself in the Tribulation? Was he part of the Kingdom? Contrary to Chiliasm (premillennial) claims, the Apostle testifies, “I, John, your brother and fellow PARTAKER IN THE TRIBULATION AND KINGDOM ...” (1:9). This verse obviously subverts the notion that the Tribulation and Kingdom are entirely future to our present day, and thus John and the seven churches could in no wise be partakers. This verse even undercuts the empty notion held by some, “God won’t make the church go through the Tribulation because it does no good to have His people suffer.” Have they not read the New Testament, where suffering for the church is guaranteed (e.g., 2Tm3:12)? After being stoned and dragged out of Lystra, Paul told the Christians, “Through many TRIBULATIONS we must enter the kingdom of God” (Acts14:22). Did Paul think that God was going to whisk away he and his fellow believers to heavenly bliss because the church shouldn’t have to suffer? In Rev1:9, John himself says he was part of the Kingdom, and for this he suffered great tribulation in the windswept prison paradise of Patmos. A Futurist outlook that puts both the Kingdom and the Tribulation entirely future to our day does not even align with one of the Apostle John’s opening statements!

Other threads conspire to weaken the Futurist case for the Revelation, especially that it lacks contemporary relevance for the seven churches. Recall that the book is an epistle, dictated by Christ Himself to these suffering Asia Minor churches. With the Futurist view, a decidedly negative light is cast upon Jesus’ messages to the churches. “I know that you are suffering greatly, you Asia Minor churches,” says our Lord, according to the Futurist perspective; “But fear not! Several thousand years from now you will be dead and gone, with your lands having been overrun by a marauding nation [the Turks] and your churches reduced to ruins left to be seen by tourists. Another religion will arise to dominate the land [Islam]. After all of this, I will do some truly amazing things, especially in regions you know not of [America and Europe]. I care for you, my persecuted bride, so take slim comfort in these empty words, since none of what I’m telling you applies to your day and age. Be warm and well fed!” No, the Lord of glory would not so mock His suffering church. The very epistolary nature of the Revelation means there MUST be contemporary relevance in Jesus’ words for the Asia Minor churches. Any application of the Revelation that puts everything in the far distant future from John’s day (Futurism and Historicism) makes it completely irrelevant to its original audience. Indeed, if they were to find solace in Christ’s words, the application of the Revelation must be within the grasp of those seven churches, otherwise what is the point of Jesus’ calling them to obedience? Futuristic fantastical fulfillments that the Asia Minor churches could not have possibly imagined – tanks, helicopters, epic battles amongst modern nations – this cannot align with the Revelation’s application to the 1st century church. The criterion of contemporary relevance subverts the hash often made of the Apocalypse by the unending day-dreaming of Futurists and Historicists. Murray (p261) says of Spurgeon:

Spurgeon possessed a profound distrust of many pre-millenial dealers in prophecy who, working upon the excitement caused in Victorian evangelicalism by the new ideas of the Plymouth Brethren [JN Darby and company, the founders of Dispensationalism], set themselves up as the expounders of all mysteries and treated the subject of prophecy as though it were the key to Christianity. There are many warnings in Spurgeon against that sort of interest in prophecy. A biblical preacher, he told his congregation, “wants to have souls saved and Christians quickened and therefore he does not forever pour out the vials, and blow the trumpets of prophecy. Some hearers are crazy after the mysteries of the future. Well, there are two or three brethren in London who are always trumpeting and vialing. Go and hear them if you want it, I have something else to do” (v21 p91). Again, addressing the students at his college, he says:

“I am greedy after witnesses for the glorious gospel of the blessed God. O that Christ crucified were the universal burden of men of God. Your guess at the number of the beast, your Napoleonic speculations, your conjectures concerning a personal Antichrist – forgive me, I count them but mere bones for dogs; while men are dying and hell is filling, it seems to me the veriest drivel to be muttering about an Armageddon at Sebastopol, or Sadowa or Sedan, and peeping between the folded leaves of destiny to discover the fate of Germany. Blessed are they who read and hear the words of the prophecy of the Revelation, but the like blessing has evidently not fallen on those who pretend to expound it, for generation after generation of them have been proved to be in error by the mere lapse of time, and the present race will follow to the same inglorious sepulchre” (Lectures to my Students, First Series [1887] p83).

In the same volume he tells his students that, “A prophetical preacher enlarged so much upon ‘the little horn’ of Daniel, that one Sabbath morning he had but seven hearers remaining” (p100). There is much more in Spurgeon in the same vein; he ridiculed the novelities of interpretation which were being hawked about as new insights into Scripture and did not underestimate the spiritual evil which was resulting from the disproportionate attention which a number were giving to prophecy.

More could be forwarded on this critique of Futurism and Historicism with respect to the Apocalypse – indeed, lengthy tomes and diatribes have been penned showing how Biblically empty these schools really are, though their progeny do an excellent job of whooping up the masses; but their consistent predictive failures speak more volumes than their critics could ever amass in many tomes of refutation.

After this brief aside, we return to the six views on the Revelation:

(4) Idealism. Idealism (or Spiritualism) is a less pervasive yet attractive position on interpreting the Revelation. In essence, Idealism contends that the Revelation is not about any historical events in particular – past, present or future – but rather offers timeless truths to the church cloaked in strikingly symbolic, apocalyptic language. Idealism has had such
staunch supporters of the Scriptures as Hendrickksen and Rushdoony (Gentry p33). It seems that some who have dug deep furrows in the Apocalyptic soil have indeed found the Idealist approach to the Revelation quite appealing.

Sadly, Idealism appears to have much in common with the Liberal treatment of the Bible. “The Bible isn’t a history or science book,” say the Liberals who deny Biblical Inerrancy. Those previously called Modernists tell us, “The Scriptures nourish our faith and provide moral instruction. Those miracles in Exodus or the Gospels didn’t really happen, nor was Jonah ever swallowed by a fish, and the Creation account is just period mythology like the Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic.” Please note that Idealists DO NOT deny Inerrancy. However, divorcing the Revelation from any historical framework to untie the Apocalyptic knot is not a Biblically agreeable problem solving method, and the track record of applying this technique is not at all attractive. Putting lipstick on a pig doesn’t it beautiful. While we can all agree that the Revelation does indeed present timeless truths to the church down through the ages, the Idealist position does not comport well with an epistle written to seven 1st century churches. Do the things in the Apocalypse have immediate application to the suffering Asia Minor churches or not? If not, then why include them at the outset of the Revelation? Why didn’t Jesus just start with chapter 4 and end with chapter 21, if all of the book just pictorially presents eternal truths to the church, with no particular historical events in view? Put another way, the epistles to the Corinthians or Thessalonians certainly supply enduring instructions to the body of Christ, yet they are surely grounded in then-current events pertaining to each of those churches. Can we say, “Oh, it doesn’t matter if the church at Colossae really existed, since the epistle to them just gives the church nourishing moral sustenance throughout the ages?” Put another way, if the Revelation was penned with no historical grounding, no near term relevance to the Asia Minor churches, then surely it would be a Scriptural singularity; the Apocalypse would be a stand-alone, the one and only book of the Bible written devoid of any historical context with real people and events. For this reason alone, Idealism is suspect, since it offers no sure foundation, no exegetical grounding in history. Though it is true that the Apocalypse gives the church lasting instructions, this is also true of Romans, Philippians, or any of the other 65 books that comprise the Canon, all solidly established in the annals of history. A real live, flesh and blood history is part of every book in the Old and New Testaments; setting this aside to solve Revelation’s interpretive dilemmas is entirely unwise.

(5) Preterism. Preterism is an entirely alternate approach to the Revelation, sharply contrasting with Historicism, Futurism and Idealism. The term preterism comes from the Latin praeter, which Webster’s lists as a prefix denoting that something is “past” or “beyond.” Preterism holds that much if not all of Revelation has already taken place in the 1st century AD, future to John’s day but history to us. Preterism is the North Pole to Futurism’s South — completely opposite in polarity, but with magnetic repulsion rather than attraction between them. The two positions could not be further apart, with Futurism saying that the bulk of Revelation is yet to come for us, while Preterism holds that the majority of the Apocalypse has already transpired. Indeed, Preterist is astonishing to those hardened in the furnace of Futurism; baked clay Futurists all too commonly hold a strident brand of exclusivism, thinking that they alone hold the key to all prophetic truth. Often the Futurists accost their Preterist brethren in Christ with such vacuous logic as, “What, don’t you take the Bible seriously?” as if only the Futurists are serious about Biblical truth. Such foolishness is clearly ignorant of the historical fact that many well studied and lettered men of God hold to some form of Preterism, including RC Sproul, Jay Adams, Gentry, Schaff, Bahnsen, Stuart, Terry, Chilton, and others (Gentry p35). Even if one disagrees with their eschatological conclusions, one cannot say that this is a group of illiterate Biblical bumpkins and interpretive ignoramuses.

A few key details must be ironed out in support of Preterism, details into which its opponents sink their interlocking bulldog teeth and consider these apparent flaws well nigh fatal to the position. If the events of the Revelation were future to John’s day but mostly history to us, as Preterism contends, then when did they take place? Futurism has the advantage that nothing of consequence has yet transpired from the Apocalypse, so how can anyone say that its predictions are wrong? Historicism is likewise infinitely malleable, bending and flexing according to the interpreter’s whims, altering as time and events have shown its previous predictions to be in error. However, if the Revelation is entirely history to us – and the events of the 1st century aren’t exactly changing these days – then surely it can be disproved by an historical analysis of the 1st century events. Another apparently mortal wound is that most Preterists apply the Apocalypse to the AD Jewish War, but doesn’t everyone know that the Revelation was penned in the mid-90s AD? The establishment of Preterism is intimately connected with the time when John saw the visions from Christ on Patmos. Proving that the Revelation was written after the fall of the 2nd Jewish Temple (70AD) is equivalent to proving that Preterism is false. It is incumbent on the Preterist proponent to absolutely establish two things. The first is that the Revelation was authored prior to the fall of the Temple (70AD). The second is that the graphic pictorial language of the Apocalypse primarily concerns the events of the Jewish War (66-73AD) and the Roman Empire. Singly these criteria look insurmountable; in tandem they appear absolutely fatal, a mortal wound to the stumbling, staggering and generally unpopular belief known as Preterism. My purpose is not just to heal the Preterist mortal wound with a theological band aid, but to demonstrate that in fact the Partial Preterist Amillennial (PPA) position is compelling, answering all of its vitriolic critics and squaring up with all that we know about the Apocalypse. You may yet remain unconvinced, but at least you can hereafter leave aside the pejorative, ad hominem and overall opprobrium heaped upon your Preterist brethren.

One of the sharpest arrows against Preterism, piercing its seemingly thin defensive armor, is the notion forwarded by some that ALL of the Revelation is history to us, including the Lord’s return (the 2nd Advent). This is so-called Full Preterism, the “full” meaning that we look for NO future fulfillment of anything from the Apocalypse. Starting with the assumption that all is past to us, Full Preterists look upon chapters 20 to 22 as having transpired. Without delving into too much detail, it is difficult to swallow that the new heavens and earth, along with the New Jerusalem coming down from heaven, represent past events to us, or even the current state of ecclesiastical affairs. It seems that for some who wield the Preterist hammer, even chapters 20-22 look like Preterist nails. Oh, would that the River and Trees of Life of Rev 22 were
Indeed present among us! One would have to seriously redefine the armed conflict and glories of Rev20:7-22:9 to insist that these things have happened in our past or represent our present, so we can sidestep the obvious Full Preterist shortcomings and thus dodge a bullet to the Preterist skull. The wound does indeed appear fatal to Full Preterism, but this is not so for its Partial alternative.

Indeed, many Preterists are of the Partial variety, the so-called Partial Preterist Amillennial (PPA) position. This view is “partial” in the sense that the contents of Rev20:7-22:9 have not yet come to pass. In contradistinction to its Full Preterist brethren, PPA holds that Gog and Magog, the 2nd Advent, the final judgment, the eternal state are all are future to us. The basic framework of PPA is as follows:

1) John wrote to seven real Asia Minor churches in need of Jesus’ admonition (Rev1-3), with the sufferings they faced being the infamous persecution of the church by Nero from 64-68AD.

2) Rev4-5 supplies the glorious heavenly introduction; few would argue this, whatever their eschatological perspective

3) Rev6-11 give us apocalyptic images of the Jewish War (66-73AD) viewed from the land of Israel. Those who violently rejected their Messiah receive their comeuppance, according to their own wishes (“His blood shall be on us and on our children!” Mt27:25).

4) Rev12 is transitional, dealing with the fate of the Jerusalem church during the seven year “Great Tribulation” of the Jewish War and the demolition of the Temple by the Romans. Would the Jerusalem church be swept aside in the destruction of God’s Jewish enemies? Eusebius (3.5.3) famously informs us that the church heeded Jesus’ words to flee when Jerusalem was surrounded by armies (Lk21:20) and found sanctuary in the nearby valley location of Pella, which providentially was not sacked by the Romans. In apocalyptic terms, the woman fled and was protected (12:14), while the land of Israel consumed the river of the dragon’s wrath (12:15-16).

5) Rev13-18 revisits the Jewish War from a wider angle lens, looking at the larger effects of the conflagration on the Roman Empire (the Beast from the water and the 2nd Beast from the land) and how this interleave with the demise of the Jewish nation (the Harlot) in general and Jerusalem (Babylon) in particular. The church’s primary opponent prior to the Jewish War was not really the Romans, but was actually the virulent, Jesus-rejecting Jews who attempted to use the power of Rome (the Harlot riding the Beast) to crush the nascent church and its gospel progress. For the Bride of Christ to truly flourish, the enemies of God needed to be removed, as did the last vestiges of the Old Covenant. This came to pass with the obliteration of the Messiah-spurning Jewish adversaries during the Jewish War from 66-73AD.

6) Rev19 is about the worldwide gospel victory now that the church’s primary antagonists had been severely curtailed; it is not about the 2nd Advent. Note that the white horse conquest is not necessarily military; it is achieved via that sharp sword from Jesus’ mouth (19:15) – the Word of God did indeed triumph over Jewish and Roman opposition, as the sword of the Spirit still metes out victory to this day! The cross always conquers, no matter the seeming strength of its antagonists!

7) Rev20:1-6, the ever-controversial passage on the Millennium, is about Jesus’ current heavenly rule and the nations being subjugated to Him via gospel invasion and occupation up to the present time. In other words, according to Partial Preterist Amillennialism (PPA), the Millennium is NOW, a current and actual rule by Jesus in the hearts of men amidst the earthly kingdoms of men. The 1st resurrection is the new birth in Christ, raising the spiritually dead to newness of life which enables the partakers to avoid eternal perdition, the 2nd death (Eph 2:1-7).

8) As expected, Rev20:7-22:9 is chronologically subsequent to the church age and is about the final judgment and the eternal state. The beauty of the New Jerusalem lies in our future, with blessed imagery of eternal bliss presented to us in Old Testament prophetic terms, the enemies of God having all been subjugated and judged.

Intimately tied to the above sequencing is the assumption that the book of Revelation was penned BEFORE the fall of the 2nd Temple (70AD). How can the Apocalypse be prophetic if it was written ex post facto (after the fact)? This appears to be a fatal Partial Preterist Amillennial flaw. “Doesn’t everybody know that the Apocalypse was written around 95AD? How can it possibly be predicting the events of the Jewish War when the book was written a quarter century AFTER these things took place?” However, the “everybody knows” argument may not be as potent a weapon as first supposed. After all, the Biblical books don’t exactly come with time/date stamps, despite what your Study Bible may lead you to believe.

Without yet expanding too broadly on the subject, there are several poignant chronological indicators within the Revelation itself and from external sources, showing that the events prophetically described were close at hand to John’s day. There is the oft-repeated refrain at the beginning and end of the Apocalypse that the time was near or at hand (Rev1:1,3; 22:6,7,10,12,20), and therefore were not to be construed as taking place many hundreds of years later. How can the “soon take place” (Rev1:1) mean centuries later? In addition, there is a nail firmly driven in Rev17: “The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits, and they are seven kings; five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come” (17:9-10). What can this mean? It appears that the book was authored after the reign of five kings (“five have fallen”) and during the sovereignty of the 6th (“one is”). The 6th (and last) Caesar in the Julio-Claudio line was Nero (1-Julius, 2-Augustus, 3-Tiberius, 4-Caligula, 5-Claudius, 6-Nero). Rev17:9-10 squarely puts the penning of the Apocalypse during Nero’s day. In addition, Rev11:1-2 indicates that the Temple was still standing when the book was written, since John was told to go
measure it. If the Temple had not yet been demolished and John himself (not someone in the future) was asked to measure it, doesn’t this imply a date of writing prior to the Temple’s destruction in 70 AD? The Muratorian Canon (c. 180 AD) says that Paul wrote to seven churches as did his PREDECESSOR John. This strongly implies that John wrote to the seven churches of Asia Minor in the Revelation prior to the completion of Paul’s epistles to seven churches (Rome, Corinth, Galatia, Ephesus, Philippi, Colossae, Thessalonica). The Muratorian Canon, then, dates the Revelation prior to Paul’s decapitation, traditionally put around 67 AD. Here is strong external testimony to the early date of the Revelation.

Indeed, so compelling and extensive is the early date evidence for the Apocalypse that it was the majority report among Bible believing scholars in the 19th century. We examine the internal and external dating testimonies more completely below; here we simply note that there are many chronological pointers corroborating that the visions from Patmos came prior to the Jewish War (66-73 AD) but during the Neronian persecution (64-68 AD), thus making a date of writing around 65 AD very likely. It seems, then, that the “everybody knows” argument concerning the late date (95 AD) for the Revelation may not be that powerful after all. Could it be that the late date fire has been fueled by the rise of Historicism and Futurism, with their desire to apply the images of the Apocalypse to the history of the church or to our own immediate future rather than to our distant past? The wish could well be the father to the thought. In other words, if the Revelation was written well after the Jewish War, as forwarded by many today, then of necessity it must be giving either an ecclesiastical syllabus (Historicism) or telling us about our future (Futurism); but what if this dating assumption proves to be false, and the Apocalypse was, in fact, written before the outbreak of the Jewish War? If so, then Partial Preterist Amillennialism (PPA) gives the best explanation of the contents of the Revelation.

In sum, then, we would like to show that PPA (Partial Preterist Amillennialism) is not only a plausible approach to the Revelation, but that it is compelling, and neatly aligns with the facts of the book. It is grounded in history, has immediate impact for the seven Asia Minor churches to which it was written, is well established in the prophetic imagery of the Old Testament, and squares up with the Lord’s meting out retribution upon the heads of THAT generation of Jews, the very ones who had ruthlessly butchered their Messiah [i.e., Jewish bloodguilt does not extend to future generations at all].

(6) Eclecticism. Finally, we arrive at Eclecticism, the last of the six approaches to the Revelation. As the name implies, this is a mix and match position, with a pinch of Preterism, a dash of Futurism, salt to taste with Historicism, and so forth. Eclecticism invariably starts with the late date position for the Revelation (penned in the mid-90s AD). Realizing that putting everything in the distant future (either by Historicism or Futurism) would obviate its 1st century applicability to the Asia Minor churches, Eclecticism attempts to untie the Gordian knot by including some Preterism, allowing for some immediate usefulness for those early Asia Minor churches. Since no events subsequent to the 1st century AD seem to align with the contents of the Revelation, however, the Eclecticist then applies a bit each of Historicism and Futurism to infill the perceived prophetic gaps. Such an amalgamation of variegated building materials often makes for a rather unseemly final edifice. With no unified position to defend, Eclecticism’s flexibility becomes its own undoing. Each proponent seems quite confident that he has finally gotten the right alchemical admixture for a tasty Apocalyptic stew; but his testimony is unraveled by the next who enters the prophetic kitchen and proposes alternate ingredients. “The first to plead his case seems right, until another comes and examines him” (Pr 18:17). Like a surgery patient who perishes from complications, so Eclecticism dies from its own complexity; that is, until another comes along and resuscitates it, sewing in a new brain and loudly declaring that the Eclectic monster yet lives! Without a unified position to acknowledge or refute, we can quietly allow Eclecticism to wallow and perish in the quagmire of its own making, each proponent undermined by subsequent proponents with alternate Eclectic alchemy. Eclecticism will continue to be advocated by those who accept a late date and yet recognize that there must be some 1st century relevance, but it will ever remain an awkward position to describe and defend.

Six Revelation Views Review

Having considered six holistic views on the Apocalypse, let us take a moment to summarize the assertions made by each one.

1) Futurism holds that from Rev 4 onward, the events prophetically described in the Apocalypse are future to our time. In our day, a reconstituted Roman Empire, Israel gathered back to the land, the Secret Rapture, and so forth are typically associated with this view. The details of how to apply Futurism typically depend on the epoch of the commentator. The certainty of one writer gives way to the confidence of the next generation’s Futurist authors. Note that while maintaining that most all of the Revelation is Future to us, this does not seem to provide a corresponding brake on applying the images from the Apocalypse to the latest world events, which is more in keeping with Historicism (see below). If you ever hear about “the signs of the times,” this is NOT Futurism, since their bedrock principles posit that there are no signs before the Rapture. Though “literalism” is often associated with today’s Futurism, many of the Futurist interpretations of the Revelation’s prophetic imagery is anything but literal. UFOs?! Attack helicopters?! A Russian or Chinese invasion?! Such applications betray an alternate agenda surprisingly devoid of actual literalism.

2) Historicism [more properly, Continuous Historicism] contends that the Revelation is a blueprint of church history from the 1st century AD down to the present time. Depending on the commentator’s era, the ecclesiastical syllabus typically comes to a close in the time period and country of the author (prophetic myopia). Therefore, with cool assurance each successive Historicist author adjusts or replaces the confident assertions of a bygone age. For instance, thumbing through the Reformation or 19th century Historicist literature produces puzzled looks on the faces of 21st century readers. The Historicist blueprint of church history in the Apocalypse proves to be remarkably malleable, and thus it does not support the weight of Christians who hang on to it; rather, it is a cord with weak strands that is easily broken by those who come later.
Curiously, Scofield and LaHaye are examples of those who combine Historicism with their Futurism. Why do these Futurist men employ Historicism, supposing that the seven churches stand for seven ecclesiastical epochs? Needing to get from the Apostle John’s day in Rev1 to the (surprisingly unmentioned) future Secret Rapture after the end of Rev3, Historicism applied by Futurists to the seven churches neatly achieves the desired end. In other words, if the seven Asia Minor churches stand for seven ages in church history, then with punctuated Historicism the Futurist can time warp himself from the distant past (John’s day) in chapter 1 to events future to our day beginning in chapter 4 – what a nifty (though unsubstantiated) Biblical trick! In addition, that means the present church age is that of the lukewarm Laodicean era, the last of the seven churches; and this dovetails nicely with the Darbyite assertion that the church is pathetically going downhill in our current era! [Darby was the leading 19th century promoter of Dispensationalism and the dictatorial head of the Plymouth Brethren until his death in 1882.]

It all fits so well, until one realizes that nowhere in the Revelation is there even a breath that the seven churches were meant to stand for seven ecclesiastical eras. Moreover, isn’t it likewise fascinating that the defining mark of many Futurists, that seminal event known as the Secret Rapture, is nowhere actually mentioned in the Apocalypse? Ah, yes, some contend that in the “Come up here” of Rev4:1, the Apostle John is representative of the church’s Secret Rapture, just prior to the seven year Great Tribulation. However, speculative assertions do not represent Biblical facts, and the firm repetition of falsehoods do not make them true. The Apocalypse itself nowhere forwards the notion that the seven churches represent seven church ages, nor that John is representing all of the church at some point in the future far distant from his own age. Can you believe that such assertions are made by those who claim “literalism” as their hallmark?! All indications from the Revelation are that these were simply seven struggling local Asia Minor churches, no longer extant, each of which needed encouragement and/or upbraiding; and that the Apostle John was, well, the Apostle John, not representing anything other than himself.

Moreover, doesn’t the Historicist approach to the seven churches by Futurists overturn the much-vaulted doctrine of imminence? If seven extensive church epochs had to take place before the Secret Rapture, how then can the Rapture have been imminent for the bulk of ecclesiastical history? Using the seven churches = seven church ages equation, we must conclude that seven lengthy time periods had to transpire before Christ’s partial return at the Rapture became “imminent.” This means that the Secret Rapture was not imminent for 2,000 years, until our very own day during the alleged Laodicean church age. This obviously undercuts imminence as a meaningful church dogma for, oh, about 2,000 years; and all of this to support a Rapture doctrine not actually forwarded in the Revelation. Story telling seems to be superseding and circumventing the Scriptures.

While on the subject, inconsistency does not appear to prevent some Futurist proponents from routinely employing Historicism to whoop up the masses with “signs of the times” fervor. This typically takes the following form: citing some opaque prophetic Scriptures as referring to the latest news headlines, the compliant church masses are told that the Bible foretold some recent major event – always safely after the fact (ex post facto), of course. Indeed, this is Futuristic plagiarism, borrowing without attestation from the Historicist playbook. I thought the Secret Rapture is supposed to come with no precursory signs whatsoever – what gives?! How can one say there are no signs of the “imminent” Rapture while still stoking the flames of church end times hysteria with “signs of the times?” While not acknowledging the divergence from Futurism (“it’s all future to us”), such speakers and authors seem to be casually tossing aside their doctrine of sign-less “imminence” (no signs precede the Rapture, so no “signs of the times”) for notoriety and book sales.

3) Recapitulationism [more properly, Recapitulational Historicism] is like unto its Continuous Historical cousin in holding that the last New Testament book prophetically gives a church history curriculum from the Apostles right up to the present time. However, Recapitulationism notes the patterns of seven within the Revelation and contends that each of the sevens are, in fact, the same events viewed from differing angles; each of the sevens give the same information, hence recapitulating the other sevens. To the obvious seven churches, seals, trumpets, and bowls, the Recapitulationalist typically adds three additional sevens for an attractive total of seven sevens, each seven rehearsing the same expanse of church history in a slightly altered fashion. Though creative, the variance of the commentators on these three additional sevens points towards its artificiality. Also, the differing percentages given for the seals, trumpets, and bowls (¼, ⅔, all) is difficult to reconcile with things being the same events in the ecclesiastical syllabus. Moreover, the chronology of each seven is jumbled compared to the others; it is therefore difficult to properly time align all of the sevens. In addition, as with Continuous Historicism, Recapitulationism suffers from serious generational variations; those who employ Recapitulationism in the 20th century come to very different conclusions than those who used it with equal certitude during the 19th century.

4) The assessment may seem harsh, but it appears that the white flag represents Idealism’s regimental colors. The Revelation has no historical grounding whatsoever, whether past, present or future; the last book of the Bible just uses prophetic word pictures to give eternal principles to the church throughout the ages, according to Idealism. While Idealism is attractive in that it makes no historical demands upon the Apocalypse, one cannot escape the fact that this would make the Revelation the ONLY book in the Bible without an historic provenance. How can one assert that a letter to seven churches has NO grounding in history without undercutting the very nature of an epistle? Besides, exactly what the eternal truths taught via the prophetic language of the visions from Patmos is a bit squishy. For Idealism, what are the locusts like battle horses with crowns like gold, faces like men, hair like women, teeth like lions, breastplates like iron, wings sounding like chariots, and tails like scorpions, led by the king of the abyss? The flexibility of interpretation and application offered to us by Idealism is unnerving. Moreover, the application concept of Idealism could be equally applied to any New Testament epistle. Do not the books of 1 and 2 Corinthians offer eternal
truths to the churches throughout the ages? Yet these epistles are firmly established in the historical realities of a troubled local church. Cannot the same be said of the Revelation? Separating the Apocalypse from history seems to be separating soul from spirit and joint from marrow, undoing what God has joined together to seemingly untie the interpretive knot.

5) Preterism is the north pole to Futurism’s south. While Futurism holds to the Revelation’s being almost entirely future to our day, Preterism says that Rev4-19 was future to the Apostle John but ancient history to us. Full Preterism contends that Jesus has already spiritually returned, that the 2nd Coming has already spiritually taken place. We set this aside as Scripturally untenable and affirm what all historic creeds have put forth, that Christ will physically return all the way to earth (not partway nor secretly), raise all of the dead (not just some of them), hold the great assize of all men (the Bema), and inaugurate the final eternal age, with no intermediate Millennium to confuse the subject – this is Partial Preterist Amillennialism (PPA). According to PPA, the Millennium is John’s way of figuratively forwarding what is taught throughout the New Testament, that Christians are raised to newness of life with Jesus and now spiritually reign with Him. The successful methodological applicant, the one hired simultaneous fulfillment of the precept of the holiness of God, must include the following:

1) **Contemporary Relevance.** This is an epistle by Christ to seven of His local churches, after all, so the Revelation must contain material applicable to them. Given negatively, Jesus didn’t mock His church by saying, “I know you’re suffering, but look at the fantastic events that are to come in the thousands of years of church history (Historicism), or 2,000 years hence (Futurism), long after your churches have been washed away by the tides of Islam and are sulking ruins visited by pilgrims.”

2) **Near Term.** There are many references to the events being close at hand, beginning with two of the first three verses (Revel 1:1, 3). Any interpretation that puts all of the events of the Revelation far distant to its original readers, such as Historicism or Futurism, must be rejected on this criterion alone.

3) **Unbelieving Jewish Opponents.** Twice the risen Savior opposes “the blasphemy by those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan” (2:9, 3:9). That the Jews were a real and present danger to the seven churches must be taken into account by any interpretive technique appropriate for the Apocalypse. Note that “Satan,” which means adversary, is used of the Jews. The 1st century Jews were fierce adversaries, completely devoted to eradicating the early church. We note in passing that the Jewish opposition to the gospel essentially vaporized after the Jewish War and the Temple’s demise (66-73AD). At the very least, Jews troubling the church can be no later than the near extermination of Israel during Bar Kochba (132-135AD).

Six Essentials For Understanding the Revelation

Though we cannot support the use of Eclecticism, it at least brings to the fore an overriding issue; namely, that there are several seemingly conflicting components within the Revelation. The successful methodological applicant, the one hired for the interpretive job, must simultaneously fulfill several criteria with respect to the Apocalypse. The resumé of the holistic grid hired to interpret the Revelation must include the following:

1) **Contemporary Relevance.** This is an epistle by Christ to seven of His local churches, after all, so the Revelation must contain material applicable to them. Given negatively, Jesus didn’t mock His church by saying, “I know you’re suffering, but look at the fantastic events that are to come in the thousands of years of church history (Historicism), or 2,000 years hence (Futurism), long after your churches have been washed away by the tides of Islam and are sulking ruins visited by pilgrims.”

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4) Not Chronological From Start To Finish. No doubt some measure of sequencing in the Revelation is indicated by the seals, trumpets and bowls, with one judgment following rapidly on the heels of the preceding. However, Rev12:5 gives Jesus’ birth and Ascension in one short verse, and this obviously predates John’s visions on Patmos by several decades. This verse alone states that the Apocalypse is not chronological from start to finish. It seems best to suppose that Rev4-11 is the 1st unit, containing primarily the seven seals and seven trumpets; the “intermission” of Rev12 deals with the child (Christ), the dragon and the woman; and Rev13-19 is the 2nd unit, with the introduction of several new characters (the Beast, the False Prophet, the Harlot, etc). The replication of seven judgments in part two (bowls), very similar to the two sets of seven in part one (seals and trumpets), implies that somehow the two units are connected; there indeed appears to be a measure of Recapitulationist truth! Likewise, the 144,000 in Rev7 and the repetition of the same number in Rev14 is another positive pointer that the two primary sections are linked. It may well be that the same material given in part one (Rev4-11) is presented from a different angle in part two (Rev13-19). So then, while there are clearly some sequential indicators within the Revelation, the fact that Rev12:5 is about Jesus’ birth and Ascension makes equally clear that this chronology is not absolute. This limited or partial sequencing, by the way, undercuts some Historicism and Futurism applications of the Apocalypse that assume each chapter chronologically follows the preceding ones.

5) Old Testament Prophetic Grounding. This aspect of the Revelation requires little verification. As Swete informs us (pcxxxix), of the 404 verses in Revelation, 278 contained Old Testament references or allusions. Alas, many treat the Apocalypse as a happy hunting ground for double-barreled interpretive license, blasting away at redefining images in terms of modern military equipment. All such applications are far afield from the Old Testament prophetic literature. Allow a few examples to take the knees out from this jejune modern method. The locusts of Rev9 cannot be interpretively separated from the book of Joel. The mark of the beast of Rev13 cannot be divorced from the similar markings of Ezk9. Indeed, the Beast himself is intimately linked to Daniel’s visions of Daniel 2, 7, and 8. Wild-eyed redefinitions of the images that do not comport with the Old Testament prophetic literature are significantly wide of the mark; such ungrounded interpretive speculation can hardly be deemed “literal.” The prophetic pictures of the Revelation are firmly established in the Old Testament; ignoring this discredits those who diverge.

6) Date of Writing. More hinges on this point than is realized at first. Really, if Paul died in 95AD and Romans was penned in 94AD, would this make much difference for today’s interpreter? Maybe a little, but one still would not miss the gospel basics in Romans by an incorrect dating of the book. Not so the Revelation. If the visions on Patmos took place after the Jewish War (66-73AD), then we can confidently declare that the Apocalypse was not written to prophesy of that violent episode, the near annihilation of the Jewish nation. If, however, the Revelation was written prior to the Temple’s fall in 70AD, then the last book of the New Testament may well be about those seminal events, when the bloodguilt of Abel to Zechariah fell upon that very generation of Jews who crucified their Messiah (Mt23:34-36), per their own request (Mt27:25).

Late Date (95AD) Problems

Suppose for a moment that the Revelation was actually spoken by Jesus Himself around 65AD and that the contents were primarily about the upcoming Jewish War (66-73AD). Suppose now that later interpreters, not knowing (or not wanting to know) this historical framework, came along and declared that the Revelation was undoubtedly penned much later, somewhere around 95AD. Would this not produce wild interpretive gyrations, since the book itself would be detached from its original historical setting? There would no firm anchor to hold the Biblical student in the right historical spot, no safe harbor from the thrashing high velocity winds of raw speculation. The problem is that there were no near term 95AD events that fit the graphic prophetic images of the Apocalypse. If one holds to a late date for the last book of the New Testament, one is forced to choose an interpretive grid that has some obvious holes … but, well, you do the best you can, and substitute high volume white noise or electronic countermeasures when these defensive gaps are highlighted. Historicism and Futurism leave the seven Asia Minor churches in the dust, since there could be no way for them to know about or spiritually profit from the Revelation’s “revealing” coded information about the medieval pope as the Antichrist or data about the apparent prediction of the upcoming Jewish War (66-73AD). Suppose now that later interpreters, not knowing (or not wanting to know) this historical framework, came along and declared that the Revelation was not written to prophesy of that violent episode, the near annihilation of the Jewish nation. If, however, the Revelation was written prior to the Temple’s fall in 70AD, then the last book of the New Testament may well be about those seminal events, when the bloodguilt of Abel to Zechariah fell upon that very generation of Jews who crucified their Messiah (Mt23:34-36), per their own request (Mt27:25).

Unlike other books of the New Testament, then, the very application of the prophetic word in the Revelation is sewn up in the date of writing. Once the late date assumption is made for criterion six above, then the remaining five criteria must be rudely ignored or even harshly assaulted with verbal broadsides. As already stated, late dating means that there would be no contemporary relevance or near term applications for the bulk of the Revelation’s message, chapters 1-3 being excepted – criteria 1 and 2 above are thrown under the interpretive bus. Moreover, there was no significant Jewish opposition to the church by 95AD, the Jews having long before been suppressed in the Jewish War – contra criterion 3. For the other two criteria given above, only a cursory reading of the available Futurist and Historicism material evidences a general assumption of chronological sequencing of the Apocalypse (Recapitulationism being the exception) and often a minimal use of the Old Testament prophetic images – these stand astride criteria 4 and 5. For Futurism or Historicism to be true,
anchored in late dating the Apocalypse, then the other criteria given by Jesus to the Apostle John must of necessity be false, or at least made to appear false. This is a high interpretive price to pay for holding a late visionary date. Indeed, one cannot help but wonder about the genesis of the very dating method itself. Does the date of the Revelation determine one’s Futurism or Historicism, or did these two interpretive schools band together and mercilessly pummel the date of writing, both having a bias (an a priori) in favor of late dating the Revelation? Especially as detailed by Gentry, the facts suggest the latter. The evidence supporting a late date is tenuous at best, while that for a date of writing around 65 AD is quite strong, both internally (within the Apocalypse) and externally (historical sources). Some of this evidence has been presented above, and this subject will be greatly expanded below.

As an aside, isn’t late dating the tool often used by liberal theologians, the purview of those who deny the inspired text? I know this is a guilty-by-association argument (the genetic fallacy), but one would hope that conservative theologians would at least be sweating and squirming a little when they support a late dating method for the Apocalypse while they simultaneously oppose similar techniques applied to other Biblical books. Indeed, late dating is about the only cork in the noisy liberal popgun for those who reject Scriptural authority. “Deuteronomy was penned in Josiah’s day.” “Daniel was written long after the events took place.” Biblical late dating gives liberal authors notoriety and wide publicity, until the next Ivy League novelist masquerading as a theologian comes along with a yet more radical approach. One would hope, then, for some pretty strong conservative arguments to employ the sketchy, dishonest and disreputable late dating technique to the Revelation. One cryptic quote by Irenaeus from around 190 AD would clearly be insufficient. This is especially true because the Bishop of that Lyons ecclesiastical backwater was the first to advocate the authority of church tradition, saying that apostolic testimony verified that Jesus was around 50 years old when He was crucified. With such a significant error, Irenaeus was certainly not a consistently reliable witness! Alas, the external testimony is indeed that weak for Revelation’s authorship of around 95 AD; Irenaeus is about all that is available to support a late date. Other late date arguments (see late-dater Beale) could equally be applied to the Revelation for an early date, prior to Jerusalem’s 70 AD fall. If Irenaeus is all you have, then your late date house of cards is quite easily toppled.

Returning to the late date point, is it not clear that WHEN the Revelation was given is a structural load-bearing member for the whole interpretive house, supporting much if not all of the weight? If it can be conclusively shown that the visions of Patmos took place around 95 AD, then Historicism (of either stripe) or Futurism are your lot, neither having enough Biblical clout to knock the other out of the ring. Indeed, one can inconsistently combine the 2, like a ventriloquist speaking out of both sides of one’s interpretive mouth. Out of one side of his mouth, the skilled Futurist/Historicist says that all of the Apocalypse is yet Future and allegedly literal, with no precursory signs before the Secret Rapture; simultaneously, out of the other side of the ventriloquist’s mouth, the Futurist/Historicist loudly declares how the Revelation tells us about current events, “the signs of the times,” with an abundance of sign-laced and quite obviously non-literal Historicist applications. If in late dating the more irenic theologian seeks peace and not conquest, then Idealism is well suited to your tastes – there really is no historical grounding for the Revelation at all, past, present, or future! It’s just ephemeral, pictorial prophetic images for the church throughout the ages. If, however, one wants to mix-n-match to get a tenuous late date solution, all the while trying to insert some contemporary relevance for the Asia Minor churches, then Eclecticism is for you – a pinch of Historicism, a dash of Futurism, a teaspoon of Preterism, salted with some Idealism and served up hot off the presses in the latest manuscript offering, awaiting refutation or supersession by the next Eclecticist author.

If, however, the Revelation was seen just prior to the Jewish War, then there can really be only one all conquering interpretive school. PPA (Partial Preterist Amillennialism) wins! The Apocalypse is about the punishment of God’s enemies, the Harlot (Jesus-hating Jews of the 1st century) or Babylon (Jerusalem) by the hands of the Beast (the Romans), while the church is spared (the woman whisked away to safety in the wilderness, Rev 12). Setting aside Full Preterism as untenable and contrary to all historic church creeds, PPA becomes the only logical interpretive option remaining for the inquisitive theologian if the Apocalypse was penned around 65 AD. No doubt much depends on the date that the Apostle John saw his spectacular visions from the risen Christ while he enjoyed his windswept working vacation, quarrying and doing heavy lifting under the Roman lash on that tropical island paradise, the barren rocky penal colony of Patmos. If we can nail down an early date (65 AD) for the book, then we can erect the interpretive edifice with relative ease. If instead the Apocalypse was penned around 95 AD, then Pandora’s lid is lifted and all manner of interpretive license can be foisted upon us with little theological braking; the only limiting factor being the creativity of the latest purveyors of end times speculations as they mash the prophetic accelerator to the floor, swerving around each sharp eschatological bend and madly cackling at their resourceful interpretive genius. With a late date, the Revelation becomes detached from any history that would apply to those seven 1st century churches who received this epistle from the risen Christ, and the results are variegated, mostly unconvincing, and oftentimes downright laughable in hindsight.

65 AD: The Internal Evidence

My thesis is that if a circa 65 AD date for Revelation’s writing can be proved, then this will fulfill all of the criteria given above and will strongly argue in favor of the Partial Preterist Amillennial approach to the Apocalypse. Establishing an early date for John’s visions may seem a bit boring, like the blah-blah-blah of your physics teacher on uninteresting electromagnetic topics, learning about things you’ll never, ever use; but remember, this is a whole book of God’s Word. Jesus Himself gave these words. Don’t you think it’s important to understand them?! Think of it like starting down the right trail to reach the proper destination (the opening illustration). If you go down the wrong path, you may face unexpected hazards and will surely end up in the wrong place. What if you used a map of Chicago to get around in Detroit? You may regret your choice and wind up in some dangerous neighborhoods. We must establish or refute the early date of Revelation to properly understand its message. Fortunately, the Lord has left more than a few clues along the right trail, plenty of in-
ternal and external evidence for us to examine. Jesus didn't just leave a trail of interpretive bread crumbs that were later swallowed by marauding, doctrinally aberrant birds; no sir, the pointers are yet there, right along the trail, clear arrows indicating the proper direction to go. What follows is a compendium of the facts that support an early writing for the Apocalypse, beginning with the all important internal evidence (that which is contained within the Bible itself).

A. The Revelation Was Written Under King Number Six

“The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits, and they are seven kings; five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; and when he comes, he must remain a little while” (Rev17:9-10). First off, let us establish the king’s location. “The seven heads are seven mountains ...” (17:9). Famously, Rome is built on seven hills (Palatine, Aventine, Caelian, Esquiline, Viminal, Quirinal, and Capitoline). To any 1st century reader, speaking of seven mountains firmly establishes the location as Rome. Now that we have the location of the kings nailed down, Rev17:10 also says that the book was authored during the reign of the sixth king. How so? Well, five kings had fallen by the time the Apocalypse was authored (“five have fallen”). That means that the Revelation was written during the regnal era of king six (“one is”). The sixth (and last) Caesar in the Julio-Claudian line was Nero. Enumerating them, we have ΘJulius, ΘAugustus, ΘTiberius, ΘCaligula, ΘClaudius, and the then-reigning monarch from Revelation’s time, ΘNero. Nero reigned from 54 to 68AD, so the Apocalypse itself testifies to being written during Nero’s dominion. Isn’t it interesting that one of Nero’s contemporaries referred to him as a beast [Apollonius of Tyana, 48BC-96AD; later we have the testimony of Sib Or 8, c.175AD; Sulp Sev (363-425 AD) Sacred Hist 2:28; in Gentry p42-4]? Moreover, there is no adequate way to have the late date favorite, Domitian, be king number 6, since after Nero there came Galba, Otho, Vitellius (68-69AD), Vespasian (69-79AD), Titus (79-81AD), and finally Domitian (81-96AD); by any rational enumeration that would be kings seven through twelve. No fancy late date (95AD) bookkeeping can give a proper accounting for Domitian being king number six; however, it is easy to count to six from Julius Caesar to Nero. If it be objected that the Caesars were not kings, even the unbelieving Jews testified against this empty assertion nearly 2,000 years ago; for they said to Pilate, “We have no KING but Caesar” (Jn19:15). By its very own self, Rev17:9-10 dates the Apocalypse to Nero’s monarchy, not Domitian’s.

Some contend that the enumeration of emperors should begin with Augustus (Julius Caesar’s nephew Octavian), since the line of Caesars was not continuous until his reign. Indeed, there was a gap between Julius’ Ides of March murder in 44BC (famously, “Et tu, Brute?”) and Octavian’s establishing firm and sole control in 31 or 27BC as Caesar Augustus. However, there are a few problems with calling Augustus the first king. The obvious first problem is that of the moniker. After whom were the “Caesars” named, after all? That would be Julius Caesar, and Augustus cemented his rule upon the lineage granted to him by adoption in Julius Caesar’s will. In addition, Suetonius (70-160AD) begins his numbering of the Caesars with Julius (Lives of the 12 Caesars) and calls him the “father of his country,” while Dio Cassius (150-235AD) numbers Julius as the 1st emperor (Gentry p155). For contemporaries of Nero, there really cannot be much doubt on the enumeration, that Nero was number six in the kingly line. If the Revelation was penned during the reign of king number 6, as stated in Rev17:10, then the Apocalypse must have been seen during Nero’s reign; and if penned prior to the Jewish War, why is it not prophetic of those very events which were to take place from 66-73AD?

B. The Revelation Was Written While The Seven Asia Minor Churches Were Being Persecuted

Nero’s persecution of the Christians began after the burning of Rome in 64AD and lasted until Nero’s suicide in 68AD. That the seven Asia Minor churches were undergoing severe persecution when the Apocalypse was penned cannot be seriously doubted, so a date of Revelation during the timeframe of the Neronian persecution is quite reasonable. Interestingly, this persecution lasted for a period of 3½ years, or 42 months (Nov64 to 8Jun68; Russell p460), which also aligns nicely with Revelation’s numbers.

It is true, some say that the church was being persecuted under the Emperor Domitian in the mid-90s AD; but there is NO contemporary evidence for any such persecution (Bahn and Gentry p262), and none EVER by any secular historians (Gentry p55). The only testimony is long after the fact, and the witness is solely from the pen of Christian writers. Dipping our chronological toe into some external (outside the Bible) evidence, a recent BAS article by Wilson (Biblical Arch Soc, 20Jul2018) questions whether there ever was an empire wide crushing of Christianity under Domitian.

As I revisited a critical biography of the Roman emperor Domitian by the scholar Brian W. Jones recently [Jones The Emperor Domitian 1992], I was reminded that “alternative facts” and “fake news” are not just a contemporary phenomenon. On occasion ancient writers similarly tried to spin their version of the truth. Jones tackles the familiar line that Domitian, who reigned between 81 and 96 C.E., was a great persecutor of Christians. This “fact” is now standard stock in much popular writing on the book of Revelation and is even found in some scholarly tomes. In his discussion, Jones carefully rehearses how this “fact” developed.

Eusebius in his Church History (CH) provides the first reference to Domitian persecuting the church. Writing over three centuries later in the early fourth century C.E., this ancient Christian historian first quotes Melito of Sardis, who mentioned that Domitian brought slanderous accusations against Christians (CH 4.26.9). He also cites Tertullian, who claimed that Domitian was cruel like the emperor Nero (r. 54-68 C.E.), but that Domitian was more intelligent, so he ceased his cruelty and recalled the Christians he had exiled (CH 3.20.9). Eusebius also quotes Irenaeus, who
claimed Domitian’s persecution consisted only of John’s banishment to Patmos and the exile of other Christians to the island of Pontia (CH 3.18.1, 5).

Despite these cautious statements by three earlier authors, Eusebius then spun his own alternative fact by claiming that Domitian, like Nero, had “stirred up persecution against us” (“anekeini diōgmon”; CH 3.17). From here the tradition was enlarged by Orosius (d. 420 C.E.), who, in his History Against the Pagans, wrote that Domitian issued edicts for a general and cruel persecution (7.10.5). Despite a lack of evidence, Jones observes that the tradition concerning Domitian’s persecution persists: “From a frail, almost non-existent basis, it gradually developed and grew large.” Thus the alternative facts sown by these ancient historians grew to a truism of Christian history.

No pagan writer of the time ever accused Domitian, as they had Nero, of persecuting Christians. Pliny, for example, served as a lawyer under Domitian and wrote in a letter to Trajan (r. 98–117 C.E.) that he was never present at the trial of a Christian (Letters 10.98.1). This is a strange claim for one of Domitian’s former officials if Christian persecution were so prevalent. The archaeologist Julian Bennett, who has written a biography of Trajan, also fails to mention any general persecution of Christians at this time. ... Jones concludes, “No convincing evidence exists for a Domitianic persecution of the Christians.” ...

The non-existent testimony of a Domitianic persecution is well nigh fatal to late dating (95 AD) the Revelation. One of the main late date sources for this alleged persecution, Sulpicius Severus (363-425 AD), has two whole chapters of his sacred history on Nero while only three sentences on Domitian (Gentry p52). As premill Ladd says, there is NO evidence of any systematic persecution of the church under Domitian (Rev Comm p8; in Gentry p54). Therefore, the terrible sufferings of the seven Asia Minor churches places the date of the Revelation squarely within the Neronian persecution (64–68 AD).

C. The Revelation Was Written When The Temple Was Still Standing

“Then there was given me a measuring rod like a staff; and someone said, “Get up and measure the temple of God and the altar, and those who worship in it. Leave out the court which is outside the temple and do not measure it, for it has been given to the nations; and they will tread under foot the holy city for forty-two months” (Rev11:1-2). This passage indicates that the Temple was still standing when the book was written, which implies a date prior to the Temple’s destruction (70 AD). How could John be asked to measure the Temple in Rev11:1 if the Temple had been razed by the Romans?

Yet this would be the assertion by those who contend that Domitian, like Nero, had "stirred up persecution against us" ("anekeini diōgmon"; CH 3.17). From here the tradition was enlarged by Orosius (d. 420 C.E.), who, in his History Against the Pagans, wrote that Domitian issued edicts for a general and cruel persecution (7.10.5). Despite a lack of evidence, Jones observes that the tradition concerning Domitian’s persecution persists: “From a frail, almost non-existent basis, it gradually developed and grew large.” Thus the alternative facts sown by these ancient historians grew to a truism of Christian history.

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As Gentry highlights (p165–7), what if the Temple had already been razed by the Romans? Wouldn’t this have been mentioned in the NT books of Hebrews, Acts, and Revelation as a past event and a well known fact? This is decisive, the equivalent to Sherlock Holmes’ dog that didn’t bark. If the Temple had been destroyed prior to Hebrews, Acts, or the Revelation, then surely this would have been declared and even expanded upon, with the consequent and appropriate gospel applications. We can confidently date both Hebrews and Acts as being authored prior to 70 AD because the Temple’s demise is not stated; can we not do the same for the Revelation? Even liberal scholar JAT Robinson says that the most datable and climactic event of Jewish 1st century, the Temple’s destruction, is never once mentioned as a past fact in the NT (Gentry p182). Doesn’t Rev11:1 alone testify to the Revelation’s being given prior to the Temple’s eradication at the hands of the Romans?

All three versions of the Olivet Discourse (Mt24; Mk13; Lk21) begin with a question concerning the Temple’s fate, when not one stone would be left upon another. Per Jesus’ own words, within THAT very generation (not some generation future to us) the Temple would be removed and the Jewish nation would turn sour, about 40 years past its political and spiritual expiration date. The coming Temple termination was a generation away during Jesus’ day (Mt24:34), but was “near” or “at hand” (Rev1:3) when John wrote the Revelation. Note also that if Jesus’ death was in 30 AD, then the Temple’s obliteration was exactly 40 years thereafter (70 AD). The crucifixion was during Passover 30 AD, and Josephus records that the Jews were bottled up in the doomed city of Jerusalem during the Passover in 70 AD. 40 years was the time of testing during the Exodus for Israel’s rebelling against God’s commandment to take the Promised Land; and for 40 years the unbelieving Jews were tested and found wanting with respect to the New Covenant and their Messiah.

As an interesting aside, why does the Olivet Discourse not appear in the Gospel of John? Several explanations could be given, including the common one that John presupposes the other three gospels, so he does not repeat the material. If that is absolutely so, then why does John’s gospel repeat other things found in the Synoptics? Maybe a better explanation of John’s omission of the Olivet Discourse is available. If the Olivet is about the destruction of the Temple, as stated at the outset of all three Synoptic accounts (e.g., Mt24:1-2), then isn’t it entirely understandable if John’s gospel omits that dialogue, since the Apocalypse itself served that very purpose (Farrar, JS Russell, Gentry)? The Revelation by Jesus to John describes in prophetic imagery the coming desolation of the Temple, which is also the subject matter of the Olivet Discourse. John need not include the same material in his gospel account. Note that the Jews of that day had called for
Jesus’ blood to be upon themselves and their children (Mt27:25), and now in the Jewish War they would receive their comeuppance and their Temple would be leveled. The Jewish rulers had wanted to retain their place and nation (Jn11:48), but by rejecting their Messiah they were to lose both. What had been somewhat chronologically distant and unexpected during Jesus day when He gave the Olivet Discourse — the decimation of the Jewish nation and the demise of the Temple — was now “at hand” in 65AD, when the Jewish War was about to explode violently upon Palestine and the thunder cloud of the Romans would break upon the heads of the Jesus-hating Jews. The guilty Jews of Jesus’ generation would face annihilation at the hands of Rome by the finger of God. Would we expect anything less for those who had executed their Messiah and persecuted His church? In short compass, this is the timing and storyline of the Apocalypse. While the Revelation’s tie in with the Olivet Discourse does not conclusively prove the early date of the book, it surely is consonant with Jesus’ prediction of the Temple’s demolition. Therefore, the Patmos visions being about the Jewish War and the Temple’s termination may well explain why the Olivet Discourse does not appear in the gospel of John.

This is terribly exciting, no?! We are quickly homing in on a solution! Our radar is quickly locking on to an early date (65AD) for the Revelation. The three lines of evidence thus far for the date of the Apocalypse are: (1) During Nero’s reign (54-68AD), who was king number six of the Caesars, per Rev17:10; (2) During a time of severe persecution of the church; and (3) what persecution was more notorious than Nero’s? This was a terribly troubling time for the church, when many might have despised and called out to the Lord for their spilled blood to be recompensed (Rev6:9-11). Nero’s persecution stretched from Nov64 to 8June68AD, almost exactly 42 months, or 3½ years — time, times and half a time; and (3) While the Temple was yet standing, before its destruction in 70AD as also foretold by Jesus in the Olivet Discourse. So far the Scriptural facts align beautifully with a 65AD date for the writing of the Revelation.

[Note: The Temple’s reconstruction by Herod had begun in 19BC and continued until 63AD, right up to the very eve the Jewish War (PE Hughes p80). This was and is still called the 2nd Temple, though the post-exilic minor edifice was completely renovated by Herod’s workmen. After over 80 years of high-priced efforts, the symbol of Judaism’s connection with Yahweh was about to be emphatically removed — in fact, it would stand completed for only that magical seven years before not one stone was left upon another, per our Lord’s prediction (Mt24:2). There had been a prelude to this coming destruction in the veil being rent asunder upon Jesus’ death, but the final consummation of the New Covenant and the cessation of the Old would take place a mere seven years (a familiar Apocalyptic number) after the Temple’s reconstruction was completed.]

[Note: Some contend that the Temple must be rebuilt before or after the Millennium (or both), partly so that it can be measured as prescribed in Rev11:1-2. However, Is66 clearly curses anyone who reinstitutes the sacrificial system — “But he who kills an ox is like one who slays a man; he who sacrifices a lamb is like the one who breaks a dog’s neck; he who offers a grain offering is like one who offers swine’s blood; he who burns incense is like the one who blesses an idol” (Is66:3). History verifies such a sacrificial cessation after the Temple’s demise at the hands of the Romans. Indeed, the very presence of God as expressed by the Ark of the Covenant was to be forgotten and not even missed — and weren’t the Ark and its Mercy Seat crucial for the Day of Atonement?! Not long before Jerusalem’s demolition by the Babylonians, Jeremiah explicitly states that, “they will no longer say, ‘The ark of the covenant of the Lord.’ And it will not come to pass among them” (Is66:3). This is terribly exciting, no?! We are quickly homing in on a solution! Our radar is quickly locking on to an early date (65AD) for the Revelation. Thus far the three lines of evidence thus far for the date of the Apocalypse are: (1) During Nero’s reign (54-68AD), who was king number six of the Caesars, per Rev17:10; (2) During a time of severe persecution of the church; and (3) What persecution was more notorious than Nero’s? This was a terribly troubling time for the church, when many might have despised and called out to the Lord for their spilled blood to be recompensed (Rev6:9-11). Nero’s persecution stretched from Nov64 to 8June68AD, almost exactly 42 months, or 3½ years — time, times and half a time; and (3) While the Temple was yet standing, before its destruction in 70AD as also foretold by Jesus in the Olivet Discourse. So far the Scriptural facts align beautifully with a 65AD date for the writing of the Revelation.

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The laws of Constantine, and of his son and successor Constantius, were likewise in other respects very severe against the Jews; but Julian called the Apostle, the nephew of Constantine, and successor of Constantius, was more favorably inclined towards them; not that he really liked the Jews, but disliked the Christians, and out of prejudice and hatred to the Christian religion resolved to reestablish the Jewish worship and ceremonies. Our Savior had said that “Jerusalem should be trodden down of the Gentiles;” and he would defeat the prophecy, and restore the Jews. For this purpose he wrote kindly to the whole body or “community of the Jews” (Julian Epistles 25:396, Spanheim trans), expressing his concern for their former ill treatment, and assuring them of his protection from future oppression; and concluding with a promise, that “if he was successful in the Persian war, he would rebuild the holy city Jerusalem, restore them to their habitations, live with them there, and join with them in worshipping the great God of the universe” (ibid p399). His zeal even exceeded his promise; for before he set out from Antioch on his Persian expedition, “he proposed to begin with rebuilding the temple at Jerusalem, with the greatest magnificence” (Amnianus Marcellinus 23:1:350, Valesius trans). He assigned immense sums for the building. He gave it in charge to Alypius of Antioch who had formerly been lieutenant in Britain, to superintend and hasten the work. Alypius set about it vigorously. The governor of the province assisted him in it. But horrible balls of fire bursting forth near the foundations, with frequent assaults, rendered the place inaccessible to the workmen, who were burnt several times; and in this manner the fiery element obstinately repelling them, the enterprise was laid aside.” What a signal providence was it, that this no more than the former attempts should succeed and prosper; and that rather than the prophecies should be defeated, a prodigy was wrought even by the testimony of a faithful heathen historian? The interposition certainly
was as providential, as the attempt was impious; and the account here given is nothing more than what Julian himself and his own historian have testified. There are indeed many witnesses to the truth of the fact, whom an able critic hath well drawn together, and ranged in this order: “Ammianus Marcellinus a Heathen, Zemuch David a Jew, who confessed that Julian was divinitus impeditus, hindered by God in this attempt; Nazianzen and Chrysostom among the Greeks, St. Ambrose and Ruffinus among the Latins, who flourished at the very time when this was done; Theodoret and Sozomen orthodox historians, Philostorgius an Arian, Socrates a favorer of the Novatians, who wrote the story within the space of fifty years after the thing was done, and whilst the eye-witnesses of the fact were yet surviving” (Whitby’s General Preface pxxviii).]

With a mighty hand God emphatically declared to Julian the Apostle and to all succeeding generations that the Temple shall NOT be rebuilt! Indeed, nowhere in the New Testament is there an explicit account of a reconstituted Temple and a reinstituted Mosaic sacrificial system, since this would be a retrograde maneuver from the New Covenant back to the Old; it would also cross swords with the book of Hebrews, since the blood of bulls and goats cannot atone for sins (Heb10:4). If the Revelation was written when the Temple was yet standing and when the Apostle John himself was still in the flesh, then the command to measure the Temple was issued by our Lord Jesus Christ prior to the Temple’s demolition in 70AD, and certainly before the Temple mount was scraped clean by the Legion X Fretensis (the Roman 10th Legion) – not one stone was left upon another (Mt24:1-2)! The Temple still standing so it could be measured by John, part three in our enumeration of internal evidence for an early date for the Apocalypse, also aligns squarely with a 65AD date of writing.

D. The Revelation Was Written When Unbelieving Jews Were A Disrupting Part Of The Church

In keeping with the Temple being yet present, some unregenerate Jews were still a part of the church during the writing of the Apocalypse. Some, however, were not true Jews, but rather were of the synagogue of Satan (2:9; 3:9); these Jews were greatly disturbing the church, likely with a syncretistic view today termed “Judaizing.” The church had an admixture of Jews and Christians prior to the Jewish War, but these two groups were irreparably separated thereafter. Given the statements of 2:9 and 3:9, is it not reasonable to suppose that the “us/them” separation of the church from the Jews had not yet taken place when the Apocalypse was penned? The Jews being integrated within the church points to a time of writing prior to the Jewish War.

After Jerusalem’s fall, the “us/them” of Christians versus Jews prevailed in Christian literature, as evidenced in the epistle of Barnabas (~100AD) and Ignatius’ Epistle to the Magnesians (~107AD) (Gentry p130ff). Ignatius plainly states that one cannot cherish Judaism and be a Christian. Moule says that the crisis of the Jewish War “decisively separated Jew from Christian” (Gentry p130ff). The Jews were not a united force against Christianity after their collective back was broken during the Jewish War. For their part, the Jews had an equally intense hatred for the church after the Jewish War. In 80AD, Gamaliel II had the daily Jewish prayer (Shemone Esre) include a curse against the Christians: “Let the Nazarene ... perish utterly” (Gentry p225-6). Returning the favor, out of spite for the Jews the Christians made the former Temple location a dunghill, not cleared until the construction of the Dome of the Rock (Newton p58). Prior to the Jewish War, Paul had written, “Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision; for we are the true circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh, although I myself might have confidence even in the flesh” (Php3:2-4). After 73AD, such admonitions to the church were entirely unnecessary. The animosity between Jews and Christians was finalized by the Jewish War, and no longer was there an intermingling of the church with the “synagogue of Satan,” “those who say they are Jews and are not” (Rev2:9).

If the Jews were troubling the church during the time when the Revelation was written, then this points to a date of writing before the final split between the Jews and Christians, a divorce consummated by the Jewish War. Note that with a mere four points from the Revelation itself we have now narrowed the date of writing to the 64-66AD timeframe, with 65AD being a reasonable guess – before the commencement of the Jewish War (66AD), but after the initiation of the Neronian persecution (Nov 64AD).

E. The Revelation Was Written When The 12 Tribes Of Israel Were Still Distinguishable

Along with the Jews still being present within the church, the Revelation also shows a distinction between the 12 tribes of Israel, as enumerated in Rev7. However, tribal distinctions became essentially extinct after 70AD. Why? The genealogical records were kept at the Temple. After the Romans burned that structure, all pedigrees were irretrievably lost, so that one could no longer trace his family tree to the likes of Naphtali, Zebulon, and so forth. Since Jewish tribal distinctions are present in Rev7, with the 12 tribes explicitly listed, does not this very fact testify of a date of writing prior to the destruction of all of the genealogical records at the Temple? True, the Lord understands DNA and could gather exactly 12,000 members from each tribe together today; but such Futurist fantasies strike one as grasping at burning straws. Are the 12 tribes any longer discrete, even if God Himself intervened to separate out 12,000 from each? Is it not simpler to suppose that 12 distinct tribes existed during the writing of the Revelation, prior to the Temple’s demise? If so, then the enumeration of the 12 tribes in Rev7 also speaks of the Apocalypse’s being issued to John on Patmos prior to 70AD.

[Note: For those who subscribe to the “10 lost tribes” gloss, how could Anna know that she was of the tribe of Asher (Lk2:36) if Asher was one of the allegedly “lost” tribes? “Sorry, Anna, your tribe was lost about 700 years ago, so please stop saying you’re descended from Asher.” Not exactly. One additional OT reference is sufficient to debunk the 10 lost tribes myth. Ezekiel, the post-exilic prophet, records the Lord Himself as saying the following (Ezk16:53-55):

Nevertheless, I will restore their captivity, the captivity of Sodom and her daughters, the captivity of Samaria and her daughters, and along with them your own captivity, in order that you may bear your humiliation and feel ashamed for all that you have done when you become a consolation to them. Your sisters, Sodom with her daughters
and Samaria with her daughters, will return to their former state, and you with your daughters will also return to your former state.

As this passage asserts, those of the northern 10 tribes (Samaria) would return from exile, along with “Sodom” (those of Judah). There are no 10 lost tribes, and they surely did not migrate to England as the Anglo-Saxons.

[Note: A couple of interesting items are related to the obliteration of the Jewish genealogical records with the Roman-induced Temple conflagration of 70 AD. One is to answer the question of why the Jews today trace their lineage through matrimony rather than by ancestry (you’re a Jew if your mom is Jewish). After the Jewish War and later Bar Kochba Revolt (132–135 AD), the Jewish male population was so decimated that the preservation of national identity depended on this switch in calculating descent. The second is far more important. No claimant to the Messianic throne can any longer trace his line to King David – all of the documentation was burned with the Temple. In 70 AD, the Lord Himself placed His very own exclamation point on the fact that Jesus alone is the Christ; no others can make the Messianic claim with proper Israeli genealogical authority, those sources perishing in the Temple’s flames.]

F. The Revelation Was Penned Prior To God’s Judgment Against The Jewish Generation Who Had Pierced Jesus

Of the Jewish rebels of Jesus’ generation, John testified at the outset of the book, “BEHOLD, HE IS COMING WITH THE CLOUDS, and every eye will see Him, EVEN THOSE WHO PIERCED HIM; AND ALL THE TRIBES OF THE LAND [earth] will mourn over Him. So it is to be. Amen.” (Rev 1:7). Many assume this is speaking of the 2nd Advent, but clouds-coming judgments by God are sprinkled throughout the Old Testament (Is 19:1, for instance), and these by no means tell of the Lord’s physical return and the end of all time. No, we have the judgment of the Almighty coming upon a very specific people; namely, “those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the land.” Who can this mean but the very Jewish generation condemned by Jesus for their unbelief? The very hands of that generation who drove the Roman nails into the Savior’s hands and feet were guilty, and therefore would be punished. It is as if the Father is saying, “You want Jesus’ blood to be upon you and your children (Mt 27:25)? Well, that can be arranged!” As given above, Jesus had said that the blood guilt of the prophetic murders from Abel to Zechariah would be upon THAT generation, not being held in abeyance during the Jewish War. All by itself, Rev 1:7 tells us that the Apocalypse was given prior to the Jewish War, the cloud-coming judgment of God against that generation of Jews in Palestine who had goaded the Romans into executing Jesus. Rev 1:7 insists that (1) those who actually pierced Jesus, (2) the Jews of that generation (3) who lived in the land prior to the Jewish War were the very ones who would face a cloud-coming judgment against them. When did this happen? Since God’s wrath against the rebel Jews was delivered with undiluted strength during the Jewish War (66-73 AD), Rev 1:7 points to a date for the visions on Patmos prior to this foolish Jewish rebellion, around 65 AD.

Some may question denominating “the land” as Palestine and “the tribes” as the Jews. Couldn’t these refer to others elsewhere? As Gentry (p127) informs us, the Greek for “tribe” is φυλή; the LXX [the Greek translation of the OT] has this selfsame Greek word as a fixed term for the tribal system of Israel (Theo Dict NT, 2:246). The ISBE agrees, noting that with few exceptions φυλή [tribe] refers exclusively to the tribes of Israel. Likewise the Greek for “earth” (γῆ) means either earth or land. The YLT translates 1:7 “tribes of the land.” Edersheim (Sketches Jewish Social Life p14) says that the Rabbis simply called Palestine “the land,” all other locales being “outside the land” (Gentry p128-129). Unless one can provide preponderant evidence to the contrary, the usage of “the land” and “the tribes” in Rev 1:7 points to Palestine and the Jews. When were the tribes of Israel in the land in the 1st century AD, near term to a set of horrific events (1:1,3)? That would be before the Jewish War, somewhere in the vicinity of 65 AD.

G. The Revelation Was Given When John Was Newly Arrived In Ephesus

This may be best argued in reverse, showing that the commonly asserted late date (95 AD) is untenable if John had been a longtime resident in Ephesus. According to passably reliable church tradition, John came to Ephesus around 65 AD. Now consider first the Ephesian church’s problems enumerated by Jesus Himself in Rev 2, incisive words that dig below that church’s surficial obedience to its rock hard heart issue. They were doctrinally pure, even actively shunning heretics, but their real problem was that they had lost their first love for Christ. Can you really imagine that the Apostle of Love, John, had been their pastor for 30 years and yet the Lord still brings this accusation against the Ephesian church? “Unlikely” barely begins to describe the problems with the late date outlook when it comes to John’s allegedly extended Ephesian pastorate. Yet if John came to Ephesus in the 65 AD timeframe, then this is exactly what we must conclude. It seems the Lord should have severely rebuked the Apostle John himself for his pathetic pastoral efforts in Ephesus over the preceding 30 years, if the Revelation was given around 95 AD. Christ should have given the Ephesian church a pass on their lovelessness, while upbraiding John for his miserably failed three decade pastorate. Jesus should have said, “C’mon, John, you walked with me for 3½ years and you’re a premier Apostle! In 30 years, couldn’t you at least have taught the Ephesians step one of the faith, to love their Savior?!” Obviously this is difficult to swallow, but this is exactly what we must believe if the Revelation is dated around 95 AD.
If, however, John had recently arrived in Ephesus (around 65 AD), then the matter is much more understandable. Maybe John had arrived at his Ephesian assignment and was arrested shortly thereafter, then being shipped off to that lovely barren Roman penal colony of Patmos. As the Syriac “History of John” plus both versions of the Syriac say of the Revelation, “written in Patmos, whither John was sent by Nero Caesar” (Gentry p146). After Nero’s death (68 AD), John would then have been repatriated to the needy Ephesian church (Clement of Alexandria, 150-215 AD; in Gentry p157,162), where surely teaching them the love of Christ was his top priority. Undoubtedly this scenario fits the Biblical and extra-Biblical data far better than supposing that the Apostle John completely botched a three decade pastorate in Ephesus, resulting in the church’s being strongly reprimanded by Jesus for its lovelessness in Rev2. If, rather, John had arrived in Ephesus a little bit before his sunny Patmos vacation quarrying rocks, then John’s return thereafter and his heavenly antidote of love for the Lord would be just the elixir needed for the weakened and reduced state of the loveless Ephesian congregation. From this fact alone we can conclude that John’s arrival in Ephesus was right about the same time as the giving of the Revelation, around 65 AD.

[Note: Also associated with John’s Ephesian labors, though a bit less convincing for dating the Apocalypse, is why John only wrote to SEVEN Asia Minor churches? If the church had been around for 40 years or more – which would be the case if Revelation was penned around 95 AD – then wouldn’t there have been dozens and dozens of churches in western Asia Minor for which the Apostle John was responsible? The fact that John had charge of only seven churches mildly implies that the church was relatively new to Asia Minor. True, there may have been many more local churches at the time but the Lord chose to address only seven of them, seven being a very attractive number to use in the Revelation; but could it not be that there really weren’t that many well established churches when He gave this vision to John? A date of authorship around 65 AD is more consonant with only seven Asia Minor churches, since the gospel would have been fairly new in that area, for around a decade. Granted, this is mostly an argument from silence, reasoning from what churches are not mentioned in the Revelation. However, there possibly being few churches in Asia Minor is at least consistent with an early date of writing, prior to the Jewish War.]

H. The Revelation Was Chronologically Close To The 60/61 AD Laodicean Earthquake

What of the proud Laodicean attitude evidenced in Rev3? “… [Y]ou say, ‘I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’” (3:17). Even late daters suggest that this refers to the city’s spurning imperial assistance to rebuild their city after the devastating 60/61 AD earthquake, preferring to rely upon their own wealthy resources for reconstruction (as recounted by Tacitus, the contemporary Roman historian). If this indeed is the event being referenced in 3:17 – the arrogant attitude, “I can do it myself with my own money, thank you very much, and I don’t need your help, Mr. Emperor” – then wouldn’t it make sense that this event was chronologically closer at hand than 95 AD? If the Apocalypse was penned near the end of the 1st century, then the Laodicean earthquake and rebuilding would have been 35 years in the past, a distant memory unknown to many who had entered the church since that time. “Hey Octavius, remember that earthquake 35 years ago? It really made a mess of our deluxe aqueduct, didn’t it?” “Nah, I wasn’t even born then. What about it?!” If, however, the Revelation were written about 65 AD, then this earthquake and reconstruction of the city would have been only a few years prior to the Apocalypse; it would serve as the Lord Jesus’ cattle prod, having a sharp, immediate impact upon the souls of those within the church. The rich, self-reliant Laodicean restoration of their city after a crushing earthquake fits much better with its being a very recent memory, thus pointing to a date of Revelation’s writing much closer to the referenced event. Once again, the Apocalypse itself directs us to a date of authorship around 65 AD rather than 95 AD.

I. The Beast Of Revelation Is The 1st Century Roman Empire

Who or was the Beast of Revelation? Dan7 gives a vision of four sequential animals – a lion, a bear, a leopard, and an iron-toothed, 10 horned beast. There can be little doubt that these depict Babylon, Persia, Greece, and finally Rome, the successive world-dominating empires from the Babylonian Exile to Jesus’ day. Using the imagery established in Dan7, the Beast of Revelation is therefore the Roman Empire. This is also in accord with the Colossus of Dan2, where the Rock cut without hands – the Messiah, Jesus – strikes the feet of iron and clay, the Roman Empire. At that time, the dust of the Colossus is scattered and the Rock becomes an earth-filling mountain – the kingdom of God expands to fill the whole earth, unimpeded by any world encompassing, gospel opposing empires. Rome (the Beast) must therefore be in power when the prophesies in the book of Revelation apply. That Rome is the Beast is cemented by several lines of evidence in the Apocalypse itself, not the least of which is 17:9, that the seven heads of the Beast are seven mountains. Famously, Rome was built on seven hills (Palatine, Aventine, Caelian, Esquiline, Viminal, Quirinal, and Capitoline). Any 1st century reader would equate “seven hills” (or mountains) with Rome. Well, when was the last time there was a world dominating Beast situated on seven hills? This was the late, great Roman Empire, which expired in 476 AD. From this beastly evidence, if the Revelation is to make any sense at all to the original readers from the seven Asia Minor churches, then the Beast (of Dan7) and the seven hills both point to the 1st century dominion of Rome.

Will some suppose that the Colossus struck by the Rock cut without hands will somehow be duct-taped back together and once again become an overarching world power? The dust of the shattered Dan2 Colossus has been scattered to the winds; who will reassemble this broken empire? While some Historicists during the Reformation could maintain that Roman hegemony was maintained through the Roman Catholic church, this is a mighty difficult position to hold today, the pope’s power being markedly abated from the times of Innocent III and the IV Lateran Council (1215). Note again the Euro-centric application of the Historict Reformers. Could such a “Beast” as Catholicism be said to hold sway over the churches in Africa, for example? In contrast to the Reformers, Futurists posit a soon-coming resurrected Roman Empire that will persecute the Jews, but there is little current political evidence to support such an ungrounded assertion. Mussolini and his Fascist Party attempted to revive the greatness of Rome (1922-1943), but martial ineptness characterized this sickly European military weakening, Hitler often having to intervene on behalf of his beleaguered Axis colleague. With
no actual facts to support a “just around the corner” rise of political Rome. Futurists yet bank upon its return to power; often, though, they morph “Rome” to be mean something other than Rome itself (e.g., the European Union) via principles that are obviously sub-literal. Such a shifting of Rome to be something other than the actual reconstituted Roman Empire does violence to their allegedly literalist principles. Is this taking the Revelation “at face value” (Ryrie’s phrase)? This makes one wonder whose face is determining the value (Gentry p10-11)! As Adams points out, there is an abundance of “diplopia” — in playground parlance, a “do-over” — in the Futurist’s resurrection of a Roman Empire not too distant from our own time; but there is scant evidence coming from Rome itself of its imminent rise to military supremacy. Besides, for a redivivus of Rome to fulfill the Apocalypse, the Temple would also need to be rebuilt, the Jews back in the land, and so forth — in short, a complete reconstruction of the political landscape from around, oh, about 65 AD. Rather than diplopia (an historical “do-over”), isn’t it simpler to suppose that these things have already taken place in our distant past, during the 1st century? Wouldn’t a fulfillment near term to their own time make sense to the 1st century Asia Minor churches? And if these events have already transpired, why wouldn’t all of these things (including the Beast) be in accord with the Jewish War, and thus the Revelation was penned prior to this revolt against the Beast?

So then, the Beast of Revelation indicates that Rome was the dominant world power when the epistle to the seven churches was given by the Lord of the churches. While Roman hegemony alone doesn’t prove an early date for the Revelation (65 AD) over today’s dominant late date outlook (95 AD), at least points to a fulfillment during the Roman Empire, the 4th beast of Dan7 and the feet of iron and clay in Dan2. Since that Empire effectively ceased with Alaric’s sacking of Rome in 410 AD and Rome’s subsequent collapse in 476 AD, it is mighty difficult to suppose that the contents of the Apocalypse apply thereafter, either during church history or in our own near future. Historicism and Futurism are therefore simultaneously cut off at the knees by the dominance of the Roman Empire (the Beast) in the Apocalypse. The Colossus of Daniel is never said to be resurrected and glued back together like some blobby, misshapen Frankenstein. No amount of Historicism or Futurist prophetic superglue will accomplish that magical Biblical feat. No, the feet of iron and clay, the Roman Empire, will NOT be reconstituted. “The Beast” is in our past, and so are the fulfillments of the prophecies in the Revelation, these things having come to pass during the Jewish War of 66-73 AD.

J. Revelation Came Before The 69 AD Near Collapse Of The Roman Empire, But The Beast’s Fatal Wound Was Healed!

Worship of the Beast, whose fatal wound was healed, figures prominently in chapter 13 of the Apocalypse (vss 3,13). How might this affect the dating of the book? If it can be shown that the fatally wounded but healed Beast is referencing Rome’s brush with death in 69 AD, then obviously the visions to John on Patmos came before this date.

As established above from the prophetic language in Daniel’s visions of the Colossus and the four successive empires (Dan2,7), the Beast is the Roman Empire, the city built on seven hills (Rev17:9). There need be no theological thrashing about, trying to explain the Beast in terms of some now-current Eurasian political entity. Dan2 assures us that Jesus’ kingdom, the Rock cut without hands, came during the clay and iron feet of the Roman Empire; Dan7 says that the “Son of Man” — one of Jesus’ favorite cloaked Messianic terms for Himself, taken from Dan7:13 — receives a kingdom during the rule of empire number 4, that of the beast with terrifying iron teeth and claws of bronze. Unless one wants to willingly ignore the prophetic imagery established in the Old Testament and fly off to fanciful speculations, there really can be no doubt that the Beast of Revelation is the Roman Empire.

Next, was the Beast of Rome worshiped, per Rev13? Contrary to the often forwarded late-date opinion that Emperor worship was a much later development, it is an historical fact that Caesar worship was firmly in place by 65 AD. Past Caesars had been deified, and Caligula nearly instigated a Jewish revolt in 41 AD by trying to place his statue in the Jewish Temple to be worshiped. Why were Christians executed during the Neronian persecution (64-68 AD)? Because they would not offer a pinch of incense to the “genius” of Caesar, an acknowledged act of worship. Again, the Biblical and historical sources remove all doubt that the empire-wide worship of Caesar was demanded preceding the Jewish War.

Now we arrive at the “fatal” issue, that this worshiped Beast was nearly extinguished but was revived, contrary to expectations. When did Rome nearly expire, only to miraculously be resuscitated? Rome waxed and waned for centuries after 95 AD, with no subsequent events fitting the framework of surprising life after a seemingly mortal wound. If, however, the Apocalypse was received around 65 AD, then we have an historical fact near to hand that fits the Biblical description, namely, the virtual disintegration of the Empire in 69 AD. The Roman Empire almost totally collapsed during the year of the four emperors. It was the Flavians (Vespasian and later Titus) who rescued Rome, healing the fatal wound. The nearly killed Beast yet lived, to the surprise of contemporary secular historians.

Because this time period is unfamiliar to many, especially that which pertains to the breakdown of Roman rule with the end of the Julio-Claudio line (the six Caesars from Julius to Nero, cf Rev17:10), it is helpful to quote Gentry (p72-3):

In introducing the months following the death of Nero, Tacitus (56-117 AD) [a Roman secular historian contemporary to the Jewish War and the year of four emperors] wrote:

The history on which I am entering is that of a period rich in disasters, terrible with battles, torn by civil struggles, horrible even in peace. Four emperors fell by the sword [Nero died by assisted suicide, 8 Jun 68 AD; Galba was murdered, 15 Jan 69 AD; Otho committed suicide, 17 Apr 69 AD; and Vitellius was put to the sword, 20 Dec 69 AD]; there were three civil wars, more foreign wars and often both at the same time. There was success in the East [the Jewish War, with the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD], misfortune in the West. Illyricum was disturbed, the Gallic provinces wavering, Britain subdued and immediately let go. The Sarmatae and Suebi rose against us; the Dacians won fame by defeats inflicted and suffered; even the Parthians were almost roused to arms through the trickery of a pretended Nero. Moreover, Italy was distress by disasters unknown before or returning after the lapse of ages. Cities of the rich fertile shores of Campania were swallowed up or overwhelmed; Rome was devastated by conflagrations, in which her most ancient shrines were consumed and the very Capitol fired by citizens’ hands. Sacred rites were
wards. For example, during Jesus’ ministry, prophecies were continually passing into fulfillment, but in such a way that with what God had foretold, but this fact only became clear afterwards.

Previously the Apocalypse was written prior to these sordid affairs, with a likely date of writing around 65 AD. Even the phrase “This was the condition of the Roman state when Serius Galba, chosen consul for the second time, and his colleague Titus Vinius entered upon the year that was to be for Galba his last and for the state almost the end” [Hist 1:11, emphasis added].

Reading over these statements, doesn’t it make sense that the worship of the Beast whose fatal wound was healed – the near collapse of the Roman Empire itself – is that spoken of in Rev13? If the worshiped Beast with a healed fatal wound is prophetic language describing the violent and tragic events surrounding the Roman Empire during 68-70AD, then obviously the Apocalypse was written prior to these sordid affairs, with a likely date of writing around 65AD.

K. The Revelation Came When “Coded” Language Was A Vital Necessity, Lest The Church Be Accused Of Treason

The cryptic, symbolic language of the Revelation itself bespeaks of an early date of authorship. One’s outlook for this last book of the Bible MUST explain why John would use so-called apocalyptic language in the first place. “Oh, that was just the style of the times,” is both unreasonable and misleading, for the balance of the New Testament – 26 books! – do not use such a truth delivery medium. There must have been something in John’s immediate context that mandated the “sign” language drawn from the Old Testament prophets. If the Revelation was written about John’s distant future, then there was really no reason for his being coy or cagey with the theological information to the seven churches; if, however, there was an immediate, near term impact, as Jesus Himself testified (1:1,3), and if it related to the then-current 1st century political situation, then the coded pictorial language of the Apocalypse makes perfect sense. Why? In two words, personal safety. If John was plain about his writings concerning the impending destruction of the Jewish nation and the soon-coming turmoil for the Roman Empire itself, he could have been hauled in front of the courts for treason or worse, and the fledgling church would have faced an even greater threat of complete eradication, if that were possible. Surely some Roman officials were tempered in their zeal to carry out Nero’s heinous orders against the church by their observing the good behavior of Christians (cf 1Pt2:12-14). What if these magistrates were convinced that the church had its hands on allegedly seditious prophetic literature that foretold near term Roman political turbulence that would be nearly fatal to the Empire? Would not the rest of such officials in prosecuting the war against Christianity have been stepped up a notch or two if they understood the seemingly subversive message of the Revelation?

The Apocalyptic language also highlights the Lord’s prophetic genius in showing how He ordains the soon-coming events, but reveals them in such a way that doesn’t clue in the rebellious and unwitting actors taking part in the drama. Summarizing Fairbairn (p102), prophecy is delivered in a manner so as to be obscure before the events but clear afterwards. For example, during Jesus’ ministry, prophecies were continually passing into fulfillment, but in such a way that even those who closely studied the Old Testament did not perceive their fulfillment until much later – and for the unbelievers, they never caught on. Prophecy exhibits the combination of light and shade that demonstrates God’s wisdom. This principle appears throughout the prophetic literature – the language is cloudy enough to lay down a doctrinal smokescreen against the Lord’s opponents, but obvious enough (especially ex post facto) that the faithful are blessed and encouraged, knowing that their sovereign Lord reigns supreme! If the Revelation made it plain to all who could read, whether Christian or not, exactly what would come to pass before the fact, then the Jews or Romans could have understood what was going to happen and refused to play their respective parts. Instead, they both willingly went right along with what God had foretold, but this fact only became clear afterwards.

What is the very point of a code, after all? To reveal information to the intended audience while simultaneously concealing its contents from one’s adversaries. If the Revelation was penned before the Jewish War, the church had two primary enemies; these were Roman power stirred up in opposition to the church by the unbelieving Jews (the Beast and the Harlot, respectively). And what was the message delivered? Two primary points were given concerning the church’s two bloodthirsty opponents. Those Jews who fought against the church’s very existence would be brought to ruin; and Rome itself would suffer a nearly fatal wound and its power to persecute would be sapped, the destructive wrathful river being swallowed by “the land” of Palestine. In short, the church would be rescued from oppression – now there’s a message the seven churches needed to hear and that answered the plea of the souls under the altar (6:9-11)! How long?! The time was short, and then the Lord God Almighty Himself would rescue Christ’s afflicted bride.

The case can hardly be better stated than the following from Wishart (p5-8):

Most people who complain because the Revelation is obscure, fail to realize that there was a reason, and a very definite reason, for its cryptic character. If the complaining critic had been either the writer or one of the readers of this book, he probably would have wanted it to be even more obscure than it is. Why? Because the personal safety and the very life of the writer and the readers of this message would not have been worth a farthing if its real meanings were made clear. In the Greek it was called the Apocalypse. The word indicates the revealing of something hidden. Hidden to the outsider, its inner message was revealed only to the initiated. For the so-called apocalyptic literature was written in times of persecution when danger and death stalked abroad and hunted men down to their destruction; when
As a matter of fact the Poles had by this time developed in their writing an art of allegory, of veiled significance, which became the quintessence of symbolic double-meaning. It was their only safeguard against a censorship which threatened death not only to national authors but even to readers found possessing national writings. Thus Poland had her Mickiewicz whose poems, their real significance hidden, were passed by the Russian censors only because the censors did not penetrate to their true meaning. Sienkiewicz dared to tell his people their story only in terms of romance of the past; in whose Quo Vadis, even, with its scenes of ancient Rome, the Pole read the interlineal record of his own struggle against Neronian tyranny. Poland has a vast library of double entendre literature grown out of oppression and proscription.

... we should expect to find it [the Apocalyptic writing method] far more highly developed in an age of persecution when the Christian Church, driven in upon itself, was compelled, for its very life, to adopt a system of codes and symbols by which words of encouragement or sympathy, or even matters of common information, could be flashed from one little church center to another without endangering the life of all the Christian communities.

The cryptic, pictorial language of the Revelation itself testifies of a date of writing when the church was being dealt an existential body blow. Facing extermination at the hands of Rome, goaded towards bloodlust by the vitriolic Jews, it is no surprise that coded [or apocalyptic] language was required to communicate comfort to the suffering Christians. Again, code is meant to be deciphered by the recipients but veiled from one’s enemies. Because the Lord didn’t want the censors to read the church’s mail – indeed, Jesus sought to make the pictures appear innocuous and uninterpretable to the church’s opponents – He used the apocalyptic style to encourage and console His afflicted bride during a time of great persecution.

Put another way, if the fulfillment of the Revelation is entirely future to our present day, then why was an enigmatic (or Apocalyptic) writing style used to convey the message to the suffering churches of John’s day? Couldn’t John have just spelled it out, without fear of Roman or Jewish reprisals against the politically weak 1st century church? And if all was far future to their day, then of what possible comfort could these puzzling and obscure symbols have been to the smallish bands of persecuted believers huddled in humble Asia Minor house churches? Such questions are self-answering. There is no contemporary evidence for a Domitianic persecution (in the mid-90s AD); in contrast, there is a torrential flood of testimony concerning the Neronian suffering of the church (64–68AD). Therefore, we can safely conclude that the puzzling pictorial language of the Apocalypse itself points to a date of writing prior to the Jewish War but before the end of the church’s 3½ years of indescribable agony at the hands of Nero, the titular head of the Beast. On the threshold of the Jewish War, the church needed comfort from their Lord during a time of great affliction, but that heavenly message needed a delivery medium that was impenetrable to the church’s enemies, carefully encoded in Old Testament prophetic images to keep the identity of Christ safe; and this is exactly what we find in the pre-70 AD book of Revelation.

L. The Apocalyptic Harlot Is The Jesus-Rejecting 1st Century Jews

A very focused timeframe for the writing of the Revelation is indicated by the Harlot. If you had recently completed a read through the Old Testament and I asked you, “In the Old Testament, who is the Harlot?” you would have no hesitation in answering, “Unfaithful Israel.” The picture of a prostitute for the disobedient Jews is a recurring OT theme. The book of Ezekiel alone is sufficient to point the way, with extended and graphic harlotry passages in Ezk16 and 23, plus additional references in 6:9, 20:30, and 43:7-9. Of course, there is the justly infamous reenactment of Jewish harlotry in Hos1-3, where Hosea is commanded to wed a woman of ill repute as a testimony against Israel’s harlotry, a flesh and blood demonstration of the Jews prostituting themselves to other gods. The 1st chapter of Isaiah includes the same, where Jerusalem is called a harlot (1:21). So then, we now come to the book of Revelation and we find a Harlot in Rev17 – can we suddenly assume that this startling image has a different application than what was set up by the whole of the Old Testament? Having read the 16 preceding chapters, we really can have no doubt that the Apocalypse is firmly rooted in the historically established prophetic pictures of the Old Testament. It does not take a theological doctorate to figure out the identity of the Harlot. Indeed, the said doctoral degree is probably required to prove that the Harlot is NOT the rebellious 1st century Jews (especially of Jerusalem) who had spurned and executed their Messiah. That the Jews employed the Roman Empire to persecute the early church before the Jewish War cannot be seriously debated; in the terms
of Rev17, the Harlot (the Jesus-rejecting Jews) “rode” the Beast (the Roman Empire) to persecute the church – “These will wage war against the Lamb ... and those who are with Him are the called and chosen and faithful” (17:14).

What does all of this have to do with the date of Revelation’s writing? After the Jewish War, the Jews could no longer employ Roman power against the church; rather, the Beast became irked with the harlot and decimated her rather than the church. In prophetic parlance, “the Beast ... will hate the Harlot and will make her desolate and naked, and will eat her flesh and will burn her up with fire” (17:16). What an apt description of the Jewish War! Those Old Covenant-hugging Jews who persecuted the New Covenant church using Roman power, the Harlot herself became the victim of that very Roman vengeful might during the Jewish War. The Harlot, then, points to a date of Revelation’s writing prior to 66AD, before the four Legions of Rome wiped clean the Jewish slate; thereafter, the Harlot (the Christ-hating 1st century Jews) never again employed Rome (the Beast) against Christ’s bride. The Revelation picture of the harlot, the church persecuting Jews, therefore indicates a date of writing around 65AD.

M. The Revelation’s Babylon Is Pre-70AD Jerusalem

At first this may seem a bit puzzling, but the transitive property of equality (A=B, B=C, so A=C) helps us firmly nail this to the structure of the Apocalypse. In Rev11:8, we are told that the dead bodies of the two witnesses “will lie in the street of the GREAT CITY which mysterically is called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified.” This plus Rev11:1-2, where the Temple is measured, leave us no doubt about the identity of the GREAT CITY, namely, Jerusalem. In addition, we have the references from Isaiah where Jerusalem is called Sodom (1:9-10; 3:9), as it is in Rev11:8. Now consider how Babylon is described later in the Revelation. Rev16:19 informs us, “The GREAT CITY was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. Babylon the GREAT was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of His fierce wrath.” In Rev18:10, we have “Woe, woe, the GREAT CITY, Babylon, the strong city!” Rev18:21 concurs, saying, “So will Babylon, the GREAT CITY, be thrown down with violence, and will not be found any longer.” In the Apocalypse, time and again when Babylon is referenced she is given the adjective “GREAT” (14:8; 17:5; 18:2). A=B, B=C, so A=C. Rev11:1-2 and 8 finger the GREAT CITY as Jerusalem (Jerusalem “A” = The Great City “B”). Babylon is repeatedly called the “GREAT” or the “GREAT CITY” (The Great City “B” = Babylon “C”). Therefore, with little mathematical brilliance, we conclude that Jerusalem the Great City is indeed Babylon (A=C), the urban region marked out for destruction. Concurrence for this comes from the tripartite division of the city in Rev16:19, which actually took place during the Jewish War (see below). The city was divided into three warring factions, decimating its already weakened meager defenses against the besieging Romans.

There is another line of evidence supporting the Jerusalem = Babylon equation. Have you wondered if there is any Biblical hard evidence that Peter finished his course and perished in Rome? Where did this tradition begin? A look at the end of Peter’s first epistle gives us the alleged testimony of his time in Rome. Peter writes, “She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you greetings, and so does my son, Mark” (1Pt5:13). Yup, that’s it – clear proof that Peter’s papacy began in Rome! With certainty folks have concluded that Babylon is a code-word for Rome, and thus Peter was there at the end of his life, along with Mark. Actually, it may prove nothing of the sort. Mark was from Jerusalem and may have even penciled himself into the gospel that bears his name, making a naked cameo (Mk14:51-52). After his angelic prison escape, Peter came to the gathered church at John Mark’s house in Acts12:12 (the Rhoda incident), so clearly Mark was a resident of Jerusalem. For his part, Peter was certainly the apostle to the Jews (Gal2:7-8), so it would make sense for him to remain at his Jerusalem post for the duration of his ministry, as he did when the church was scattered after Stephen’s stoning (Acts8:1). Note that Peter even begins his first epistle by addressing “those who reside as aliens, SCATTERED [or dispersed] throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia” (1Pt1:1). Does this not sound a lot like Acts8:1, that the church was “scattered” after great persecution arose following Stephen’s martyrdom, while the apostles remained in Jerusalem? So then, Peter was the Apostle to the Jews (Gal2:7-8), he had remained in Jerusalem when many in the church had been dispersed by persecution (Acts8:1), and Mark was from Jerusalem (Acts12:12). Now let us again reread the supposed Scriptural “proof” that Peter was the first pope in Rome: “She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you greetings, and so does my son, Mark” (1Pt5:13). Peter ministered in Jerusalem and Mark was from Jerusalem – why in the world would the Apostle to the Circumcision go to Gentile Rome, “territory” belonging to Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles? Wouldn’t it be better to assume that “Babylon” was actually a cipher for the unbelieving Jews who comprised the bulk of Jerusalem? The “Babylon = Jerusalem” equation accords nicely with the same use of “Babylon” within the Revelation, and this fact points towards a fulfillment of the Revelation before Jerusalem fell and was no longer a vigorous and bloodthirsty opponent of the early (and mostly Jewish) church. Both the Revelation and 1Pt5:13 speak of Jerusalem as Babylon, a city that would meet its end at the hands of the Romans soon after the ink dried on the Apocalypse (65AD).

[Note: In Acts6-7, of what was Stephen accused? “They put forward false witnesses who said, ‘This man incessantly speaks against this holy place and the Law; for we have heard him say that this Nazarene, Jesus, will destroy this place and alter the customs which Moses handed down to us.’” (Acts6:13-14). Though the witnesses were false, yet there must have been some kernel of truth within the accusation. It may well be that Stephen and others were telling the Jews that the Old Covenant was passé, obsolete and soon to be destroyed along with the Temple. In Acts2:22ff, 3:13-15, and 5:30, Peter clearly laid the blame for the cross at the feet of the Jews, and Stephen follows this example later (7:52). Paul likewise says as much in 1Th2:14-15 – the Jews both killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets. With Messiah’s coming, the Old Covenant waxed old and was passing away, the New Covenant having been inaugurated at the cross. The only thing that remained was to punish the Jewish opponents who had killed Jesus and hounded His Bride, and this would happen during the Jewish War. Following in Peter’s accusatory footsteps, Stephen had probably warned of the Temple’s impending doom because of the Jewish rejection of the Messiah, and for this he stood accused.]
Before we launch into the Roman suppression of the Jewish Revolt (66–73AD), we should investigate to see if the Apocalypse speaks of military activity. While this seems to be a well established fact agreed upon by most everyone, it would be good to review some of the Revelation’s warfare contents, beginning with the four seals and horsemen in Rev6. These events take place at the outset of the prophesied earthly activity, hard on the heels of the heavenly vision in Rev4-5. A white horse rider with crown and bow setting out to conquer (seal 1); a red horse rider who takes away peace (i.e., brings war) with a great sword for men to slay each other (seal 2); a black horse rider who brings famine – a quart of wheat for a denarius, etc (seal 3); and a pale horse rider who brings death and Hades (seal 4). Think about these four in concert. Of what did 1st century warfare consist? Conquest, weapons with “reach” (archers), the removal of peace, sieges producing famine, and, of course, high death tolls. In aggregate, the four horsemen of the Apocalypse bespeak of 1st century military conflict, not of some events far distant from the time of writing.

[Note: Bows and swords surely are NOT weapons of modern combat (Seals 1 and 2), so how some present day “literalists” can say that these Seals speak of hostilities future to our day is curious at best. If a Dispensationalist chooses to be consistently literal, how will future Russian or Chinese armies use bows and swords rather than tanks, helicopters, machine guns and airplanes?]

As Chilton highlights (p65-6), the famous and scary four horsemen of the Apocalypse correspond almost exactly to the contents of the Olivet Discourse (Mt24, Mk13, Lk21), with slight variations in order. Here are the six aspects of Rev6:1-17 cross referenced to the destructive forces listed in the Olivet:

1. War (Rev6:1-2; Mt24:6; Mk13:7; Lk21:9)
2. International strife (Rev6:3-4; Mt24:7; Mk13:8; Lk21:10)
3. Famine / Pestilence / Plagues (Rev6:5-8; Mt24:7; Mk13:8; Lk21:11)
5. Earthquakes (Rev6:12; Mt24:7; Mk13:8 Lk21:11)
6. De-creation (Rev6:12-17; Mt24:15-31; Mk13:14-27; Lk21:20-27)

The Olivet Discourse begins every time with a question about when one stone of the Temple would not be left upon another (Mt24:1-2; Mk13:1-2; Lk21:5-7), punctuated at the close with a near term emphasis, saying that the present Jewish generation would not expire before the listed things take place (Mt24:34; Mk13:30; Lk21:32). Jesus left little doubt that He was speaking of a soon-coming razing of the Temple. If the same destructive language, even in nearly the same order, is employed by Jesus Himself with the four horsemen of the Apocalypse as in the Olivet, then it sure looks like He is once again fleshing out the same exact events surrounding the Temple’s demise. If the Temple’s destruction is being addressed by the first four seals in Rev6, then of necessity the visions from Patmos were given prior to 70AD.

[Note: Many would have us believe that the Olivet Discourse is about the end of all time, but this aligns poorly with Jesus’ own words. Each of the accounts of the Olivet begin with a question about when not one stone of the Temple would be left upon another and end with the assertion that the then-present Jewish generation would not pass away until the events described came upon them. Some interpreters are a bit more cagey, saying that Jesus gave a mixed answer about the coming Jewish War intermingled with data about the end of all time. There are significant – yea, mortal – issues related to this middling approach. First, at this point in Jesus’ ministry, did the disciples even understand that the Messiah would be executed and then return again in the (possibly distant) future? No, there is no possible way that these men were asking two questions in Mt24:3, one about the Temple’s razing and another about the end of all time. Mt24:3 is standard Hebrew parallelism, the same question being restated:

As He was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, “Tell us, when will these things happen, and what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?”

This was one question, not 2, and Jesus answers the one question in Mt24. Note that only one question is asked in the “less Jewish” gospels of Mark and Luke – no Hebrew parallelism in the other two gospel accounts.

[A second fatal aspect of the “both/and” answer – that the Olivet deals with both the Temple’s demise and the end of all time – is how variable the interpreters separate Mt24 into near term and distant future. In short, which stuff in Mt24 is about the Jewish War and which concerns eschatology? The erratic, inconsistent answers given within the books and commentaries supporting the “both/and” outlook is its own undoing, showing the interpreters to be too clever by half. Besides, the dual answer approach sure makes Jesus look irrational. Couldn’t He stay on subject and answer the question at hand? Was He so sloppy in His answer that He could not clearly answer a question about the Temple’s destruction, that He incoherently interleaved material about the end of time along with His Temple razing answer? No, all of the soon-plus-future approaches to the Olivet Discourse founder upon the rocks of rationality. The disciples understood what “not one stone upon another” meant, asked about when this would, and Jesus answered their query with prophetic language. The Olivet is about the Jewish War that would come upon that generation, and 40 years after the cross the Temple would be caught in the crosshairs of God’s wrath for their rejection and crucifixion of the Messiah. The Christ in whom we trust our very eternal souls was not so cagey as to answer an eschatological question the disciples did not ask alongside His response to a clear question about the Temple’s destruction – the 12 didn’t even understand that there would be a Second Advent, so why would they ask about it?]

Resuming the litany or warfare characteristics within the Revelation, the locusts of Rev9 are decidedly similar to the same in the book of Joel, and this with good cause. While it is true that some contend that the Joel just describes a very pesky insect invasion, consider what the Lord actually reveals through the prophet. After describing four types of locusts (gnawing, swarming, creeping, stripping; Jl1:4), Joel says, “For a nation has invaded my land, mighty and without num-

39
ber. It’s teeth are the teeth of a lion ...” (Jl:6). Up next is Jl2:4-8, which ties in tightly with Rev9 and describes a military conquest of Palestine:

“... Their appearance is like the appearance of horses; and like war horses, so they run. With a noise as of chariots they leap on the tops of the mountains, like the cracking of a flame of fire consuming the stubble, like a mighty people arranged for battle. Before them the people are in anguish; all faces turn pale. They run like mighty men, they climb the wall like soldiers; and they each march in line, nor do they deviate from their paths. They do not crowd each other, they march everyone in his path; when they burst through the defenses, they do not break ranks. They rush on the city, they run on the wall; they climb into the houses, they enter through the windows like a thief. (Jl:2:4-8)

Later, the Lord says through Joel, “I will remove the northern army far from you” (Jl:2:20) and describes the locusts as “My great army which I sent among you” (2:25). Finally, as if to end all doubt, in the closing chapter the Almighty tells Israel, “Prepare a war; rouse the mighty men! Let all the soldiers draw near, let them come up! Beat your plowshares into swords and your pruning hooks into spears; let the weak say, ‘I am a mighty man.’” (Jl:3:9-10). An insect invasion of Palestine is certainly NOT the point of the book of Joel; every chapter in this brief minor prophet’s book tells of martial activity within the land of Israel.

What are we to conclude, then, if similar imagery is used within the Apocalypse (Rev9)? The point can hardly be missed, that an invading army will shortly overwhelm the Jews in Palestine. Terry says that the book of Joel describes a desolating northern invading army that reduces Israel to a wilderness (p173). Terry also notes that while literal locusts invade Palestine from the east, the invading "locust" army in the Revelation comes from the north. With prophetic satisfaction we note that all of Israel’s Old Testament enemies – the Assyrians, Babylonians, Greeks, Seleucids, and so on – attacked from the north (the exception being Egypt). Using the imagery established by Joel, the Revelation describes the invading Roman army that started in the north (Galilee) and moved southward to isolate Jerusalem. As Farrar says, “Vespasian had formed the plan of conquering the country in detail, and of driving the defeated population southwards in disorderly masses towards Jerusalem, where he hoped that famine would expedite the work of war. He started from Antioch in March 67AD. Then once more began the bath of blood for the hapless race” (p420).

Locusts normally destroy plant life, but these in the visions from Patmos are given entirely alternate instructions. “They were told not to hurt the grass of the earth, nor any green thing, nor any tree, but only the men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads. And they were not permitted to kill anyone, but to torment for five months; and their torment was like the torment of a scorpion when it stings a man. And in those days men will seek death and will not find it; they will long to die, and death flees from them” (Rev9:4-6). Rev9 goes on to describe odd looking creatures with “the faces of men” (9:7) – hmmm ... this again sounds a lot like an invading army. Rev9:5,10 even delineates how long the “locust” (Roman army) invasion would affect Jerusalem, namely five months. Terry explains that when a locust infestation occurs in Palestine, the usual time period is the five months, from May to September (p350). Isn’t it fascinating that the Roman siege of Jerusalem began on April 14 of 70AD and that all of the city’s resistance ceased about five months later, by September 8 (Wiki)? Yes indeed, the five month Roman “locust” infestation of 70AD that harmed the men and not the plants is entirely consonant with a Jewish War application. Since the prophetic word came prior to the events foretold, a date for the Revelation of 65AD is about right, not some 30 years thereafter (95AD).

Further military examples could be multiplied from the Apocalypse, but a 200 million man army is specifically mentioned in 9:16, right after the locust plague is described. The point of these military examples is simply that the Revelation multiplies apocalyptic warfare imagery; but where does this conflagration occur? If the Harlot is a prophetic picture of the unbelieving 1st century Jews who rebelled against their Messiah and persecuted His Bride (the early and mostly Jewish church), then it would make sense that the armored conflict depicted in the Revelation takes place in the land of Israel, particularly Jerusalem – and we find it to be so! Rev11 alone cements the events of the Apocalypse in Jerusalem; that was the site of the physical Temple (Rev11:1-2), and the dead bodies of the two witnesses are in “the great city which mystically is called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified” (11:8; cf Is1:9-10; 3:9). There can be no debate that at least Rev11 takes place in the environs of Jerusalem, and it is likely that the balance of the book’s warfare centers there as well.

If Jerusalem is in view for the mighty military eruption described in the Apocalypse, then this alone undercuts many Historicist and Futurist applications that make the European theater the center of the Beast’s operations. True, most Futurists posit some conflagration concerning the Jews who repopulate Palestine in modern times and who have rebuilt the Temple – all coming sometime really soon, we are assured. However, the Futuristic fabrications of what is rapidly approaching a rejuvenated Israeli military theater near you contain nations (USA, Russia, China) and weapons (helicopters, airplanes, tanks, machine guns) of which the 1st century Asia Minor churches would have had no knowledge – and these impositions (not expositions) upon the Scriptures come from those who pound the table with their shoe, vigorously asserting that they alone are the only ones who take the Bible seriously! As Job said, “Truly then you are the people, and with you wisdom will die!” (Job12:2). Such “wisdom” that incorporates the USA and tanks, or even UFOs for locusts (Ryrie), can be gently set aside. There is no need to eulogize such fuzzy Futurism, since it will expire from its own theological respiratory malfunctions. Even now, life support is being administered to a dying breed of decidedly non-literaterologists. Apathy by recent Dispensational graduates along with the very real possibility of increased oppression of the church will kill off this uniquely American eschatological system that is in the process of drawing its final breaths. The great suburban hope is quietly decomposing with every false hope that has flopped, every faded Futurist forecast that has consistently failed. While these opium-laced pipe dreams don’t materialize, they do positive harm by weakening the church’s spiritual vitality and its falsehood-rejecting immune system, making it ill-equipped to face genuine tribulation from the world. With compromised and frail error-correcting immunity, with few “killer T-cells” to ward off gангенерous
infections in this day of “everybody’s right” tolerance, then full-on persecution will surely kill off the escapist chiliasts. The epitaph on Rapture Fever’s tombstone will read:

Here lie your erstwhile Dispie friends, We sought the Rapture till the end,  
It never came – oh what despair! For persecution we’re ill-prepared,  
Failed predictions drove us crazy, Now we’re here just pushing daisies.

Having established Jerusalem and the 1st century AD as that which would have had contemporary military relevance for the seven Asia Minor churches, it is fascinating to note that most of the Roman legions used in the Jewish War were drawn from Syria near the Euphrates, stationed there as border guards against the Parthians. Besides the infamous Legio X Fretensis, better known for its aftermath efforts in leaving not one stone of the Temple upon another (Mt24:1-2), Vespasian also employed the services of Legio V Macedonica, Legio XV Apollinaris, and Legio XII Fulminata. The last of these was the legion most recently defeated by the ambushing Jews at the Battle of Beth Horon under the now disgraced Cestius in 66AD, so we can rightly suppose that “mercy towards the Jews” was absent from their vocabulary. The four destructive angels bound at the Euphrates – Tacitus Annals 4:5 and Dio Cassius 4:23 both tell us that four Roman legions patrolled there – were released against the rebellious, Christ rejecting and church thrashing Israelites (Rev9:14). 200 million (Rev9:16) is the estimated world population in the 1st century AD (Wiki) – it was as if the inhabitants of the whole earth were arrayed against the Jewish insurrectionists! Everything in the Apocalypse squares nicely with a Jewish War application, without resorting to fanciful Futurist speculations on what could but never does happen to us “very soon, in our generation.”

Oh no! But what became of the weak, hapless Jerusalem church during the Jewish War, those sheep persecuted by the Jewish wolves and the iron-toothed Roman beast? Would Christ’s bride in the condemned city become collateral damage as the Lord God of hosts waged war against Babylon (Jerusalem), the Harlot (the Christ-rejecting Jewish nation) and the Beast (Rome), the persecutors of His people? Absolutely not! The Lord’s arrows are well aimed and do not miss their mark, nor do they take out nearby targets. Unlike a nuclear blast that flattens a whole city or a neutron bomb that irradiates an entire region, God’s judgments were focused with laser-like precision upon the Jewish insurgents and the Roman Beast, entirely bypassing His saints. Rev12 gives us this exclusion, where “the woman” is whisked away to safety in the wilderness (12:14). Who was this woman? Why, none other than the church of Jerusalem! While it is true that the identity of the woman is bantered about by theologians, let us see if, in fact, “the woman” is prophetic imagery for Christ’s bride, especially in the environs of Jerusalem.

Motivated by love, would not the Savior seek to secure His bride’s safety during the times of Jerusalem’s “great tribulation,” the Jewish War? And we find it to be so in the Olivet Discourse. In Luke’s account, Jesus had personally warned the Jerusalem church in connection with the coming destruction of the Temple (Lk21:5-6, not one stone left upon another). He’d prophesied, “But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then recognize that her desolation is near. Then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains, and those who are in the midst of the city must leave, and those who are in the country must not enter the city; because these are days of vengeance, so that all things which are written will be fulfilled” (Lk21:20-22). This had a startlingly accurate fulfillment. As recounted above, the Roman general Cestius had surrounded Jerusalem in 66AD and could have made quick work of the insurgents, squashing the incipient Jewish rebellion like a cornered roach, but for unknown reasons he and his army fled (Wars2.19.7-9). This flight of the Roman legions served two purposes. It hardened the Jews in rebellion while discrediting the nation’s moderates (Gentry p251ff); and it provided the opportunity for the church of Jerusalem to flee to the nearby but tucked away city of Pella, as described by Eusebius (3.5.3). Is this not remarkable?! “The same sun that softens the wax also hardens the clay” – a slogan that can be readily applied to the hardened Jews, while the softened Jerusalem church had an escape hatch, an opportunity for exit to safety.

This understanding of “the woman” in Rev12 also explains the wrath of the serpent, poured out like a river after the woman but swallowed by the land (12:15-16). Understanding “the land” without qualifier to be shorthand for “the land of Palestine” (Chilton), this is exactly what came to pass. The Roman historian Tacitus, a contemporary of the Jewish War, records that Titus thought he could extirpate both Christianity and Judaism by taking out Jerusalem (Adams p71n). The future Flavian Emperor was entirely mistaken. Judaism was indeed crushed with the Temple’s demise, only to rise from the Rabbinic ashes via Yohanan ben Zakka; but the Christian Jews had skipped town at their Lord’s behest, and Christianity thrived after release from its Egyptian bondage to the Old Covenant. The bride of Christ was rescued; or, as Rev12:14 puts it, “... the two wings of the great eagle were given to the woman [the church], so that she could fly into the wilderness to her place, where she was nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent.” Note that eagle’s wings also describe God’s rescue of Israel from Egypt in Ex19:14; if the correlation is intentional, then the church was rescued from unbelivng Jewish bondage much like Israel during the Exodus. Meanwhile, the “land” (γῆ) of Israel swallowed the river of Roman vengeance (Rev12:15-16) poured out against the woman. Truly the winepress of God’s wrath was trodden for 1600 stadia (Rev14:20) – in round numbers, the geographic extent of Palestine (~184 miles). The four destroying angels of the Roman legions subdued Palestine and eradicated its inhabitants to the tune of a somber dirge, with at least 1.1 million dead (Josephus). Truly the winepress of God’s wrath was...
trod the land over! “The woman” of Rev12, therefore, aligns perfectly with the events predicted by Jesus and described by the historians, once again pointing towards a Jewish War timeframe for the Apocalypse.

Some other niblets in the Revelation are in keeping with a time of authorship prior to the Jewish War, predicting the Roman onslaught against the rebellious Jews. The talent weight (~70 lbs) hailstones of Rev16:21 are one example. Josephus (Wars5.6.3) says that the Roman catapult stones used against Jerusalem were white and weighed a talent each; in mockery of Jesus, the Jews would shout, “The Son is coming!” to warn of the incoming artillery. The Mosaic punishment for harlotry was stoning. If Jerusalem is the Harlot, then her death by Roman stoning aligns perfectly with the Law (Gentry). While the Romans laid siege outside the walls, three warring factions struggled within Jerusalem against each other – according to Rev16:19, the “great city was split into three parts.” Jerusalem was thronged with Passover participants when the Romans encamped and initiated the Jewish War, thus pointing to the early date of writing (65 AD).

In a court of law, do the above military, political and geographic facts prove beyond reasonable doubt that the Revelation was given prior to the Jewish War? Please allow an alternate construction to the question. If the visions from Patmos are NOT about the Jewish War, then what events in history do they depict? What episodes would have had contemporary relevance to the seven Asia Minor churches? Hear the crickets chirp; no answer can be given. Wild-eyed Futurists fail the “contemporary relevance” test, while typically inserting weapons and political architectures unknown in the 1st century AD churches. Continuous Historical advocates of the pope as the Antichrist also flunk the relevance test, while again interposing (usually European) nations completely unfamiliar to the early church. No, we are reduced to a solution only, and this reduction is by divine design. A Roman conquest of Israel fits the following pointers: 

As even a cursory reading of the Revelation demonstrates, the time periods of 7, 3½ (half of 7; or time, times and half a time), 42 months, and 1260 days appear quite prominently. Do these also indicate an early date for the Apocalypse? While not conclusively proving a 65 AD date of authorship, these numbers are certainly in accord with the events surrounding the Jewish War. The Jewish War was about seven years in duration (66-73 AD). In the middle of a seven, after time, times and half a time (3½ years), the Temple was enveloped in flames. Later, the Roman 10th Legion (“Fretensis”) would scrape the Temple mount clean, leaving not one stone upon another (per Jesus’ prediction in Mt24:1-2). Of course, the War with the Jews would continue until the Roman conquest of Masada in 73 AD, another 3½ years later. Clearly, then, the seven year Roman prosecution of the Jewish War was punctuated by the Temple’s termination in the middle, after 3½ years. The historical data are not particularly debatable, and they cleanly line up with the turmoil predicted in the Revelation.

Another aspect of 3½ relates to the duration of the persecution of the church under Nero. This bloodbath ran from approximately Nov64 AD to Nero’s death on 8Jun68 AD (Russell p460), which is almost precisely 42 months, or time, times and half a time (3½ years). When the saints from underneath the altar ask, “How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?” (Rev6:11), the answer would be clear to them. If the Revelation was penned around 65 AD, then the time was indeed at hand or near, just around the chronological corner. A year later, in 66 AD, the high explosive bomb of the Jewish War would detonate, culminating in the Romans razing the Temple to the ground 3½ years thereafter. The Harlot Jews were “riding” their beastly Roman overlords, goading them to persecute the church. The blows instigated by the Jews would be somewhat dampened once Rome turned its anger against the rebellious Jewish nation (the Harlot), and would fully cease once Nero perished at his own hands in 68 AD. For 1260 days, or 42 months, or time, times and half a time (3½ years), the two witnesses, the combined Jewish and Gentile church (Eph 2:11-3:13), had testified of the truth of the gospel, sealing it with their blood. Though slain for their faith, their dead bodies would “lie in the street of the great city which mysterically is called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified” (Jerusalem). Nevertheless, those of the church held firm to the end and were rescued from the evil clutches of both the Harlot (unbelieving Jewry) and the Beast (Rome). Yes indeed, all of the seven and 3½ year time periods within the Revelation nicely align with a date of authorship around 65 AD, just prior to the seven year Jewish War.

What might be the significance of 3½? If seven is a full measure from God, like the seven days of creation, then half of a seven (3½) is almost certainly related to a broken covenant. Let us now follow this Biblical thread, the numerical...
rhythm employed by God Himself to help us see how seven and 3½ connects to the covenants. After the seven creation
days, we now begin our covenantal journey of seven in that most likely of locations, the Law given to Moses. In Lev26,
blessings were promised for obedience in 26:1-13; but extended penalties were guaranteed for disobedience in 26:14ff.
Notice how seven prominently appears within the punishment texts of Lv26:
If also after these things you do not obey Me, then I will punish you SEVEN times more for your sins. (26:18)
If then, you act with hostility against Me and are unwilling to obey Me, I will increase the plague on you SEVEN times
according to your sins. (26:21)
And if by these things you are not turned to Me, but act with hostility against Me, then I will act with hostility against
you; and I, even I, will strike you SEVEN times for your sins. (26:23-24)
Yet if in spite of this you do not obey Me, but act with hostility against Me, then I will act with wrathful hostility
against you, and I, even I, will punish you SEVEN times for your sins. (26:27-28)
It is transparent from Lev26 that SEVEN represents covenant sanctions for covenant violations. The Mosaic economy
came with harsh penalties for disobedience. What about the punishments for rejecting the Messiah and the New Cove-
nant? As put by the writer of Hebrews, “For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgres-
dion and disobedience received a just penalty, how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?” (Heb2:2-3). Clearly
the writer to the Hebrews was implying that rebuffing the New Covenant would incur much harsher sanctions than those
stipulated for violating the Old Covenant. If the Revelation is about the destruction of the Jewish nation for spurning the
New Covenant and killing their Messiah, then wouldn’t we expect the number SEVEN to be front and center? And, of
course, we find it to be so in the Apocalypse.

Next up chronologically in the seven and 3½ Scriptural quest is the time of Elijah (1Ki17-18). The northern 10 tribes of
Israel had been exceedingly wicked, following the paganism (Baal and Asherah worship) of that evil Phoenician Jezebel
and her hen-pecked husband, Ahab. What “tribulation” would come upon that perverse nation for rejecting the 1st two
commandments of their covenant document, the 10 Commandments? By the word of Elijah, the Lord withheld the rains
for 3½ years (Jms5:17). Once again, covenant sanctions were meted out for covenant rebellion. Making the numerical
connection with the Revelation, doesn’t it seem appropriate that the punishment parcelled out by God against the Jews
for rejecting their Messiah would once again include the 3½ timeframe? And so it was during the Jewish War, which
lasted seven years but climaxed after 3½ years with the leveling of the golden and beautiful Temple. Did you know that
reconstruction of the Temple was completed just seven years before its demise (63AD)?! Yes indeed, Herod’s elegant
Temple stood complete for only that magical seven years and then was cut to pieces and dumped off the Temple mount,
with archaeological digs revealing massive stone piles left by the 10th Legion as a testimony against Jewish rebellion
against their Messiah.

A more enigmatic use of seven comes at us from the difficult Gog and Magog passage of Ezk39:9-16. Weapons would be
burned for seven years, and burials would take place for seven months. While there is insufficient space herein to illumi-
nate this intricate passage, a case is made in a previous paper (“The Gog and Magog Enigma” Sep2017) that Ezk38-39
is also speaking of the Jewish War. The War lasted seven years, and the final siege on Jerusalem lasted seven months,
and this is what the Gog and Magog passage is addressing in the highly wrought prophetic language of the Old Testament,
with the graphic symbolism of birds and beasts being summoned to eat flesh (and this after all of the burials, by the
way). To quote the conclusion:

The famous “sevens” of Ezk39:9-16 – seven years of burning and seven months of burials – also line up well with
the Roman subjugation of Judea during the Jewish War. The land was afire with war for seven years, the Romans
ruthlessly crushing the Jewish rebellion; in other words, Palestine suffered through seven years of burning, per
Ezk39:9. What, then, of the seven months of burial? The final siege of Jerusalem took seven months (Wiki). The
burying is not of the invading nations; rather, the Jewish nation itself was interred by the Jewish War. This solution
is more reasonable than the notion that an invading billion man army suffered more than a 36% mortality rate, re-
sulting in the burial of over 360 million corpses by the rather paltry one million Jewish male defenders dwelling in
Palestine. A Jewish War explanation also addresses those who “build a monument” (the literal of 39:15) beside any
discovered bones. In the OT, monuments were often erected to commemorate the Lord’s victories (e.g., Gilgal’s 12
stones, Jos4). The piles of rubble memorializing the Jewish War are still viewed by thousands today, below the Temple
Mount. Truly Jesus’ Olivet Discourse prediction that “not one stone here will be left upon another, which will not be
torn down” (Mt24:2) came to pass, as the Jew’s house (not God’s), the Temple, was left to them desolate
(Mt23:38). The Lord Himself made the land a waste, the land being littered with war time monuments of the Jewish
rejection of their Messiah and the New Covenant. Jesus Himself bore witness against the Jews of the 1st century with
strikingly similar language to the graves and bones of Ezk39:11,14-15; He said that they were like white-washed sep-
ulchers full of dead men’s bones (Mt23:27). After the seven years of Jewish War devastation by the iron-toothed Ro-
man Beast, what had been figuratively true of the Jewish leadership became literally true of the nation, the land being
littered with monuments of the aftermath. With the final siege of Jerusalem being seven months, we can tie the loop
and confidently assert that Palestine indeed burned for seven years during the Jewish War (66-73AD), and that the fi-
nal 70AD siege of seven months was required to bury the capital city, destroy the Temple, and hunt down the Cove-
nant transgressors by the hated Roman Tenth Legion.

If Gog and Magog are about the Jewish War, as forwarded by my previous paper, then it makes sense that the number
seven once again factors prominently in Ezk38-39.

[Note: Seven months is used for Jerusalem’s siege in Ezk38-39, but five months are referenced above with the locusts
of Rev9. Aren’t you being a bit inconsistent (to put it lightly)? The siege was in fact seven months, beginning in February
70 AD, a couple of months prior to Passover; the Temple was burned 30 Aug, and the conquest of Jerusalem came to a close on 8 Sep. However, on 14 Apr, Titus allowed pilgrims to enter for the Passover but refusing exit to any, a effective stratagem to deplete Jerusalem’s already dwindling food supplies. The inauguration of the Passover is used above for the locust invasion to arrive at five months, while in Gog and Magog the full seven months of the siege is given; this resolves the apparent discrepancy.

Now consider the famous first use of the phrase “time, times, and half a time” in Dan 7:25, a poetic expression for 3½ years (time = 1, times = 2, ½ a time = ½, totaling 3½). This is an apocalyptic passage concerning the four successive beasts. These four visionary animals were the lion with eagle’s wings (Babylonia), the bear with three ribs between its teeth (Persia), the leopard with four wings and four heads (Greece), and finally the dreadful beast with large iron teeth (Rome) – the same world empires delineated by Nebuchadnezzar’s Colossus vision in Dan 2. From the iron-toothed beast proceeds a boastful little horn (different from that in Dan 8) that “was waging war with the saints and overpowering them” (7:21). Now we arrive at the operative passage:

He [the little horn] will speak out against the Most High and wear down the saints of the Highest One, and he will intend to make alterations in times and in law; and they will be given into his hand for a time, times, and half a time. But the court will sit for judgment, and his dominion will be taken away, annihilated and destroyed forever. (7:25-26).

Nero’s reign of terror against the church lasted from Nov 64 AD, when he falsely accused the Christians of setting fire to Rome, until “the little horn’s” suicide in 8 Jun 68 AD. This is almost exactly 3½ years, or time, times, and half a time. Nero’s domination was removed by the heavenly court, and the Julio-Claudio line of Caesars came to an abrupt termination. The Beast (Rome) appeared to be mortally wounded, but that seemingly fatal wound was healed (Rev 13:3, 12) with Vespasian’s 69 AD ascent of “the dread summits of Caesarian power” (Farrar p13), inaugurating the Flavian dynasty. [Note that from Vespasian the Jewish historian received his new family name, Flavius Josephus.]

The connection between this 3½ year period of agony, “the Great Tribulation,” with the Revelation is reasonably obvious. If written about 65 AD, then the great tribulation faced by John (1:9) and the nascent church was for only a short time longer. The terrible Neronian persecution had begun late in the preceding year and would last about three years longer. Suffering of similar intensity can hardly be found in the annals of the church (see Farrar for details, p29ff), but it was for a divinely limited time period. As Jesus tells the Smyrnan church, “you will have tribulation for 10 days” (Rev 2:10), a poetic expression for a relatively short timeframe; not a lengthy epoch of suffering, but not an insignificant period of trouble for the church. The saints were called upon to be “faithful until death” during this “tribulation” so they would receive “the crown of life.” Conversely, the Philadelphia church was told that because of its obedience it would be kept from the hour of testing (3:10). [A hypothesis of the Partial Preterist Amillennial (PPA) approach to the Revelation can be tested is this: If historical sources are or become available, they will demonstrate that the Philadelphian Christians were mostly spared the Neronian persecution from 65 to 68 AD.]

Isn’t it interesting that Jesus’ ministry itself was also time, times, and half a time (3½ years), from later in 26 AD to His crucifixion during the 30 AD Passover? As predicted in Dan 9, “And he will make a firm covenant with the many for one week, but in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering” (9:27). A New Covenant was established after Jesus’ 3½ year ministry, the last of Daniel’s famous 70 weeks that was cut in half by the cross. Here 3½, the number of covenant breaking, marks the termination of the Old Covenant and the inauguration of the New by the crosswork of Christ. This New Covenant was firm, one that cannot be shaken (Heb 12:28-29), unlike the temporary Old (Mosaic) Covenant. The Old Covenant was a kingdom that could and was shaken to its core, being old and passing away; but the New Covenant was firmly established and cannot be removed. Does not this very passage, Heb 12:28-29, say much to those who contend the kingdom was actually shaken and postponed by Jewish disobedience? No, the New Covenant kingdom was truly put in place, the kingdom among the Jews with Jesus coming (Lk 17:20-21), the government was forever (not would be in the future, nor for only 1,000 years) upon Messiah’s shoulders (Is 9:7), and Christ does indeed sit upon David’s throne now (Lk 1:32-33; Acts 2:30-36). “[F] or the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom 14:17). Are we in this kingdom or not? “For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins” (Col 1:13-14). Again, does Paul give any hint of kingdom postponement? Yea, verily. Paul preached the kingdom to the Jews at the end of the book of Acts (28:23, 31). Was he preaching a postponed political kingdom? Hardly. The promised Messianic kingdom HAD come among them with the incarnation, but the Jews had rejected it and crucified their Messiah. Would the Jews not be punished for this effrontery?

With His crucifixion, Jesus put an end to the sacrifices and grain offerings in the Temple. Yes, the Temple operations continued for another 40 years, until the Temple itself was removed; but no longer were these sacrifices pleasing in God’s sight. The Old Covenant rituals pointed forward to Christ; after the final, once and for all sacrifice had been offered on the cross, the strong Mosaic economy from God now became the weak and beggarly elements, a mere shadow of Christ the substance (in the words of that former Pharisee, Paul, in Gal 4 and Col 2). As is abundantly evidenced in the four gospels, Jesus also testified against the Jewish Harlot for 3½ years, but they rejected the Son, cast Him out of the vineyard and killed Him (Mt 21:33-46). The guests to the marriage feast spurned the gospel offer (Mt 22:1-14). Would God not vindicate His Son and take vengeance upon the malefactors? Would He not bring those wretches to a wretched end, renting out the vineyard to the church to produce the proceeds required by the Lord, the vineyard owner (Mt 21:41)? In Jesus’ own words at the terminus of the Parable of the Minas (or Pounds), “But these enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, bring them here and slay them in my presence” (Lk 19:27). The Revelation prophetically details exactly this, the retributive hand of God condemning the once Holy City that was now Babylon populated by the
Harlot, Christ-rejecting Jewry. Jerusalem, which had been the center of Yahweh worship, was now the center of opposition to the New Covenant (Lk13:33; cf Walker's whole book).

[Note: The fig tree parable in Lk13:6-9 strongly implies a 3½ year Messianic ministry as well. Jesus said:

“...And he said to the vineyard-keeper, ‘Behold, for three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree without finding any. Cut it down! Why does it even use up the ground?’ And he answered and said to him, ‘Let it alone, sir, for this year too, until I dig around it and put in fertilizer; and if it bears fruit next year, fine; but if not, cut it down.’”

Why would Christ speak so specifically about a three year period of time? Was it not because His ministry was coming to a dramatic close and yet the Jewish nation remained spiritually barren? The fruitless fig tree had only another season to go before it was chopped down – this lack of Jewish spiritual fruit would not go on for much longer!]

As mentioned previously, Rev12:14 says that the woman was spirited away for “a time and times and half a time” (3½ years) from the dragon’s wrath. When the church in Jerusalem saw the city surrounded by the armies of Roman legions under Cestius, followed by the inexplicable flight of the mighty Roman host, they took Jesus’ words to heart and fled. Jesus had said (Lk21:20-22):

But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then recognize that her desolation is near. Then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains, and those who are in the midst of the city must leave, and those who are in the country must not enter the city; because these are days of vengeance, so that all things which are written will be fulfilled.

Heeding these words, the Jerusalem church fled to Pella (Eus3.5.3) for 3½ years, escaping the dragon’s wrath. Meanwhile, the inhabitants of “the land” (Palestine) swallowed the river poured out by the serpent. A common Old Testament prophetic metaphor is describing invading nations as torrential floods. For instance:

Now therefore, behold, the Lord is about to bring on them the strong and abundant waters of the Euphrates, even the king of Assyria and all his glory; and it will rise up over all its channels and go over all its banks. Then it will sweep on into Judah, it will overflow and pass through, it will reach even to the neck (Is8:7-8)

The waves of Rome’s flood broke over the heads of Jerusalem while the church was spared. What a remarkable testimony to the Lord’s goodness, plus His judgmental accuracy – no collateral damage to His elect! The words of Christ in Rev12:14 about the woman, His bride, being spared for 3½ years is in accord with what took place during Jerusalem’s destruction.

Finally, one of the more difficult passages with the covenant breaking number of 3½ is found in Rev11:7-11:

When they [the two witnesses] have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up out of the abyss will make war with them, and overcome them and kill them. And their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city which mystically is called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified. Those from the peoples and tribes and tongues and nations will look at their dead bodies for three and a half days, and will not permit their dead bodies to be laid in a tomb. And those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them and celebrate; and they will send gifts to one another, because these two prophets tormented those who dwell on the earth. But after the three and a half days, the breath of life from God came into them, and they stood on their feet; and great fear fell upon those who were watching them.

Here we have 3½ days rather than the more nebulous “times.” Are these to be understood as 24 hour days? Consider another passage about the selfsame events, the Jewish War and the destruction of Jerusalem. After the Triumphal Entry, Jesus wept over Jerusalem and said (Lk19:43-44):

For the DAYS will come upon you when your enemies will throw up a barricade against you, and surround you and hem you in on every side, and they will level you to the ground and your children within you, and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not recognize the time of your visitation.

As demonstrated in this passage, the same Greek word for days [ἡµέρα, ἡµὲνα] can also be used in the indefinite sense. Speaking also of the Temple’s destruction (Mk13:1-2), Mk13:19 reads:

For those DAYS will be a time of tribulation such as has not occurred since the beginning of the creation which God created until now, and never will.

Here are at least two specific instances where “days” is used in the indefinite sense, and these from passages about the destruction of the Temple. On several occasions in the NASB, ἡµέρα is translated “time.” For example, Stephen says, “Joshua upon dispossessing the nations whom God drove out before our fathers, until the TIME of David” (Acts7:45).

Could “days” (or “times”) be likewise employed for the timeframe of the two witnesses, in the more imprecise or indefinite sense? Could it be that the witnesses’ dead bodies will lie in the streets not for 3½ mornings and evenings, but rather for 3½ “times,” perhaps years?

Translating “days” as “times,” possibly implying “years,” may seem like a significant etymological leap, but it does align well with what we know about the church in Jerusalem during the Jewish War. Here is not the place to develop the full explanation, but we will allow the references to flesh this out more completely. Let us rather take a shortcut through the theological woods and head straight towards the conclusion. Pieters (p110) and Terry (p369) both contend that the two witnesses stand for the testimony of the church during that 1st century era, prior to Jerusalem’s fall. By Law, two witnesses are required to establish a testimony (Dt17:6; 19:15; Mt18:16; 2Co13:1), and the Jews and Gentiles together comprising the early church served this courtroom prosecutorial function against the unbelieving Jews. The sackcloth and shutting off the heavenly rain faucet in Rev11:3-6 point towards the prophet Elijah who did the same in 1Ki17-18, while changing the waters to blood and inflicting plagues are akin to the work of God through Moses. [Note: Recall also that Elijah and Moses appeared with Christ at the Transfiguration, Mt17.] In other words, what Rev11 is implying with pro-
As mentioned already, the Jerusalem saints evacuated the city and headed to Pella (Eus3.5.3) after the Roman armies would it not have appeared that the church was effectively dead, “killed” for 3½ years? Yet after the Temple’s desecration and demolition, the church was figuratively “resurrected,” returning to Jerusalem to reignite their fervent testimony and home against their wicked hearts, and they hated the Christians for the deep conviction they brought against those who had rejected their Messiah – just read Acts22 about how the Jews treated Paul!

If the two witnesses represent, especially of Jerusalem, then how were they killed, with their unburied bodies in the streets of Jerusalem for all to observe and mock? Upon seeing Jerusalem surrounded by Cestius’ armies, followed by the Romans inexplicably retreating, the church of Jerusalem heeded Jesus’ words and fled the Jerusalem premises. It bears repeating what Christ had said in Lk21:20–22:

But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then recognize that her desolation is near. Then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains, and those who are in the midst of the city must leave, and those who are in the country must not enter the city; because these are days of vengeance, so that all things which are written will be fulfilled.

As mentioned already, the Jerusalem saints evacuated the city and headed to Pella (Eus3.5.3) after the Roman armies departed, where they were protected for 3½ years (“time and times and half a time”) from the dragon’s wrath that came upon the Jews through looming Roman conquest (Rev12:14). To the remaining Messiah-rejecting Jews in Jerusalem, would it not have appeared that the church was effectively dead, “killed” for 3½ years? Yet after the Temple’s desecration and demolition, the church was figuratively “resurrected,” returning to Jerusalem to reignite their fervent testimony for Jesus as the Jewish Messiah. After the covenant breaking number of 3½ years, the covenant breakers had been effectively cut off with the destruction of the Temple, and the curtain was emphatically drawn on the Old Covenant. The New Covenant, inaugurated fully at the cross, was completely cut loose from any Old Covenant moorings by the Jewish War.

Are you troubled by this figurative notion of a resurrection of the two witnesses? Please note that in like fashion this type of “resurrection” is illustrated in Heb11:17-19, where Abraham figuratively received Isaac back from the dead, though his son had never perished. The 3½ year departure of the Jerusalem church and its subsequent return may well be prophetically portrayed as a death and resurrection in Rev11:7-11. While not making an iron-clad argument that this imagery is employed by Jesus in His words to John on Patmos, the 3½ year death and resurrection of the Jerusalem church is at least consonant with the what happened in the distant past, during the first half of the Jewish War.

“And their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city which mystically is called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified” (11:8). The Jerusalem church’s “death” for 3½ years would have had dire consequences upon the city – all salt and light (Mt15:16) would have been removed, and not 10 righteous men would have remained to spare “Sodom” from the wrath of God (Gen18:32). This vengeance against those who executed their Messiah would be poured out like the plagues on “Egypt.” Yes, I have not conclusively proved that the two witnesses represent the saints from the formerly holy but now reprobate city, nor that the 3½ “days” must be understood as 3½ years, nor that the deaths and resurrections of the two witnesses are figurative language for the Jerusalem church’s being tucked away for safe-keeping in Pella for time, times and half a time. None of these have been established beyond reasonable doubt in the theological court. However, it is not at all apparent that this storyline accords nicely with the historical facts concerning Jerusalem’s demise during the Jewish War?

For killing the Son who came to the vineyard, the kingdom was taken from the rebel Israelites and given to others (Mt21:43); those Jews who had rejected the marriage summons had caused the king to become enraged, and He “sent his armies and destroyed those murderers and set their city on fire” (Mt22:7); Jesus had exited to receive a kingdom, and His Jewish enemies, who didn’t want Him to reign over them, were brought before Him and slain in His presence (Lk19:12,27). But what of the hapless, weak bride of Christ in the condemned city? They had faithfully testified of the Messiah in Jerusalem, but now two eagle’s wings were given her to flee the coming wrath for 3½ years (Rev12:14). Isn’t it interesting that in the Exodus, when God was rescuing Israel from Egyptian bondage, the same language is used; “You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings, and brought you to Myself” (Ex19:4)? Now God was sparing Christ’s bride, the church, from His wrath against “Sodom and Egypt,” i.e., Jerusalem.

For how long? For that magical covenant-breaking number, 3½ years. The Jews were guilty before the Almighty and would pay for it with their own blood, having rejected and called for the blood of their Messiah to be upon themselves (Mt27:25). Again, while our elucidation of the two witnesses does not definitely determine that Rev11:3ff is speaking of the situation in Jerusalem prior to 70AD, it is at least consonant with what took place during the first 3½ years of the Jewish War (66–70AD). However, if one adds to the two witness slurry of lime the key hardening agent given in 11:1-2, namely that the Temple was still standing, then the two witness concrete sets; we can be certain that we are dealing with events prior to the Temple’s destruction in 70AD. The two witnesses represent the Jerusalem church that was seemingly “dead” when in fact it was preserved for 3½ years and then “resurrected,” reappearing in full force after the Temple’s
Coming full circle, this section began with the assertion that seven and 3½, prominent numbers within the Revelation, direct our attention towards a Jewish War fulfillment, and thus indicate that the Apocalypse was penned prior to that terrible conflagration. seven and 3½ are covenant numbers emphasizing covenanted people facing covenant sanctions for covenant violations. Examples include the Elijah account where the Lord withheld the rain from Israel for 3½ years (Jms5:17) and the penalties in quantities of seven listed in Lv26. It goes without saying that a nation must be within a covenant to face covenant punishments; the Gentiles not under the Old Covenant with God would therefore be exempt from judicial sentences doled out in portions of seven and 3½. The nation of Israel was under the Mosaic economy and was expected and lovingly encouraged to transition to the New Covenant; it flagrantly violated both Old and New Covenants, resulting in a Jewish War that was filled with covenant sanctions parceled out in 7s and 3½s. The Jewish War lasted seven years (66-73AD); it was punctuated by the Temple’s obliteration after 3½ years, at the midpoint of the War; the conquest of Masada by Silva and the Romans ended the Jewish uprising 3½ years thereafter; God Himself had promised in Lv26 that the number seven would be associated with Israel’s punishments for covenant violations; and the 7s of Gog and Magog (Ezk38-9) and the 3½ of the little horn in Dan7 both accord with a Jewish War application.

As for the church, the Lord Jesus broke the back of the Old Covenant and inaugurated the New after His 3½ year ministry; the bride of Christ had to undergo a 3½ year great tribulation at the hands of Nero (64-68AD), who falsely accused the fledgling church of setting Rome ablaze; and the Jerusalem church appeared dead, effectively disappearing for 3½ years from “Sodom and Egypt” while “the great city” where “their Lord was crucified” underwent the vengeance of God (Rev11:1-13; 12:14-16). However, the apparently slain church reappeared in full vigor after their self-imposed 3½ year “exile” in Pella, “resurrected” to renew its vigorous testimony for Jesus. The Jewish nation, however, was to be decimated by the Romans to the point where it would rise no more; the determined Jewish rejection of their Messiah and their subsequent persecution of the church resulted in God’s unavoidable judgment and the virtual extermination of that rebellious New Covenant-rejecting nation. The “hope of Israel” spoken of by Paul (Acts28:20) is now and ever will be not in a political restoration to a semi-arid piece of low-valued mideastern real estate, but in Christ alone, and we fervently pray that the natural branches will be grafted back in to the olive tree as full members of the Christian faith (Rom11)! So then, while the numbers 7 and 3½ alone do not demand that the Apocalypse was seen prior to the Jewish War, yet these numbers are surely in complete harmony with that War, which was the only major contemporary near term event within which these two numbers were firmly embedded. Any application of seven or 3½ future to us, 2,000 years after the Revelation was given, would have had no relevance whatsoever to the long-defunct seven Asia Minor churches. In balance, then, seven and 3½ bespeak of a Jewish War application, which of necessity means that the Revelation was seen about 65AD, prior to that emphatic Covenant-changing event.

P. Dan9:24-27 Says The Scriptural Canon Was Completed Prior To The Jewish War, Including The Revelation

Further on the celebrated “70 weeks” of Dan9:24-27, a subject opened in the last point, consider carefully the words of this renowned passage:

Seventy weeks have been decreed for your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sin, to make atonement for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, TO SEAL UP VISION AND PROPHECY and to anoint the most holy. So you are to know and discern that from the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince there will be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; it will be built again, with plaza and moat, even in times of distress. Then after the sixty-two weeks THE MESSIAH WILL BE CUT OFF AND HAVE NOTHING, AND THE PEOPLE OF THE PRINCE WHO IS TO COME WILL DESTROY THE CITY AND THE SANCTUARY. And its end will come with a flood; even to the end there will be war; desolations are determined. And he will make a firm covenant with the many for one week, but in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering; and on the wing of abominations will come one who makes desolate, even until a complete destruction, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who makes desolate.

What does this have to do with dating the book of Revelation? Note the highlighted section, “to seal up vision and prophecy.” Once the events foretold in this prophecy came to a close, there would be no additional vision or prophecy; in modern parlance, the Biblical Canon would be closed. In the words of Heb1:1-2, “God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world.” The consummate and closing act of God’s revelation to men would be through His Son; thereafter, no further prophetic word would be necessary, and the Bible would be completed soon thereafter; or, to use the words of Dan9, after the anointing of the Holy One (Messiah), then would come the sealing up of vision and prophecy. If we can establish when the famous “70 weeks” passage crossed the prophetic finish line, then we can also ascertain when divine revelation would cease, when vision and prophecy would be sealed up. If it can be shown that by the Jewish War the Dan9 prophecy was all wrapped up with colorful paper, put under the Christmas tree with a bow and tag, then of necessity the visions on Patmos came prior to 70AD.

The Hebrew for “weeks” does not speak of Sunday through Saturday, but rather represents a group of seven. This is much like saying a “dozen,” a “gross” or a “score,” words that stand for amounts (12, 144, and 20, respectively). It is likewise with the Hebrew “weeks,” a group of seven. So then, we have 70 “sevens” in Dan9:24-27, but seven of what? It is generally agreed that these are 70 groups of seven years, representing a prophetic timetable totaling 490 years. From the command to rebuild Jerusalem, it would be 490 years until what was foretold by God would come to pass. This prophecy dovetails neatly with the 70 years of Babylonian exile. There were 70 years of captivity, and now the Jewish nation would be informed of what the next “70” would hold for them. They were to see the Messiah’s arrival within the next 70! How-
ever, there were also some decidedly troubling aspects included in this prophecy. The city and Temple destroyed, plus the Messiah's being cut off and having nothing?! These are given within the passage as well, which says, “the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing, and the people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary.” To the godly seed of Abraham, these were simultaneously exciting and disturbing words indeed! The Anointed One would come? Great! But He would be cut off and have nothing? Very bad! And then a coming prince would destroy Jerusalem and the Temple? Really bad! How can all be well if our Messiah is cut off and the Temple and Jerusalem are destroyed? Interpolating this “weeks” passage with data unknown to men in Daniel's day:

Daniel, you are praying for the restoration of the Jews to the land after the prophesied 70 years of captivity. Now the Lord Almighty will tell you of the next 70 for Israel, 70 more “sevens” that will bring the cessation of the Old Covenant and the inauguration of the New by the coming Messiah. After 49 years (seven weeks) the Temple will be rebuilt, but in turbulent times. The Anointed One will arrive 62 weeks thereafter, at the start of the 70th week, and His ministry will last 31/2 years (half a week). In the middle of that last (70th) week He will put a stop to the Mosaic sacrificial system by His once for all sacrifice on the cross. Thereafter (the time period is left gauzy, but we know it to be 40 years later), the Romans (“the people of the prince who is to come”) will make quick work (a “flood,” or military invasion) of Jerusalem and the Temple, razing them to the ground. Though these will be fearful times, yet an end to sin and transgression, full atonement, and everlasting righteousness will be the glorious products of these 70 weeks! It can hardly be wondered that such a passage would raise 1st century Messianic expectations to a feverish pitch. The Messiah is coming soon! Ah, but with it also is the promise, not specifically spelled out as part of the “weeks,” that Jerusalem and the Temple would be destroyed. The timeframe of the “end” that comes like a “flood” is left a bit murky. Jerusalem and the Temple’s termination are connected to the Messianic arrival and His putting a stop to the sacrificial system in the middle of the last “week,” but how this all plays out is not explicitly spelled out. Connecting back to the point at hand, we can rest assured that divine revelation would be wrapped up once all of these things took place.

Another Messianic passage of similar import was given to Daniel in chapter 2, Nebuchanezzar’s vision of the Colossus, which specified that the Messianic kingdom would be a “stone ... cut out without hands” that becomes an earth-filling mountain (2:34-5, 44-5). When would this happen? During the era of the Roman Empire, the feet of iron and clay. These two chapters (2 and 9) of Daniel alone, plus some simple arithmetic, let the faithful of the 1st century AD know that the Messianic kingdom was close at hand. Folks today may debate the time of Dan9’s fulfillment, but there seems to have been no doubt by the 1st century AD Jews – they knew that the Anointed One was to come during their day from the “weeks” passage, and boy, they sure were ready! Moreover, during his lifetime, Daniel was head of the “Chaldeans,” so his work was preserved to direct the Babylonian Magi to seek the King in Mt2 at the proper time. Note, however, that the Jews generally looked for a Messianic kingdom of military conquest and Jewish political hegemony, while the Dan9 text actually speaks of the cessation of the Mosaic sacrifices and the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple – aspects the Jews of Jesus’ day conveniently ignored!

Indeed, some have suggested that the Jewish War (66-73AD) had a powerful Messianic flavor among many Jews; they were hoping to usher in the political kingdom by taking the initiative on God’s behalf and booting out the Romans. How often do the students of the Book latch on to what they like while ignoring that which is inconvenient to their prosperity hopes?! The Jews found attractive the hoped for political domination of Israel via the Messiah, while conveniently bypassing the foretold cessation of sacrifices and Jerusalem’s desolation. “Verse A Day” calendars don’t usually quote Biblical judgment passages – we all want to feel good, especially early in the morning when we tear off yesterday’s therapeutic verse! Likewise, the Jews clung to their political Messianic hopes from Dan9 while quietly bypassing the clearly demarcated judgment aspects against Jerusalem and the Temple.

As to the extent of this Messianic hope during the Jewish War, consider the following from NA Silberman (MHQ 1996 v8 #2 p26-34) about the Dead Sea War Scroll:

In tightly written rows of Hebrew letters inscribed in ink on now-tattered parchment, an ancient Jewish scribe indelibly expressed his people’s secret longings for a bloody, apocalyptic war. His vision was vivid and violent. At the appointed “time of salvation for the people of God,” he prophesied, two massive armies would face each other in battle on the outskirts of the Holy City of Jerusalem. Arrayed on one side would be the foot soldiers and auxiliary forces of an aggressive, totalitarian empire that held the Holy Land under its sway. On the other side would be a mighty army of liberation: a volunteer force of skilled infantrymen, cavalrymen, archers, and slingers mobilized from all the tribes of Israel. In this clash of Darkness and Light on the rocky terrain of Judea, there would be no cease-fire, armistice, or tactical retreat. It was to be a cataclysmic battle fought to a merciless finish to free the Holy Land — indeed, to free the entire world, once and for all — from the forces of evil, corruption, and tyranny.

Thus begins the ancient text known to modern scholars as the “Scroll of the War of the Sons of Light against the Sons of Darkness.” It is one of the most famous of the 2,000-year-old manuscripts discovered by a Bedouin in caves of the Dead Sea region in the winter of 1946-47. Dated by its handwriting style to the late first century B.C. or early first century A.D., the Dead Sea War Scroll (and, indeed, the hundreds of other Dead Sea Scroll texts found in nearby caves in subsequent years) was originally considered by most scholars to be the work of the ancient Jewish sect of the Essenes.

In reviewing new information about the scrolls’ attitudes toward other groups, sects, and religious issues, a number of scholars, led by Lawrence Schiffman of New York University, have proposed that the authors of the Dead Sea Scrolls were not isolated monkish Essenes but actually puritanical Sadducean reformers — a breakaway faction of priests from the Jerusalem Temple who established a community in the wilderness from which they championed an uncompromising observance of the Mosaic law.
Other scholars, like Robert Eisenman of California State University, suggest that the authors of the scrolls cannot be seen merely as theologians or religious activists. The scholars argue that the scrolls must be seen as the product of a militant anti-Roman messianic movement that preached a gospel of righteous Holy War. That this group actually participated in violent resistance to the Romans is likely. The discovery of Dead Sea Scroll-type documents at the fortress of Masada, whose rebel occupiers were the fiercely militant group known as the Sicarii (the “knifemen”), can no longer be easily ascribed to the flight of individual refugees from the peaceful “Essene” community at Qumran. A critical reading of the accounts of the first-century Jewish historian Josephus indicates that the entire nation was drawn into a movement of resistance. And while it may be true that the authors of the scrolls did not actively drill in close-order formation or practice combat maneuvers, it is becoming clear from the newly published scroll texts that they were not isolated, pious monks hunched over their writing tables; instead, they were active observers of a deteriorating political scene. Their knowledge of Roman-era arms and armor, tactics, and strategy contained in the War Scroll seems far too specific to be explained by religious imagination alone.

Could the Dead Sea War Scroll thus possess a military significance that has previously been overlooked? Could its extraordinarily detailed specifications for weaponry and battlefield tactics have been drawn from direct experience? Could the War Scroll, and perhaps other Hebrew apocalyptic works like it, have played an important part in fomenting a vast national uprising in Judea — which turned out to be one of the most serious internal challenges the Roman Empire ever had to face?

It is important to stress that the War Scroll is not a single, continuous text but a fascinating potpourri of military hymns, laws, and tactical descriptions. With an unrolled length of approximately nine feet, nineteen columns of writing have been preserved, though the lower portions of all of them have rotted away and darkened at the edges. The text contains an initial call to battle, followed by passages of religious instruction, a concise strategic timetable for global conquest, an armorer’s catalogue, a tactical manual, a battlefield prayer book, and, finally, a biblical-style combat narrative, in which the forces of Evil are permanently vanquished on the field of battle by the forces of Good.

Each of the scroll’s individual sections possesses its own, slightly differing details about tactics and timing — whether final victory against the forces of Darkness would be won in a single, decisive encounter or in a drawn-out, decades-long campaign. Yet all of the traditions contained in the War Scroll share the unshakable belief of its author or authors that the wrath-filled End of Days was fast approaching and that the ultimate forces of Evil, to be defeated on the Day of Judgment, were allied with recognizable, earthly enemies — the legions of the Roman Empire. …

The initial strategic aim of the campaign envisioned in the War Scroll was a retaking of the Promised Land from the hands of the Gentiles. In a replay of Joshua’s conquest of Canaan, the War Scroll envisioned six initial years of hard fighting, to be followed by a sabbatical year. That would be the biblically prescribed interval when Jewish priests and their assistants known as Levites would purify the Jerusalem Temple from all foreign interference and reestablish the strict observance of the sacrificial cult that had been defiled in the previous years by the rule of the Sons of Darkness and their local collaborators, Jews whom the scroll condemned as “offenders against the covenant.” Yet this was only the beginning. Once the power of Rome and its allies had been shown to be empty and broken in the Land of Israel, the scroll predicted that the forces of Light would set out to liberate other subject lands and peoples all over the world.

In its explicit, geographically logical detail, the War Scroll’s timetable for a subsequent worldwide campaign of liberation offers a unique glimpse at the mind-set of an ancient people who dreamed about and plotted Rome’s destruction. It may be true that history is ultimately written by the winners, but the War Scroll may at least preserve a memory of the losers’ once-bright hopes. Roughly following the terminology of the “Table of Nations” from the Book of Genesis, the scroll envisions an additional thirty-three years of fighting, interrupted by the strict observance of sabbatical years in which all fighting would cease. In this global phase of the War of the Sons of Light against the Sons of Darkness, territorial conquest would be methodical and systematic, based on careful consideration of the geography and topography of the known world. Volunteer levies recruited from each of the tribes of Israel would first conquer the region of the Upper Euphrates, then clear the far left flank with the conquest of Asia Minor and Armenia, proceed to the conquest of all of Mesopotamia and Persia, and ultimately reach the shores of India and beyond, to the eastern edges of the known world. …

The Roman legion, with its deadly power and flexibility, was the basis of imperial power in the Middle East. In this capacity, it was a hated and feared force in Judea in the late first century BC Herod’s new-style army, which brought together Jewish veterans of the Hasmonean forces with new recruits from the regions immediately surrounding Judea, proved itself an efficient instrument of power, cowing the local population into docility, if not loyalty. This became unmistakably clear soon after Herod’s death in 4 BC, when a large number of the king’s Jewish troops — intensively trained in Roman-style warfare — defected from their barracks and garrisons to join in a widespread popular revolt.

That uprising was eventually suppressed by the intervention of Quintilius Varus and the Syrian legions, and it is worth noting that henceforth throughout the first century, the auxiliary troops in Judea were composed almost entirely of recruits from pagan cities. The thousands of Jewish mutineers who escaped crucifixion or imprisonment were no longer on active duty, but in the following decades — as Roman oppression intensified and Jewish messianic hopes burned more brightly — they and their sons and grandchildren, raised on hearthside tales of former battlefield glories, must have harbored secret hopes of once more arming themselves with shields, lances, and swords to reconquer the Promised Land.
Could the War Scroll embody the memories and hopes of those generations of Jewish soldiers and rebels? It is clearly a collection of separate traditions, memories of tactical maneuvers, and equipment specifications woven together into a composite revolutionary ideology. The time of its composition and copying is precisely when the direct memories of participation in legionary-type warfare would have been most vivid among the Judean population, and when religious resentment against Roman rule was growing.

The MHQ article makes plain that many Jews of the 1st century were possessed of Messianic fervor, to the point of making military plans to kick out the interloping iron-fisted Romans, followed by the hoped for conquest of the entire Roman Empire itself! While it probably cannot be proved that these hopes sprang from the timetable set up in the 70 weeks of Daniel, one cannot help but wonder if the Jews of Jesus’ era understood this obvious prophetic “clock” – certainly the Magi of Mt2 understood it, having been schooled in the texts of their Chaldean mentor and predecessor, Daniel.

One can see in the Jewish War a Kadesh-Barnea redux. At the edge of the Promised Land, Israel had sent out spies (Num14). 10 of the 12 reported that taking the land was an impossible task, resulting in an Israelite rebellion against the Lord and Moses. God Almighty delivered the sentence of punishment, that all of the Israelites males 20 or older would perish in the wilderness for their unbelief. How did the Israelites respond? After it was too late, they arose in the morning and said (in paraphrase), “OK, we’ll go now and take the land.” Moses warned them against such folly, for the Lord was not with them; but they went anyway and had their little bottoms spanked pink by the Amalekites (Num14:39-45).

How does this parallel the events of the Jewish War? Having rejected their Messiah, now the Jews attempted to usher in their hoped-for political Messianic kingdom by rising up in rebellion against their Roman overlords, counting on God to rubber stamp their military efforts. Unfortunately, they had missed their first opportunity of entering the true Messianic Promised Land (Heb3), much like the Israelites at the edge of Palestine had failed many generations before. The outcome was as predictable as it was tragic, a national disaster of unparalleled proportions. Jesus had made plain that He was NOT ushering in a political kingdom – “My kingdom is NOT of this world,” said to the very political Pilate in Jn18:36. The weak, divided and disorganized insurgent Jews were militarily crushed by the Romans in the Jewish War for seeking a false political Messianic kingdom.

Returning to Dan9, we note in passing that some insert an unwarranted and unsupported gap of thousands of years between weeks 69 and 70, much like the old earth creationist gap theory with millions of years between Gen1:1 and 1:2. This “gap” was thrust upon the passage by the fledgling Dispensational Plymouth Brethren in the 1830s, never before having been advocated for in the preceding 2400 years of interpreting the book of Daniel. Needless to say, nothing within the text of Daniel itself buttresses such a system-driven expedient. Gaps appear to have been a popular solution to fitting the Scriptural texts to then-current 19th century theories which were at odds with the Bible. To paraphrase Pieters in a different context, readers bright enough to understand the refutation of these supposed gaps don’t need it, and those wed to their bias towards a gap theory gloss won’t listen to the refutation. Suffice it to say that there is nothing within either the Gen1:1-2 or Dan9:24-27 texts that demand a gap of millions or thousands of years. If there is an unmentioned gap between weeks 69 and 70, the prophecy suspended allegedly due to Jewish disobedience to their Messiah (a Jewish argument, by the way), why not insert a huge time gap between the 7th and 8th weeks, since the text of Dan9 clearly indicates a separation there? In Lk10:9-11 the 70 are sent out to preach. What would become of the Jews who rejected them? Shake off the dust of your feet in judgment against them, Jesus said, “yet be sure of this, that the kingdom of God has come near.” Our Savior made clear that the kingdom would come with or without their acceptance of it, with no gap required in Dan9, thank you very much. As an illustration of the sophomoric gap theory’s emptiness, would your spouse approve of your inserting a “gap” of decades before you kept your promise to go to Hawaii in three months? Such Scriptural machinations to support an unsupported theory have no place within the Ecclesia of God. An unsupported gap inserted into the Biblical text is simply a deus ex machina to salvage a predetermined hypothesis, a miraculous rescue of an anti-Scriptural a priori.

Returning to what Dan9 actually says, there are several lines of evidence within the text that point towards a complete fulfillment of this prophecy by the Jewish War, and therefore the closing of the NT Canon. Let us be alert to the details as we step through the passage, with the 1st observation not being so readily apparent. Note that Jerusalem is called the “holy city” (9:24). How could Jerusalem be considered the “holy city” after the Lord Himself had used the Roman iron fist to smash the infidels and bathe the city in blood, even demolishing what had once been His house? Indeed, Jesus had made clear that the Temple would no longer be holy, saying, “YOUR house has been left to you desolate” (Mt23:35) – note that it was now YOUR house, you rebellious Jews, not Jesus’ house. Just a few chapters before Jesus had called the Temple His Father’s house (Mt21:13), but now in 23:35 the Savior was saying, “The Temple is decidedly not MY house; it is YOURS, you rejecters of the New Covenant!” In just the opening statement of the renowned “weeks” passage, we see a call for the fulfillment of the prophetic word prior to 70AD; afterwards, the unbelieving Jews were “Lo-Ammi” (not God’s people) and Jerusalem was assuredly NOT God’s holy city, the Lord Himself having destroyed the city and its insurgents in rebellion against their divine Messianic ruler, Jesus. In the words of Jesus’ parable, “...the King [God the Father] was enraged, and He sent His armies and destroyed those murderers and set their city on fire” (Mt22:7). If the Messiah-rejecting Jews were no longer God’s people and Jerusalem was no longer His holy city after the Jewish War, then the prophecy of Dan9 came to a close by that point in time; and, because the NT Canon would be wrapped up by the time the prophesied “weeks” had transpired (“to seal up vision and prophecy”), then of necessity the Revelation was given to John on Patmos prior to the Jewish War.

Other aspects of Dan9 are easily verified as having come to pass by the close of the Jewish War, once again pointing to a completion of the New Testament’s 27 books (including the Apocalypse) by the time the Temple was desecrated, with not one stone being left upon another (Mt24:2). When did God Himself “finish the transgression, ... make an end of sin,
... make atonement for iniquity, ... bring in everlasting righteousness, ... and ... anoint the most Holy” (9:24)? When did God “make a firm covenant with the many for one week, but in the middle of the week He ... put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering” (9:27)? For followers of Jesus Christ, there can be but one answer – at the glorious cross of Christ, when the horrific sufferings endured by our Anointed Savior ushered in everlasting righteousness for His sheep! Though the Temple offerings continued for another 40 years thereafter, yet the divine command for these had ceased at the cross, the Old Covenant having been abrogated with the coming of the New through Christ. The Law of Moses came to a close with Jesus’ once for all sacrifice, and the crucifixion put a stop to the divine command for the Old Covenant offerings (Heb10:1-4). Moses had even foretold of “the Prophet” who, like he himself, would speak the words of God and who must be obeyed (Dt18:15-20), and that punishment from God would envelope all who did not listen to Him (Dt18:15-19). Peter and Stephen (Acts3:22; 7:37) both assure us that Jesus was indeed “the Prophet” foretold by Moses. In general, did the Jews listen to “the Prophet?” The Gospels and Acts are replete with the negative reply. Was retribution parceled out against those who rejected “the Prophet,” as predicted by Moses? This question has a three word answer – say it with me – “the Jewish War.” If full atonement was ushered in, as it most surely was at the cross of Christ, then the closing of the NT Canon would follow shortly thereafter – vision and prophecy would be sealed up!

The redemptive work accomplished by Jesus brought to a close all of the atonement features listed in the 70 weeks; these redemptive aspects were brought to the glorious completion 40 years prior to the Temple’s destruction. What, then, was chronologically on the calendar after Christ’s cross-work? For the church, the next important item on the prophetic agenda was “to seal up vision and prophecy” (9:24), God’s New Covenant people needing the divine instructions given in the completed Canon. In Dan9:24-27, the inscripturation process comes hard on the heels of the cross of Christ; right after the Lord’s atonement work “to finish the transgression, to make an end of sin, to make atonement for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness,” come the words, “to seal up vision and prophecy” (9:24). Of course, this giving of divine revelation (including the Apocalypse) took place over the course of the next 40 years, after which vision and prophecy were sealed up. After the cross and the Canon, what was prophetically up next? For the Jewish nation, the end would come like a flood at the hands of the “people of the prince who is to come,” the prophesied Roman Empire (the feed of clay and iron from Dan2); they would “destroy the city [Jerusalem] and the sanctuary [the Temple].” As noted above, acknowledged OT prophetic language for military invasions are waters and floods (e.g., Is8:7-8). This Roman flood would complete the 70 weeks prophecy. To summarize, Dan9:24-27 gives us the Messiah’s coming and crucifixion, then the Canon’s completion, and finally the termination of Jerusalem and the Temple at the hands of the prince to come – the Romans would come like a prophetic flood. Assuming the events of Dan9:24-27 are sequential and without gaps – and we have no solid reason to suppose otherwise, since a 70 week continuous timeline is obviously given – then the New Testament was wrapped up prior to the Temple’s destruction. Of course, this would mean that the Revelation was also seen before that seminal national disaster, the removal of the Temple, the symbol of God’s presence with Israel.

Let us look a little more closely at the Temple’s history in the “weeks” prophecy. In Dan9:25, the Temple’s completion after the Babylonian Captivity was prophesied as taking seven “weeks” (49 years); “it will be built again, with plaza and moat, even in times of distress,” as evidenced in the books of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Haggai. Sadly, the Dan9 prophecy, which clearly underscores the Temple’s reconstruction, also speaks of its later downfall. Herod had begun the reconstruction of the 2nd Temple in 19BC and the work was finally completed in 63AD. That very edifice was demolished only seven years after the cessation of the rebuilding work, in 70AD [note that the magical seven year period appears once again]! Jerusalem and the Temple’s “end will come with a flood; even to the end there will be war; desolations are determined” (9:26). Reading only a limited portion of Josephus’ Wars or Farrar’s summary of the same verifies that a flood of destruction came upon Jerusalem and the Temple during the Jewish War. Note also that 9:26 contains the same watery language used in Rev12. “And the serpent poured water like a river out of his mouth after the woman, so that he might cause her to be swept away with the flood. But the land helped the woman, and the land opened its mouth and drank up the river which the dragon poured out of his mouth” (12:15-16). The Great Red Dragon attempted to use Roman power to squash both Christianity (the woman) and Judaism; but the land of Palestine drank the wrathful river, and the political end of Israel did indeed come like a flood; however, the woman (the bride of Christ from Jerusalem) was spared. Once again, we see that this judgment aspect of the 70 weeks came to a close before the Temple’s obliteration in 70AD; therefore, the NT Canon, including the Revelation, must also have been given by God for His New Covenant church prior to this time.

Finally, what can we make of the enigmatic ending of the “weeks” passage, “and on the wing of abominations will come one who makes desolate, even until a complete destruction, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who makes desolate” (9:27)? Fortunately, we have assistance from the incarnate Son of God Himself on the matter. Jesus explained, “Therefore when you see the ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains” (Mt24:15-16). We have further divine commentary in Luke – “But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then recognize that her desolation is near. Then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains” (Lk21:20-21). As you can see, the “abomination of desolation” and “Jerusalem surrounded by armies” are in the exact same textual location in these two versions of the Olivet Discourse, thereby showing their equivalence. Do you see the abomination, oh Jerusalem church? Then those in Judea must flee to the mountains (Matthew). Do you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, O worshipers of Jesus? Then those in Judea must flee to the mountains (Luke). Can you not see the connection being made? Jerusalem was indeed surrounded by the Roman legions that could have quickly crushed the Jewish Revolt; but, for unknown reasons, Cestius and his troops fled and suffered a humiliating defeat at Beth-horon. The unregenerate Jews took this as a sign from God that they would be successful in their uprising against Rome (Josephus); but the Jewish Christians heeded Je-
sus' words and fled to Pella (Eus3.5.3). After the Romans regrouped under the recalled Vespasian, appointed by Nero, the Jewish War was prosecuted by the Romans with bloody vigor, beginning in Galilee; it was carried out “even until a complete destruction, one that is decreed” (9:27). For how long? Until “the decreed end is poured out on the desolator” (9:27ESV). The unbelieving Jewish nation had been the desecrator of God's New Covenant Temple, the church, so an end was poured out on unregenerate Israel, “the desolator.” Once again, we see that this retribution from God upon His Jewish enemies was achieved by Roman might during the 66-73 AD war. We can therefore conclude that by the end of the Jewish War, divine vision had indeed been sealed up (9:24); the book of Revelation (along with the rest of the New Testament Canon) was by this time given by God to His people, the church. The contents of Dan9:24-27, the celebrated “weeks” passage, gives ample testimony to the Apocalypse having been delivered to John on Patmos prior to the Jewish War. Avoiding the gap theory gloss as untenable, we see that all aspects of Daniel’s famed “weeks” passage were accomplished by 70 AD. Since the Revelation is obviously a “vision and prophecy,” it was “sealed up” by this same date. Isn’t it interesting that at the end of the Apocalypse, plagues are pronounced upon any who would add to it (22:18-19)? If this isn’t a “seal up vision and prophecy” restatement, then what is?

[Note: A taste of coming external (non-canonical) evidence is given by Clement of Alexandria (150-215 AD), who said that Apostolic revelation ceased under Nero (Misc7.17; in Gentry, p157,162).]

[Note: The 70x7 related to the firm establishment of the New Covenant in Dan9:24-27 has an interesting correlation with the day of Pentecost and the public founding of the New Testament church in Acts2. The Feast of Pentecost was calculated from the Passover Sabbath as (7x7)+1, or 50 days afterwards. Pentecost therefore always fell on a Sunday, and isn’t it appropriate that on Pentecost in 30 AD the Jerusalem church was firmly established on the Lord’s Day, with the Holy Spirit coming like a mighty wind (Acts2)? Note, then, the 7x7 associated with the New Covenant at Pentecost. Likewise in Dan9, it is 70x7 (490 years) until the coming of the Messiah and the inauguration by Jesus of the New Covenant church age. When Dan9 and Pentecost’s seven times sevens are presented side-by-side, the Lord’s numerical consistency for the church can hardly be missed.]

Q. Rev16:5-7 Is About God’s Wrath Upon The Unbelieving Jews Of Jesus’ Generation

After castigating the Jewish leaders in Mt23 with woe upon woe, Jesus draws His monologue to a close with some sharp words concerning God’s coming wrath against that generation of God-rejecting Jews (Mt23:29-37a):

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous, and say, ‘If we had been living in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partners with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.’ So you testify against yourselves, that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. Fill up, then, the measure of the guilt of your fathers. You serpents, you brood of vipers, how will you escape the sentence of hell? "Therefore, behold, I am sending you prophets and wise men and scribes; some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourg in your synagogues, and persecute from city to city, so that upon you may fall the guilt of all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. Truly I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation. Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her!"

There is little debate about what is being described – that very generation, not some future generation, would absorb God’s undiluted fury for their treatment of the prophets and of God’s very own Son. When would this take place? 40 years after Jesus’ crucifixion – one generation later – Jerusalem and the Temple would be razed to the ground, and the bloodletting would be horrific. The Jewish nation received a pitiless pounding by the Romans, the latter being the instrument of God’s wrath against the Jewish murderers. This same topic is picked up in Mt24, which begins with Jesus’ prediction of the Temple that not one stone would be left upon another (Mt24:1-2).

What does this have to do with the date of Revelation’s authorship? A more compressed version of the Mt23 quote on the bloodguilt for the prophet’s murders given in Rev16:5-7:

Then I heard the angel in charge of the waters say: “You are just in these judgments, O Holy One, you who are and who were, for they have shed the blood of your holy people and your prophets, and you have given them blood to drink as they deserve.” And I heard the altar respond: “Yes, Lord God Almighty, true and just are your judgments.”

Do you notice the parallel? In Mt23 the bloodguilt for all of the murdered prophets would fall upon THAT generation. Rev16 likewise deals with the bloodshed of the prophets, for which the inhabitants of the land (or earth; 16:1) would be punished by the bowl judgments. Once again, the transitive property rears its attractive mathematical head; A=B, B=C, so A=C. In Mt23, that generation (A) was guilty for executing God’s prophets (B); in Rev16, the bloodshed of the prophets (B) was carried out by the land’s inhabitants (those of Palestine; see Chilton); therefore, A=C, the guilty Jews of Jesus’ generation = the inhabitants of Palestine on whom the bowl judgments were poured out.

Both the Rev16 and Mt23 texts deal with God’s retribution against those who have shed the blood of His prophets, the Jews of Jesus’ generation. Those facing the bowl judgments of the Apocalypse were not some future reinstituted Roman or Jewish nation; no, it was that very generation who would face the wrath of God, as Jesus plainly spells out. Indeed, in Rev16:7 “the altar” responds, and when did we previously hear from the altar in the Apocalypse? Way back in 6:9-11, when the souls under the altar pleaded for vengeance for their shed blood. We see, then, that Rev16 and Mt23 are dealing with the same events, God’s day of reckoning for the unbelieving Jews of Jesus’ generation during the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple. Those bloodthirsty Jews who executed the prophets and crucified the Son would receive their comeuppance, the Lord’s retribution remitted in full. No loose change of wrath would be dropped or misplaced to be meted out upon future Jewish generations. Since the Apocalypse is prophetic, foretelling these events, it must have preceded the Jewish War when God’s wrath came upon the Jews. As Paul puts it in rTh2:
For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea, for you also endured the same sufferings at the hands of your own countrymen, even as they did from the Jews, who both killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out. They are not pleasing to God, but hostile to all men, hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved; with the result that they always fill up the measure of their sins. But wrath has come upon them to the utmost. (1Th2:14-16)

When was God’s wrath poured out against the opposing Jews who killed the Lord Jesus, the prophets, and drove Paul and his companions out, as foretold by 1Th2, Mt23 and Rev16? During that terrible Jewish War, when the plagues of Egypt were unleashed against the God-hating Jews who had executed God’s Son. Since the Revelation foretells these events, it was therefore penned prior to them, before the War’s initiation in 66AD. A date of around 65AD for the visions from Patmos is thus in accord with cross referencing Rev16:5-7 with Jesus’ own words in Mt23:29-36.

[Note: Zechariah the son of Berechiah bookends Abel for the heinous murders by the Jews in Mt23:35, a merism representing Jewish bloodguilt from first and last (Examples of merisms are “A to Z” or “Alpha and Omega). Who was this “Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, ... murdered between the temple and the altar?” Two answers are typically given, neither wholly satisfactory. The most common answer is that the Hebrew Bible was arranged differently than our Old Testament, with what we call 2Chronicles as the last book of the Tanakh (the Hebrew Scriptures). In 2Chr, Zechariah prophesied against Joash’s infidelity towards Yahweh, and for this, at the king’s command, “they stoned him to death in the court of the house of the LORD” (24:20-1). This all seems to fit neatly with Jesus’ words in Mt23:35 until one realizes that 2Chronicles was NOT near the chronological terminus of the Old Testament. Jesus was highlighting the wickedness of the Jews from the beginnings of God’s dealings with them until the last, and the last OT epoch of Yahweh’s work in Israel would be in the post-exilic era of the prophets Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi. In other words, the Zechariah of 2Chr24 does not fall at the chronological end of the Old Testament, but rather would be hundreds of years prior to the post-exilic era. Then again, maybe the Son of God was not actually giving a timeline lesson. The point would then be that the entirety of the Hebrew Scriptures, from the beginning in Genesis to the end at 2Chronicles, spoke of Jewish murderous malefiance; one need not necessarily extend this to the post-exilic era. Unfortunately, this brings up the mortal second objection to this solution (door number one); namely, the 2Chr24 Zechariah was NOT the son of Berechiah, but rather the son of Jehoiada the priest. This hereditary objection alone makes door number one unacceptable.

[In point of fact, there is only one Zechariah son of Berechiah in the Bible, the Old Testament post-exilic prophet whose book bears his name (Zch1:1). He was at the chronological end of the Tanakh (Torah {Pentateuch}, Nevi'im {Prophets} and Ketuvim {Writings}, or TaNaKh), which better accords the accusation Jesus leveled against His very own Jewish generation. Though admittedly not as popular today as the 1st solution, door number two at least agrees with the name explicitly given by the Savior and the timeframe that He indicates; i.e., that the murderous culpability of the Jews extended from the dawn of time (Abel) to the close of God’s prophetic dealings with Israel (Zechariah son of Berechiah), after the exile and the completion of the OT canon. For this 2nd solution, however, one must suppose that Jesus is giving brand new information not contained in the Old Testament Scriptures concerning the murder of the prophet. Of course, the Son of God is sovereign, free to supply us with additional data not given in the Hebrew Canon; but this would seem to undercut the accusatory nature of the charges leveled against Jesus’ generation. In other words, how could the Jews feel guilty about a murder for which they had no Scriptural knowledge, that the prophet Zechariah son of Berechiah was murdered between the Temple and the altar? It would seem that the very indictment against the Jews implies that the Jews knew full well about both the murder of Abel that was then bookended by the execution of Zechariah son of Berechiah.

[In fact, there may be a door number three that should be given due consideration. Here is the account from Josephus:

And now these zealots and Idumeans were quite weary of barely killing men, so they had the impudence of setting up fictitious tribunals and judicatures for that purpose; and as they intended to have Zacharias the son of Baruch [variants of the names Zechariah and Berechiah], one of the most eminent of the citizens, slain, – so what provoked them against him was, that hatred of wickedness and love of liberty which were so eminent in him: he was also a rich man, so that by taking him off, they did not only hope to seize his effects, but also to get rid of a man that had great power to destroy them. So they called together, by a public proclamation, seventy of the principal men of the populace, for a show, as if they were real judges, while they had no proper authority. Before these was Zacharias accused of a design to betray their polity to the Romans, and having traitorously sent to Vespasian for that purpose. Now there appeared no proof or sign of what he was accused; but they affirmed themselves that they were well persuaded that so it was, and desired that such their affirmation might be taken for sufficient evidence. Now when Zacharias clearly saw that there was no way remaining for his escape from them, as having been treacherously called before them, and then put in prison, but not with any intention of a legal trial, he took great liberty of speech in that despair of his life he was under. Accordingly he stood up, and laughed at their pretended accusation, and in a few words confuted the crimes laid to his charge; after which he turned his speech to his accusers, and went over distinctly all their transgressions of the law, and made heavy lamentation upon the confusion they had brought public affairs to: in the mean time, the zealots grew tumultuous, and had much ado to abstain from drawing their swords, although they designed to preserve the appearance and show of judicature to the end. They were also desirous, on other accounts, to try the judges, whether they would be mindful of what was just at their own peril. Now the seventy judges brought in their verdict that the person accused was not guilty, as choosing rather to die themselves with him, than to have his death laid at their doors; hereupon there arose a great clamor of the zealots upon his acquittal, and they all had indignation at the judges for not understanding that the authority that was given them was but in jest. So two of the boldest of them fell upon Zacharias in the middle of the temple, and slew him; and as he fell down dead, they ban-
tered him, and said, “Thou hast also our verdict, and this will prove a more sure acquittal to thee than the other.”

They also threw him down from the temple immediately into the valley beneath it. (Wars4.5.4, emphasis added)

Here, then, is a third solution to the Zechariah son of Berechiah enigma. Zacharias is just a different anglicized version of Zechariah. Baruch means “blessed” — but blessed by whom? In an Israelite context, the full version would be “blessed of God,” or Berechiah. Rather than referencing a Zechariah in 2Chronicles who was not the son of Berechiah nor chronologically at the end of the Hebrew Scriptures (door number one); nor referring to the post-exilic prophet Zechariah son of Berechiah who is not recorded in the Old Testament as perishing in the Temple in the manner described (door number two); it could well be that Jesus was giving a prophetic word concerning the death of this Zechariah son of Berechiah (or Zacharias son of Baruch) in the Temple during the last days of the Jewish nation as detailed by Josephus (door number three). If this last option is the aim of the Savior, then how would the Jews of Jesus’ day know for certain that Yahweh’s judgment for generations of Jewish bloodguilt was at their doorstep? When they consummated the murder of Zechariah son of Berechiah in the Temple, some 40 years after Jesus’ prophecy in Mt23:35. Does this not also square nicely with that which is next up on Jesus’ prophetic agenda, the Temple’s destruction, when not one stone would be left upon another (Mt24:1-2)?

**R. The Revelation Was Given To Answer The Martyrs’ Call For God’s Vengeance Upon The Persecuting Jews**

Along the same lines, that the Lord’s wrath would fall upon THAT generation (not some future one), let us now consider more closely the evidence provided by Rev6:9-11.

When the Lamb broke the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God, and because of the testimony which they had maintained; and they cried out with a loud voice, saying, “How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?” And there was given to each of them a white robe; and they were told that they should rest for a little while, until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren who were to be killed even as they had been, would be completed also.

After the 5th Seal is broken, the souls under the altar pleadingly solicit the Lord’s intervention, asking how long it would be before their blood would be avenged. Who were these souls begging for vengeance, and who were those to be punished for such evil bloodguilt? If we can find the identity of these two groups, this may help us date the book of Revelation.

Note first that the blood of a Mosaic sacrifice was sprinkled on the altar (e.g., Ex24:6; 29:12,16,20-21). Any figurative souls under the Lord’s altar calling for their blood to be avenged must of necessity be the people of God who have been martyred; they are Christians who have been killed for their gospel testimony (an interesting cross reference is found in the embattled “millennium” passage, Rev20:4). But what part of the church do they represent? Are they Christian martyrs throughout church history? The last part of their plea in 9:10 drops a heavy hint as to the identity of these saints, and therefore puts a firm index finger on the evil perpetrators who had shed so much innocent blood. The slain souls call for the Lord to judge and avenge “our blood on those who dwell on the land [earth].” The Greek for “land” could be equally translated “land” or “earth,” the context indicating the intent. Chilton makes an excellent case that the translation should be “land” in the bulk of the Apocalypse; which, without qualifier, would be synonymous with “the land of Israel.” If these souls under the altar are calling for God’s retributive justice upon the “land” of Israel, then it is most likely that the pleading souls are those Jewish believers who were persecuted and killed by the Messiah rejecting Jews within the “land” of Israel. When did this take place? It is an historical fact that the Christians were terribly cut down during the Neronian persecution (64-68AD), likely instigated by Jews within Nero’s court (Farrar). If this persecution is what caused the death of those under the altar calling for wrath against the “land” of the Jews, then the Revelation was given prior to the onset of the Jewish War (66AD) when the request for vengeance was finally satisfied.

As highlighted above, pictures of warfare appear in the first four seals opened by the Lamb, prior to Seal 5 (the call for wrath by the altar souls) currently under consideration. The conquering warrior’s white horse (Seal 1), slaughter by sword (Seal 2), famine (Seal 3), and death (Seal 4) are all characteristic of ancient warfare, consonant with the Jewish War. The vengeance called for by the souls under the altar squares nicely with the martyred Jewish Christians calling for retribution upon the persecuting Jews, and this comeuppance was delivered by the iron fist of Rome during the Jewish War (66-73AD). Since John penned these prophetic pictures prior to the events taking place, it is likely from Seal 5 – the call of the martyred saints for vengeance — that the Revelation was given somewhere before this, around 65AD.

Does not the call of the souls for the Lord’s VENGEANCE upon those guilty of bloodshed remind you of something Jesus had said? Why yes indeed! In Luke’s Olivet Discourse (Lk21:20-22), we have the following:

But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then recognize that her desolation is near. Then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains, and those who are in the midst of the city must leave, and those who are in the country must not enter the city; because these are days of vengeance, so that all things which are written will be fulfilled.

The souls under the altar called for the Lord’s vengeance for their shed blood, the same vengeance language used by Christ in Luke’s account of the Olivet Discourse. According to Luke, when would this vengeance come? Jesus said that when Jerusalem was surrounded by armies, they would then know that the vengeance He had prophesied would finally come. The Roman General Cestius surrounded Jerusalem and then retreated at the outset of the Jewish War (66AD). The vengeance Christ had foretold came upon the Jews of Jerusalem soon thereafter at the hands of Vespasian and Titus, the Temple being demolished in 70AD. While not proving that the “days of vengeance” of Lk20:22 is the answer to the martyrs’ call for “avenging our blood” in Rev6:10, there is an uncanny similarity between the situations. In Luke’s Olivet, Roman armies would come upon Jerusalem as Jesus had predicted, and this would represent “days of vengeance” for
their rebellion against the Messiah. The call for vengeance by the Christian martyrs in Rev6:9-11 follows images of war (seals 1-4), with the “land” [of Palestine]fingered as the instigators of persecution. While cross references and similar language do not absolutely establish the point, the events of Luke’s Olivet Discourse and that of the souls under the altar share remarkably similar – yea, divinely ordained – characteristics.

Vengeance finally did come upon the Jews of the “land” who had persecuted the church. The martyred souls of 1st century Jewish Christians, figuratively represented in Rev6:9-11 as souls under the heavenly altar pleading for vengeance against the “land” of Israel, received their answer in the Jewish War. The perpetrators of their murders, the Jesus-hating Jews, received their full recompense. Seals 1 through 4 came upon the “land” of Palestine, leaving it utterly desolate.

God’s avenging hand called for by the souls under the altar was resoundingly answered by the Lord Almighty as He used the powerful, iron-toothed Roman invasion to deal out retribution upon that very Jewish generation of Jesus’ day who had repulsed their Messiah and attempted to exterminate Jesus’ bride, the church. If the Jewish War answers the call for vengeance by the souls under the altar, then the Apocalypse was penned prior to this seminal event, around 65AD.

[Note that vengeance was to be delivered upon the heads of the Jews OF THAT GENERATION, in keeping with Jesus’ own words (e.g., Mt24:34); there remains no lingering Jewish bloodguilt to be absorbed by future Israelite generations. The Jewish future holds gospel blessings (per Rom11), not earthy wrath.]

S. The Revelation’s Early Date Is Bolstered By Its References To The Exodus and Babylonian Exile

Have you noticed the remarkable cross correlations between the Revelation and the accounts of the Exodus, of Israel’s entering the Promised Land, and (to a lesser degree) of the Babylonian Captivity, those seminal Old Testament events that defined the life of the nation Israel? The question is not whether or not these similarities are purposeful – surely there can be no doubt that the Risen Lord intended for us to make these connections. No, the question is WHY these associations are appropriate to the visions given on Patmos? Like the issue of the Apocalyptic style, a successful explanation of this specific time/date stamp, and thus the message of Revelation, must include an answer to the question of WHY these particular Old Testament associations are appropriate to the situation described by the Apocalypse. One cannot blithely wave an interpretive hand, saying, “Oh, that doesn’t really matter.” Such a non-answer is unacceptable to serious Biblical students. No, it’s the Lord Jesus Himself who gave the Revelation; if similarities to Israel’s history appear in the text, there must be a purpose (teleology) behind His using these images and not others. As you might expect, the explanation helps underscore the dating and purpose of the Apocalypse.

Let us first review that there are, in fact, many connections between the Revelation and the Exodus. Reading about the various plagues related to the bowls and trumpets, one cannot help but be struck by the refrain, “Haven’t I read this somewhere before?”Why, yes you have – during the 10 Exodus plagues! The same term “plagues” is even used so we cannot miss the correlation. Some of the parallels between the trumpet and bowl judgments and the Exodus plagues are as follows (after Chilton):

1) Boils! ➔ Sores on the people (1st bowl, Rev16:2); boils on the Egyptians (6th plague, Ex9:8-12)
2) Bloody Waters! ➔ ⅔ of the waters turned to blood (2nd and 3rd trumpets, Rev8:8-11); all of the sea turned to blood (2nd and 3rd bowls, Rev16:3-7); the waters turned to blood via Moses’ staff (1st plague, Ex7:17-21)
3) Heavenly Lights Altered! ➔ ⅔ of the sun, moon and stars are darkened (4th trumpet, Rev8:12); the sun scorches and darkness on the Beast’s throne (4th, 5th bowls, Rev16:8-11); darkness on the land, save Goshen (9th plague Ex10:21-23)
4) Locusts! ➔ A locust plague and men seek death (5th trumpet, 9:1-12); a locust plague and Egypt is ruined (8th plague, Ex10:4-20)
5) Watery Animal Invasion! ➔ The Euphrates army kills ⅔, with horses breathing fire and tails like snakes (6th trumpet 9:13-21); the Euphrates is dried up for the eastern kings, and frog demons instigate battle (6th bowl 16:12-16); frogs from the Nile (2nd plague Ex8:1-15)
6) Enemies Face Destructive Storms, But The God-Fearers Are Spared! ➔ Wrath on the nations and reward to God’s servants, storms with a view of the Ark (7th trumpet, Rev11:15-19); flashes of lightning, peals of thunder, Babylon split in three by an earthquake, talent-sized hailstones (7th bowl, Rev16:7-21); Babylon’s demise detailed in 17:1-13, but those in the Lamb’s Book of Life are spared (Rev17:8); hail, but the God-fearers shelter their livestock and Goshen is spared (7th plague, Ex9:13-26)

Many other Exodus and Conquest similarities appear in the Revelation. For instance, the Israelites were whisked away by God to safety in the wilderness “on eagle’s wings” (Ex19:4); likewise, the woman of Rev12 was rescued to safety in the wilderness on eagle’s wings (Rev12:14). Balaam (Rev2:14) is obviously tied to the Exodus narrative (Num22-24 and 31).

The Euphrates is dried up before the troops in Rev16:12. Hmmm. When was the last time in the Bible a river was dried up before a conquest by invading troops? That would be the drying of the Jordan River before the Israelites crossed into the Promised Land (Jos4). The subsequent fall of Jericho marked the onset of Israel’s Conquest. Do you not think that maybe a similar conquest of Palestine is in view in the book of Revelation?

Speaking of Jericho, a fascinating correlation is to be found in the seven trumpets of the Revelation. Where do seven trumpets appear in the Old Testament? With the renowned conquest of Jericho, of course, where seven trumpets were blown before the walls collapsed (Jos6). Similarly, seven trumpets for judgment appear in the Apocalypse. Given this connection, we might expect that the sounding of the 7th trumpet in the Revelation would be associated with the destruction of a city, that city being the center of the book’s attention, as it was at the outset of the Conquest. The city under the ban would be standing astride the path of the church’s conquest, much like Jericho did before the invading Israelites. We are not surprised to find, then, that when the 7th trumpet is sounded in Rev11 (11:15), that very chapter tells us that the city to be demolished is Jerusalem, “the great city – which is figuratively called Sodom and Egypt – where also their Lord was crucified” (11:8). If there is any lingering doubt about this seven trumpet judgment application to Jerusalem, the be-
ginning of chapter 11 informs us that a portion of the Temple located in Jerusalem is to be trampled (11:1-2). Note also that the destruction of Jericho occurred at the spring harvest (Jos2:6; 3:15); likewise, the final 70 AD siege of Jerusalem began in the springtime, in the March/April timeframe. The connection between the seven trumpets used for Jericho’s annihilation exactly parallels what took place during Jerusalem’s demolition in 70 AD, replete with seven trumpets of judgment. A Jewish War application lines up very nicely here as well, meaning the Apocalypse was seen before the horrific judgments that came against God’s Jewish enemies from 66-73 AD.

[Note: How can some say that the Secret Rapture will be at the last trumpet (1Co15:52) when the Revelation has yet seven more trumpets after the alleged last trumpet at the Rapture? Apparently the “last” trumpet does not literally mean the “last,” since seven more are yet to come! Indeed, the same passage (1Co15:50) says that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; if the Millennium is the soon-coming earthly kingdom of Jesus, as many of our Futurist friends contend, then doesn’t 1Co15:50 preclude flesh and blood mortals from entering the Millennium? System-driven gymnastics must be quickly performed to square these with the view many have concerning the Millennium, and not mere theological cartwheels or round-offs; oh no, tremendous gymnastic creativity must be engaged to bend the Bible around the system.]

What of the infamous mark of the Beast received by all on their right hands and foreheads (Rev13:16-18)? It is no great shock to find that such a “mark” shows up in BOTH the Exile and Exodus. The first correlation, that to Ezk9 just prior to the Exile, is fairly transparent. Though a lesser known Old Testament prophecy of Jerusalem’s destruction, it lines up with the Beast’s mark quite nicely. Ezk9 presents a vision of a man clothed in linen who was commanded by God, “Go throughout the city of Jerusalem and put a mark on the foreheads of those who grieve and lament over all the detestable things that are done in it” (Ezk9:4). Clearly this was figurative, for there is no record of those spared from Jerusalem’s demise at the hands of the Babylonians being literally so marked. Foretelling the coming destruction of the great city and its environs, those given the mark of God were exiled rather than slaughtered in Ezekiel’s prophecy (9:5-7). Jerusalem’s desolation by the Babylonians also included defiling the Temple precincts and filling the courts with the slain, just as it did during the Jewish War (see Josephus). In addition, note the location under prophetic consideration in Ezk9, Jerusalem and the Temple’s destruction are in view in Ezk9, with those figuratively marked being taken to safety via the Exile. The linkage to Rev13 is apparent but reverse, where now those with a figurative (not literal) mark are condemned, while those not so marked are rescued. Where does all of this take place? In Ezk9, Jerusalem and the Temple are the objects of wrath for Israel’s disobedience. Wouldn’t it make sense that the same targets of condemnation are in view in the Revelation? Rev11:1-2 and 8 show us that this is indeed the case, that the marking of the beastly residents takes place in the city “where also their Lord was crucified” (11:8).

The “mark of the Beast” pertains also to the Exodus, though a bit less obvious. After the well-known “Shema” (“Hear, O Israel …” Dt6:4) comes the following:

These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates (Dt6:6-9).

To this day serious-minded Jews take this literally, with phylacteries on their doorframes and, more often in Jesus’ day, even on their hands or foreheads. The link to the mark of the Beast is now self-evident, with the marked hands and foreheads being front and center in both Dt6:6-9 and Rev13:16-18. But what was the point of the Dt6 command by the Almighty? The Jews were to be figuratively “marked” by the word of God. This was not designed by God to be some paper strip of long overlooked or forgotten Scripture placed in a little box and paraded about for others to observe one’s supposed spirituality (Mt23:5). Indeed, the Lord God had highlighted the figurative nature of this command earlier to the Jews in Ex13:

And it shall be when your son asks you in time to come, saying, “What is this?” then you shall say to him, “With a powerful hand the Lord brought us out of Egypt, from the house of slavery. It came about, when Pharaoh was stubborn about letting us go, that the Lord killed every firstborn in the land of Egypt, both the firstborn of man and the firstborn of beast. Therefore, I sacrifice to the Lord the males, the first offspring of every womb, but every firstborn of my sons I redeem.” So it shall serve as a sign on your hand and as phylacteries on your forehead, for with a powerful hand the Lord brought us out of Egypt (Ex13:14-16).

Sacrificing the firstborn male animal and redeeming one’s firstborn son was to be a sign – but where? On the hand and forehead, a “phylactery” reminding the Israelites of their escape from Egyptian bondage. This “phylactery” was clearly figurative, just like the figurative mark of the Beast in Rev13. In sum, the phylacteries taken literally by the Jews in Dt6:6-9 were rather to be symbolic of the nation’s commitment to the word of God, like the mark of the Beast represents the people’s dedication to said Beast, namely, Rome.

What, then, do we conclude from this “mark of the Beast” linkage to the Exile and Exodus, and therefore for the dating of the Apocalypse? Besides this mark being figurative, it also points towards a coming destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple. This time, however, those “marked” were not godly nor rescued, but rather the symbolic “mark” was to be upon the wicked for condemnation. This would take place in the soon-coming demise of the once holy but now emphatically wicked city of Jerusalem. Earlier in Matthew, Jesus had called the Temple “My house” (Mt21:13), but later He made it abundantly clear, “Behold, your house is being left to you desolate!” (23:38). It was no longer His house, but theirs. In Jesus’ soon cloud-coming judgment, He was going to return (not physically) in condemnation via the Roman legions, and not one stone would be left upon another (Mt24:2); and thus it came to pass, 40 years after the cross. The Beast’s mark is not some UPC symbol stamped upon one’s skin nor an embedded microchip for remote tracking. Just like those
marked for preservation in Ezk9 and the Israelites marked by God's Word in Dt6, so those with the Beast's mark were devoted to Rome. What did the Jews say? "We have no king but Caesar!" (Jn19:15). Their allegiance was clear, and so was their punishment by the Roman legions from 66–73AD. The Christ-rejecting Jews had figuratively received the mark of the Beast and were punished accordingly by the selfsame Beast in the Jewish War, when the Beast rose up against and burned Babylon (Rev18:8).

Coming full circle to the initial query, we are asking why Exilic and Exodus pictures were used in the Revelation in the first place and how this might help us to put a date of authorship upon the Apocalypse. If the visions on Patmos happened around 95AD, then we must resort to either creative interpretive genius (not easily replicated) or wholesale “fudging” and ignoring of the Biblical facts to fabricate an answer. For instance, why would Exodus or Exilic language apply to the church of the USA some 2,000 years later, just prior to its being whisked away in the Scripturally gauzy “Secret Rapture?” Then again, one might conjecture that these passages are about Israel’s role in the supposedly future Great Tribulation or Millennium, and so types and figures from Israel’s history are appropriate. While modestly attractive, one must admit that this is unvarnished speculation, since the Temple is not now standing and the Jews are outside of Christ and thus are in no saving sense “the people of God.” If they are God’s people, why are most all of them hurtling towards perdition because of their rejection of the gospel? What eternal good has being the people of God done for them? Moreover, of what use would a Futuristic application of Exilic and Exodus language be for the struggling seven Asia Minor churches who originally received the Revelation?

Instead of Futurism, the simplest explanation for the use of Exodus and Exilic verbal graphics is that the substance of the Revelation applied to the time when the church of the New Covenant and Israel of the Old Covenant were violently divorced. This took place during the Jewish War, with the culminating event being the 70AD destruction of the Temple. The plagues on Egypt were now meted out against the persecuting Jews, and this is described by Exodus plague imagery. The irony should not be lost; the selfsame plagues from the Lord against the Egyptians that had created and defined Israel’s national existence were now employed against the persecuting Jews as the Old Covenant came to a close. It is entirely appropriate to describe such a violent cessation of the Old Covenant in Exodus plague language.

Meanwhile, what of those in the New Covenant, the church? The faithful bride of Christ (the woman of Rev12) was taken away to safety in the wilderness. What Old Testament prophetic pictorial representations could be better employed to describe this than those related to the Exile? The Exile had salted away the Israelites who were “marked” for rescue in Ezk9; now the “mark” of the Beast was upon those Jews destined for slaughter in the once holy but now defiled city of Jerusalem, while the unmarked people of the church of Jesus Christ were spared in the wilderness. Yes, Exilic language is entirely apropos in the Apocalypse for God’s rescue and protection of His people, the church. Likewise, the church needed to be released from its bondage to unbelieving Judaism and the practices of the Old Covenant. Who were the instigators of the persecution of Jesus’ bride? Reading the book of Acts makes clear that the unregenerate, Messiah-rejecting Jews spearheaded the persecution efforts against the church. The Christians needed to escape this Old Covenant bondage for expansive gospel prosperity, and so Exodus language is again uniquely appropriate. The body of Christ, diseased by the “synagogue of Satan” (Rev2:9; 3:9), needed a strong heavenly antibiotic to destroy the parasitic Old Covenant Jews who were attempting to kill off the church. Of course, if the book of Revelation is to be prophetic about these happenings, it must of necessity have been penned before the Jewish War, with a likely date of writing around 65AD.

T. No Internal Evidence Forces The Patmos Visions To Be After The Jewish War

While an argument from silence does not typically provide substantial proof, sometimes it can be quite conclusive. For instance, the Sherlock Holmes case of the dog that did not bark proved that the murderer was known by the dog; the canine’s silence was proof positive of the culprit’s identity. It is similar with the Revelation, where there is a dry and dusty wasteland of late date internal evidence. Nothing within the Apocalypse itself, nor within the rest of the Scriptures, demands a dating of the book around 95AD. Your system may demand a late date for the Revelation, if you are a Futurist or Historicist, but your Bible does not anywhere require it. Arguments can be made concerning the extent of emperor worship or of a Domitician persecution, but none of these are clearly given within the bounds of Biblically revealed truth. For an emphatic restatement, there is NOTHING within the Revelation itself that demands a late date, while one can see from the above arguments that there is indeed a plethora of evidence pointing to a date of writing around 65AD.

Summary: Revelation’s Internal Evidence Says 65AD, Not 95AD

Why is there so much late-date “waffling” on the meaning of the visions from Patmos? Having untied the book from its actual historical moorings preceding the Jewish War, now without anchor the late-date interpreter is tossed to and fro in a surging sea of sophisticated speculation, the eschatological waters laden with the flotsam and jetsam of failed Futurist and Historicist conjectures. Christians know that the Revelation has substance for them today, but, having incorrectly driven a firm nail into the wall, mounting the Apocalypse at 95AD and saying that this is inviolable, they now are at a loss to understand the basic meaning of the Biblical text. Like the morning dew, this problem evaporates once the proper 65AD historical setting is established, as set forth by the Apocalypse itself. “Was there a key sent with the book [of Revelation], and has this been lost?” asks Herder (in Russell, p532)? Russell answers:

The key was sent along with the book, and it has been allowed to lie rusty and unused, while all kinds of false keys and picklocks have been tried, and tried in vain, until men have come to look upon the Apocalypse as an unintelligible enigma, only meant to puzzle and bewilder. The true key has all along been visible enough, and the attention of men has been loudly called to it in almost every page of the book. That key is the declaration so frequently made that all is on the point of fulfillment [i.e., the fulfillment was near term to the readers]. If the original readers were competent, as Stuart contends, to understand the Apocalypse without an interpreter, it could only be because they recognized its
connection with the events of their own day. To suppose that they could understand or feel the slightest interest in a book that treated of Papal councils, Protestant reformations, French revolutions, and distant events in foreign lands and far-off ages, would be one of the wildest fancies that ever possessed a human brain. From first to last the book itself bears decisive testimony to the immediate fulfillment of its predictions. It opens with the express declaration that the events to which it refers “must shortly come to pass,” and it closes with the reiterating of the same statement — “The Lord God hath sent His angel to show unto His servants the things which must shortly come to pass.” (Russell p532-533)

While it is true that the Revelation itself does not come with a time/date stamp on the apocalyptic pictures, the multiplicity of facts given above pointing towards an early date is well nigh overwhelming; it should be sufficient to convince the Biblical student that the rescue of the persecuted church and the punishment of God’s Israelite enemies via the Romans during the Jewish War was the object of the book. That does not mean that the Revelation has no modern applications, of course. The books of Kings or Colossians each have an historical provenance, yet they still apply to the church down to the present time. Ezekiel or Jeremiah addressed the destruction of the 1st Temple by the Babylonians, yet that does not mean those two books of Scripture have no bearing on us today. The weight of judgment pronounced in the Scripture apply to the 1st century Jews, and we can learn much from the Revelation’s 65AD prophetic foretelling of the Jewish War.

Please do not miss this, the primary storyline of the Apocalypse. All of these internal facts related to the dating of the Revelation lead to an important theological point, not to some minor mindless adiaphora (secondary issues). The Jews of Jesus’ generation rejected and crucified their Messiah, calling down bloodguilt upon themselves (Mt27:25). Would the Father stand idly by and let these Jews get away with the murder of His Son, or would God visit their sin upon their own heads? Some want to put Jesus’ judgment of the Jewish rebels entirely in our future; but in fact, within 40 years of the crucifixion, a cloud-coming judgment was meted out against the mutinous and defiant Israelites, as declared by the Apostle John at the outset of the Revelation. John had said of Jesus, “BEHOLD, HE IS COMING WITH THE CLOUDS, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the land [earth] will mourn over Him. So it is to be. Amen” (Rev1:7). Well, did Jesus come in judgment against that generation who’d pierced Him or not? Surely the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in 70AD, 40 years after Jesus’ crucifixion, gives a powerfully affirmative answer. Jesus’ cloud-coming judgment against the Jews who’d rebelled against their Messiah would swiftly come upon their heads. This punishment was a generation away in Jesus’ day, but was at the chronological doorstep when John penned the Apocalypse around 65AD, “for the time is near” (Rev1:3). The tidal wave of Roman destruction was about to break over Palestine, and only the church would be spared the crushing judgment wave.

The Jewish vineyard tenants had been promised by Jesus Himself that for rejecting the vineyard owner’s Son they would have the kingdom taken from them and given to others (Mt21:43). Well, did this happen, or was Jesus in error? No, the gospel offer was extended to the Jews for many years; but exactly 40 years after the Passover on which Jesus was cruelly crucified at the behest of the Jews, that selfsame generation was bottled up in Jerusalem during the Passover by the Roman siege and summarily executed over a five month “locust” period, concluding with the Temple’s destruction. The woes spoken of at length by the Savior in Mt23, including the guilt of all of the prophets’ blood, would it really come upon THAT generation (23:35-36), or was Jesus mistaken when He gave this prophecy? For some eschatological positions, the answer is clearly contrary to Jesus’ very own words, that nothing of consequence came upon the Jews who had rebelled against their Sovereign and His Son. Once again, the Savior of the world, whom we trust with our very souls, cannot be trusted with regard to the events in His near future, if one holds to a garden variety Futurism where all judgment is yet future to us. Such end times viewpoints must be rejected. That very generation saw their nation slaughtered by Roman hands, as the Beast rose up against the Harlot.

Note that with the outlook promoted herein (PPA, or Partial Preterist Amillennialism), there is NO future Jewish culpability for killing their Messiah. The wrath of God would be poured out in seven seals, trumpets and bowls against the Jews of Jesus’ generation; and the collateral damage would nearly be fatal to their Roman accomplices. As Jesus declared to the Jews at the end of His diatribe against the scribes and Pharisees, THEIR house (not His) would be left to them desolate (23:38); and so it was in 70AD. Think of it! Jesus said in Mt24:2 that not one stone of the Temple would be left upon another. At the time, this was a remarkable prophecy. Pax Romana ruled the world, and the Jews were prosperous and at peace, a trusted ally of Rome. Who could have accurately projected at the time (30AD) that less than 40 years later all of this would change, that Babylon the Great (Jerusalem), whose sins were piled up to heaven, would be decimated by the Beastly Romans and the land denuded of Jewish inhabitants? Truly this was a divine utterance that in no way could have been estimated by human calculations some 40 years beforehand. Returning to the dating of the book of Revelation, we see that from start to finish, the Apocalypse dovetails nicely with the Jewish War facts, thus pointing to a date of authorship around 65AD. Indeed, through several lines of evidence, the Revelation clearly indicates that the Jewish War was a fast approaching event. Moreover, there are NO positive pointers within the Revelation itself that demand a late date (95AD). God’s prophetic miter saw cuts accurate angles so that every piece assembles easily when we begin at the right starting point and read the Biblical blueprint; all of the facts internal to the Apocalypse square up evenly with a date of writing around 65AD.

The Jews of Jesus’ day expected a Messianic kingdom that would exalt Jewry to the highest position over the Gentiles and usher in the utopian age of Jewish political hegemony. One can note with concern that this outlook is disturbingly similar to the Dispensational projections for our immediate future, where (according to oft-repeated Dispensational lore) the church is whisked away in the Secret Rapture and, seven years later, Jesus comes down for the second 2nd Coming and occupies David’s earthly throne to fulfill His allegedly unfulfilled promises to Israel. Such a Zionistic outlook on the future as held by the Jews who spurned Jesus must itself be rejected as so much eschatological daydreaming. Clearly the Jews of
Jesus’ day were mistaken and the kingdom was of entirely different construction than they supposed – see, for instance, Lk17:20-1, that the kingdom was already in their midst and not coming with the observable signs anticipated by the bulk of Jewry. Will our latter day eschatological prognosticators really say that these unbelieving Jews were actually right, only a few thousand years too early? Indeed, such a position makes Jesus a liar to the governor, or at least too cagey by half. The Savior categorically told Pilate that His kingdom was decidedly NOT of this world (Jn18:36). Dispensationalists must conclude that Jesus was duplicitous, since He should have hinted at the proper Millennial view and been a bit more honest. If Jesus were more truthful, He should have said (per Dispensational myth), “My kingdom is not YET of this world, Pilate – you and the Romans have nothing to fear. We’re a few thousand years out from my political kingdom, by which time you and Rome will be long gone.” Put another way, where did Jesus in any way hint that His mission was to establish an earthly political kingdom centered in Jerusalem? He saw Jerusalem as not His rightful throne location, but as the center of opposition (see Walter), saying, “it cannot be that a prophet would perish outside of Jerusalem” (Lk13:33). Ronald Reagan famously said, “[G]overnment is not the solution to our problem, government is the problem” (Inaugural Address 20Jan1981). Prior to the Jewish War, Jerusalem was not the solution to the problems faced by the church; it WAS the problem, and it would be obliterated for its rejection of its vineyard owner’s Son.

What about Gabriel’s prediction? He had told Mary that God would give Jesus the throne of His father David and that His kingdom would have no end (Lk1:32-33). Was the divinely authorized angelic messenger wrong? Hardly. The kingdom foretold in Dan2, the Rock that crushed the Roman opposition (the Colossus’ feet of iron and clay), would indeed become an earth-filling mountain. Further on this score, who were the Biblical “literalists” of Jesus’ day? Was it Jesus Himself? Not exactly. The literalists, were they not the Jews who consistently misunderstood the Savior’s statements in the gospel of John? “Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days” (Jn2:19) – the Jews took this literally, but Jesus spoke of His body (Jn2:21). “You must be born again” (Jn3:7) was misunderstood and taken literally by Nicodemus to be a physical rebirth, when in fact Jesus was figuratively speaking of regeneration. Indeed, there is nary a chapter in John’s gospel that doesn’t parade for all to see the faulty Jewish literalism with regard to the Old Testament promises. Will our Dispensationalist brethren really resurrect Jewish Millennial myths by reinstituting a method that demands a Jewish world-dominating future kingdom based on the same faulty literalism? Returning to the substance of the Apocalypse, the Jews of Jesus’ time thought that the Messianic kingdom was a political exaltation of Jerusalem and a religious exaltation of the Temple; but the actual Messianic kingdom spelled the doom of both (see Walker). When did this demise take place? Prophesied in the book of Revelation, the nation of Israel would be severely disciplined and nearly exterminated by God in the Jewish War, and the Temple would be removed, thereby leaving no doubt what kind of kingdom Jesus was ushering in. As Jesus had said at the outset of the Olivet Discourse, not one stone would be left upon another (Mt24:2), and this did literally take place as Israel the Harlot was burned by Rome the Beast.

Have you ever tried to talk with someone who has an agenda, a preconceived ax to grind (an a priori)? No amount of reasoning or cajoling will get such an one to reconsider his outlook. “I know that anointing myself with these essential fragrant oils will extend my lifespan.” “I’m convinced that the stars determine my destiny.” “I have no doubt that my skin color affects God’s opinion of me and my race.” Such things can be easily summarized; namely, “I already know what I want to believe, so please don’t confuse me with the facts!” The Scriptural facts for dating the Revelation around 65AD are simply overwhelming, yet many today are unwilling to countenance that their firmly driven 95AD dating peg is wrong. Will you? If not, then why not? Put another way, please go to the Apocalypse itself and conclusively prove a date of writing of around 95AD. If the Bible is our final authority for faith and practice, then surely you can do better than flatly stating, “Well, that’s what the Revelation title page says in my Study Bible.” Go ahead, prove your late date; and if you cannot, then why do you reject the early date? Are you submitting your faith to the tidal wave of men or of God? Besides, if you choose the late date over the avalanche of facts interior to the Revelation, you are then left holding the theological bag, since neither you nor anyone else can come up with any consistent meaning for the visions from Patmos that would have had contemporary relevance to the suffering seven Asia Minor churches. If you currently hold to a 95AD date for the visions from Patmos, please reconsider your misplaced confidence!

**65AD: The External Evidence**

We might expect that if the date of authorship is crucial to understanding the Apocalypse’s contents, then the Lord of hosts would provide an abundance of external (or extra-Biblical) evidence in support of a date for the Revelation if it was penned prior to the Jewish War; and we find it to be so! The following facts from outside the Bible are a veritable avalanche of data in support of the pre-Jewish War date of writing for the Patmos visions, with boulders falling upon the heads of all who would cross the early date path while trying to venture towards a late date (95AD) destination. Allow these ancients to speak for themselves and see if you do not agree that, almost without exception, the church fathers and early sources taught a pre-Jewish War date for the Revelation.

i. **The Muratorian Canon.** The Muratorian Canon (c. 170AD) says that Paul wrote to seven churches as did his PREDECESSOR John. Metzer’s translation says that the “apostle Paul himself, following the example of his predeces- sor John, writes by name to only seven churches in the following sequence ...” (48-50; emphasis added). When did John write to seven churches? Oh, that’s easy; that would be the book of Revelation, wouldn’t it? The Muratorian Canon nearly shouts that John wrote to seven churches of Asia Minor before the completion of the Pauline corpus to seven local churches, those epistles being to ™Rome, ™Corinth, ™Galatia, ™Ephesus, ™Philippi, ™Colossae, ™Thessalonica. Since almost without exception most agree that Paul (and Peter) perished during the Neronian persecution (64-68AD), the Muratorian Canon alone points to a completion date for the Revelation prior to Paul’s execution by decapitation, tradi-
rationally put around 66 AD. A date for the Apocalypse of about 65 AD therefore appears likely, according to the Muratorian Canon.

ii. **Syriac Superscriptions.** Both Syriac versions – the Harkelian (616 AD) and Philoxenian (508 AD) – have in their titles for the book of Revelation, “written in Patmos, whither John was sent by Nero Caesar” (Gentry p106). There can be no doubt that these ancient translations both testify to the Apocalypse being given by Jesus to John prior to Nero’s death in 68 AD. Why would both Syriac versions include this superscription if this fact was debatable? We are speaking of a Biblical book, after all, not some flyleaf sales pitch on a man-made novel. Wouldn’t the truth of John’s banishment to Patmos by Nero have overwhelming testimony before it was inserted at the beginning of the commonly available Syrian translation of the church under Domitian (in Gentry p54). The only expansive imperial persecution of the early church chronicles evidence for the Patmos Apocalyptic visions taking place near the onset of the Jewish War (after Gentry, p63-70). This evidence says that Nero was commonly called a tyrant. If Nero is meant by Clement, then here is yet another external line of evidence for the Patmos Apocalyptic visions that NO contemporary authors speak of any such persecution in the 90s AD. Moreover, the only testimony of this alleged persecution is much later and only Christian – no secular historians speak at all of this allegedly extensive persecution of the church! In contrast, the contemporary evidence for the Neronian persecution is quite widespread and thorough (Tacitus, Josephus, Apollonius of Tyana, Pliny the Elder, etc). That the evidence is scant, late, and only Christian for a Domitianic persecution makes one wonder if later Christian writers created the appearance of wide-ranging sufferings under Domitian to generate support for late dating the Revelation; in other words, the interpretive cart drove the persecution horse. Ladd, an historic premillennialist, is categorical, stating that there is no evidence of any systematic persecution of the church under Domitian (in Gentry p54). The only expansive imperial persecution of the early church chronicled by both secular and sacred contemporary historians is that from 64-68 AD under the cruel hand of Nero; and isn’t it fascinating that this suffering by the Christians lasted time, times and half a time (3½ years, or 42 months)? Pervasive, systematic suffering by the church at imperial hands, as evidenced in the Revelation, likewise bespeaks of authorship during Caesar Nero’s time in power and fits neatly with a 65 AD date of writing.

iii. **Syriac History of John.** Another ancient Syriac witness for dating the Revelation is in the History of John, the Son of Zebedee, likely composed in the mid to late 4th century. “After these things, when the Gospel was increasing by the hands of the Apostles, Nero, the unclean and impure and wicked king, heard all that had happened at Ephesus. And he sent [and] took all that the procurator had, and imprisoned him; and laid hold of St John and drove him into exile; and passed sentence on the city that it should be laid waste” (Gentry p105-6). Here is yet another very ancient text that makes reference to John’s banishment under Nero. It certainly appears that the History of John, the Son of Zebedee is speaking of John’s expulsion to Patmos; if so, then surely this also testifies that the Revelation was composed prior to Nero’s demise in 68 AD.

iv. **Extensive Evidence For A Neronian Persecution, While Almost None For A Domitianic.** That the seven churches of the Apocalypse were suffering – indeed, that great persecution attends much of the text of Revelation – can hardly be debated. While some contend that this speaks of a later period of suffering under the Emperor Domitian (81-96 AD), the fact is that NO contemporary authors speak of any such persecution in the 90s AD. Moreover, the only testimony of this alleged persecution is much later and only Christian – no secular historians speak at all of this allegedly extensive persecution of the church! In contrast, the contemporary evidence for the Neronian persecution is quite widespread and thorough (Tacitus, Josephus, Apollonius of Tyana, Pliny the Elder, etc). That the evidence is scant, late, and only Christian for a Domitianic persecution makes one wonder if later Christian writers created the appearance of wide-ranging sufferings under Domitian to generate support for late dating the Revelation; in other words, the interpretive cart drove the persecution horse. Ladd, an historic premillennialist, is categorical, stating that there is no evidence of any systematic persecution of the church under Domitian (in Gentry p54). The only expansive imperial persecution of the early church chronicled by both secular and sacred contemporary historians is that from 64-68 AD under the cruel hand of Nero; and isn’t it fascinating that this suffering by the Christians lasted time, times and half a time (3½ years, or 42 months)? Pervasive, systematic suffering by the church at imperial hands, as evidenced in the Revelation, likewise bespeaks of authorship during Caesar Nero’s time in power and fits neatly with a 65 AD date of writing.

v. **Many Church Fathers.** Several early church authors date the Apocalypse to Nero’s reign. “Tertullian placed John’s banishment after his being dipped in a cauldron of burning oil, which Jerome says was in Nero’s reign. Photus preserved extracts of ‘Life of Timotheus’ in which he states that John’s banishment was under Nero. Others who record a pre-Domitianic date for John’s banishment include: Epiphanius (Heresies 51:12, 33), Arethas (Rev7:1-8), the Syriac versions of Revelation, History of John, the Son of Zebedee, and Theophylact (John)” (Gentry, p54-5). Tertullian (c. 160-220 AD) implies that Paul, John, and Peter all suffered in Rome about the same time, and that John was banished to Patmos after being plunged into boiling oil and suffering no harm (p95). Farrar (p408) informs us that Clement of Alexandria and Origen say, “John was banished by the tyrant,” and this on early Christian lips likely means Nero much more naturally than Domitian. Farrar also adds that the earliest commentary on the Revelation from the 5th century by Andreas, Bishop of Cappadocian Caesarea, says that the Revelation was written before 70 AD (p413). From Bahnson and Gentry (p259), we learn that Epiphanius (315-403 AD) twice states that the Revelation was written under Nero’s reign; Papias (60-130 AD) says that John died before Jerusalem fell; and Arethas (500s) applies a number of Revelation’s prophecies to the fall of Jerusalem. In sum, then, whether by explicit declaration or subtle implication, quite a few of the early church authors testify that Jesus gave John the Revelation while Nero was Caesar; again, consonant with the Apocalypse being penned around 65 AD. Though dead, yet the church fathers speaketh with surprising force and unanimity regarding the early date for the visions on Patmos!

vi. **More Data From Clement Of Alexandria.** A little expansion on the testimony of Clement of Alexandria (150-215 AD) is in order. Clement said that John was exiled to Patmos after the death of the tyrant. But which tyrant? Rome had so many to choose from! But really, only one would come to mind for an early church Christian. Apollonius, a contemporary witness, says that Nero was commonly called a tyrant. If Nero is meant by Clement, then here is yet another external line of evidence for the Patmos Apocalyptic visions taking place near the onset of the Jewish War (after Gentry, p68-70). This also better aligns with Clement’s statement immediately following, when the Apostle John chased down a young apostate church leader. This is a very unlikely event for a man in his 90s, if the Revelation was written about 95 AD; however, chasing after a young man is considerably more plausible if John was around 60 years old, which he would be if the Apocalypse was seen around 65 AD (Gentry p83-84). To put a bow on Clement of Alexandria, he states explicitly that the apostolic revelation ended during Nero’s day, which of necessity would include the book of Revelation. Clement of Alexandria, then, though sometimes used to support a late date for the Revelation, instead supplies fairly aggressive testimony for an early date of writing (65 AD).

vii. **John’s Age In 95 AD.** If the late date (95 AD) for the Apocalypse is true, then a stumbling block arises concerning John’s age. Was John really between 90 and 100 years old when he was sent as a prisoner from Ephesus to Rome, tried before
Caesar, publicly scourged, banished to Patmos, suffered the lash in the mines, and thereafter returned to Ephesus and reorganized the churches of the region for several more years? Though not impossible, apart from some type of miraculous intervention by the Lord, such activity by a nonagenarian is difficult to believe (Barnes in Gentry, p100). Isn’t it more plausible to suppose that John was in his 60s when all of this took place, and thus the Patmos visions were around 65AD?

viii. **Nero The Antichrist.** That Nero was considered to be the Antichrist is found in the Sibylline Oracles, Tertullian, Lactantius, Jerome, Augustine, and Sulpicius Severus (Gentry p80-1). If the Apocalypse was written in the 90s AD, how could Nero be the coming Antichrist, since he had been dead and gone for nearly 30 years? If these writers thought that the Revelation spoke of an Antichrist, then clearly they considered the Revelation to be contemporary to Nero’s day, which of course means it was written prior to Nero’s death in 68AD.

ix. **9th of Av.** While the following doesn’t prove an early date for the Revelation, it is remarkable that the Temple was destroyed on that memorable and sad day, the 9th of Av. But why is the 9th of Av such an important fast day for Jewry? The First (or Solomon’s) Temple was destroyed by the Babylonians on the 9th of Av. The Second Temple was likewise demolished in 70AD on the 9th of Av. It seems that the Lord God Himself was putting an emphatic exclamation point and a big, angry frowny face on the Jewish nation for their Messianic rejection; this could be summarized as follows:

Israel, you forsook the Lord previously in the days of the divided monarchy, so He visited your iniquity upon you by the Babylonians and demolished your 1st Temple on the 9th of Av. Now here in the 1st century, amidst the hype of political messianic expectations, you have rejected and crucified the vineyard owner’s Son, your Messiah; you have rejected the Cornerstone sent by the Father. The Lord has given you 40 years to repent, but you have refused to turn, so the Romans will decapitate your nation and destroy your 2nd Temple ON THE EXACT SAME DAY as the Babylonians devastated the 1st Temple, so that it will be impossible for you to miss the judgment point.

If the Revelation is about the destruction of the rebellious, Jesus-rejecting Jews, then it is entirely appropriate that this judgment reached a climax on that same fateful day, the 9th of Av, 70AD. By no means does this prove that the Apocalypse was seen prior to the Temple’s destruction, but it certainly squares neatly with what was to come if the vision of Jesus came to John on Patmos around 65AD.

[Note: Another curious fact related to the 9th of Av occurred in 135AD. The last Jewish uprising against their Roman overlords was the Bar Kochba Revolt (132-135AD). Can you guess on what day the last battle wrapped up, when the Romans completed their decimation of the Jewish nation? If you guessed that the fall of Betar marking the end of the Bar Kochba Revolt took place on the 9th of Av, then move to the head of the class! The lesson can hardly be missed. The Lord of Hosts Himself is making a sharp theological point, that rebellion against the tender mercies of the Almighty and the rejection of their loving and compassionate Messiah begets the wrath of God against those insurgents who rise up against Jesus’ rule.]

[Note: Does your eschatological view rob the Lord Almighty of His judgment glory, placing in our near future events which have already transpired? God was magnified by preserving the church and executing judgment on His Jewish enemies from Jesus’ generation, and this is the storyline of the Revelation. Note also that this stance is not even remotely anti-Semitic. THOSE Israelites of the 1st century received their comeuppance in the Jewish War, 66-73AD (with the subsequent Bar Kochba expedition 132-135AD). God’s wrath against the Christ-rejecting Israelites was consummated in the past; no further judgment lingers over later Jewish generations, no Damocletian sword of God’s anger held by a thread over Jewish heads to fall upon them in the future. Gospel grace is extended to the Jew first and then to the Gentile. Rom11 speaks of a great gospel ingathering of the Jews in our future, wherein a large number of Jews finally accept their Messiah – and what a blessing that will be to ethnic Israel! Future Jewish prosperity is not comprised of some arid and sterile land for Jewish political messianic expectations, no further judgment lingers over later Jewish generations, no Damocletian sword of God’s anger held by a thread over Jewish heads to fall upon them in the future. Gospel grace is extended to the Jew first and then to the Gentile.]

x. **Extensive Scholarly Early Date Support.** While a show of theological hands doesn’t absolutely establish whether a view is true or false, some comfort is generated by knowing that one does not stand alone in surmising that the Revelation was given by Jesus to John prior to the destruction of the Temple in 70AD. There are indeed a host of theologians who hold to an early date (before 70AD) for the Apocalypse. Gentry (p30ff) lists the many early date advocates, among whom are Farrar, Schaff, Swete, Terry, Jay Adams, Bahnsen, FC Baur, FF Bruce, Bultmann, Düsterdieck, Edersheim, Grotius, Hammond, Westcott, Hort, Lightfoot, Moule, Sir Isaac Newton, JS Russell, AH Strong, and Stuart. Surprisingly, the liberal school of Biblical scholars (with the sub-Darwinian) dated the Apocalypse in the 60s AD, and Schaff said that the early date of Revelation was accepted by the majority of scholars of the late 19th century (Gentry p27-28). At the very least, the “everybody believes this” argument for dating the Revelation around 95AD is false; many studied and lettered Biblical scholars have weighed the evidence and concluded that the Apocalypse was seen prior to 70AD.

Even some late date advocates give oblique testimony to the early date. For instance:

A telling admission ... has been made by renowned commentator and late date advocate RH Charles: “It thus follows that the date of the Apocalypse, according to [the Preterist] school, was about 67-68 or thereabouts. And if the absolute unity of the Apocalypse be assumed, there is no possibility, I think, of evading this conclusion” (Gentry p26-27).
Clearly even some of those who hold to the late date for the Apocalypse have to admit the strength of the early date argument. Surprising additional early date backing for the Apocalypse comes from some modern theological liberals. The notorious “death-of-God” proponent, JAT Robinson (1976), “contended that all 27 New Testament documents were composed prior to 70 AD. He proposed a compositional span of approximately 20 years for all of the New Testament, from about 47–48 AD (Galatians) to 68–70 AD (Revelation; Redating, p352). He mainly bases his argument on the fact that the New Testament documents do not reference the fall of Jerusalem (70 AD; Redating p13–30)” (2013 article in www.bible.ca/ef/topical-new-testament-documents-date-and-authorship.htm).

**The External Evidence Says The Apocalypse Was Given Circa 65 AD, Not 95 AD**

Recapitulating the above lines of external evidence, can there really be any doubt that many, many church fathers and early church documents, plus well studied theologians of various stripes (liberals and conservatives) down through the ages have held that the Revelation was penned prior to the fall of the Temple in 70 AD? At the very least, this expansive testimony should silence the “everybody knows” crowd that contends for an Apocalyptic late date during Domitian’s reign. “Everybody knows” is a non-argument which hints at the historical ignorance of its advocates. Please be more specific. How does “everybody know” this? What evidence can be introduced at the theological bar? Well, it turns out that there is only one fact forwarded for a late date, and this “fact” is of dubious value. Let us examine this thin thread spun into the “everybody knows” garment by the magical late-dating loom.

**95 AD: Puzzling Irenaeus, The ONLY External Evidence**

Having done our level best to give the weight of evidence from outside the Bible in favor of an early date for the Revelation (65 AD), we now present the strongest testimony for late dating (95 AD) the Apocalypse. The statement is from Irenaeus (c. 180 AD). From Terry p256:

Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons, says that in his boyhood he had conversed with Polycarp, and heard him tell of his personal fellowship with the apostle John (Eus5.20). In speaking of the name of the Antichrist which is concealed in the mystic number given in Rev13:18 [666], he says: “If it were necessary to have his name distinctly announced at the present time it would doubtless have been announced by him who saw the Apocalypse; for it was not a great while ago that [it or he] was seen, but almost in our own generation, toward the end of Domitian’s reign” (Against Heresies, 5.30). Unfortunately for the late-daters of the Revelation, that’s about all of the extant external evidence they have on which to hang their dating hat, just a cryptic statement by the bishop of that southern France ecclesiastical backwater, Lyons. Read the statement and you’ll see that it isn’t exactly clear if Irenaeus was speaking of John’s seeing the visions on Patmos or if it was John himself who was seen in Domitian’s reign.

Here the critical reader will observe that the subject of the verb was seen, is ambiguous, and may be understood either of John or the Apocalypse. To assert, as some do, that the only grammatical and legitimate construction requires us to understand the Apocalypse rather than John as the subject of the verb is arbitrary and presumptuous. To say the least, in fairness, one construction is as correct and legitimate as the other. But why should he say that the book was recently seen? The point he evidently aims to make is that the man who saw the visions of the Apocalypse had lived almost into the times to which Irenaeus belonged, and had it been needful to declare the name of the Antichrist he would himself have done it. The time when John saw the Apocalypse was of no consequence for determining the name of Antichrist so long as the apostle himself was yet alive. (Terry p256–7)

Gentry’s paraphrase of Irenaeus is this: “The identity of the Beast is unimportant; if it was important, why didn’t John himself tell us, because he lived almost to our era and spoke with men I’ve known” (p153). In this interpretation by Gentry, Irenaeus was not explaining WHEN the Revelation was seen, but WHY the name of the Beast was not given to us by the Apostle John, since he lived almost to Irenaeus’ day. This appears to be more consistent with the statement by the 2nd century AD bishop of Lyons. In passing, we note that much time had passed before Irenaeus committed his memory to writing. Irenaeus said that he had met Polycarp as a child, and above 60 years had passed before Irenaeus wrote about it. This means that Domitian’s reign was nearly a century before Irenaeus put ink to parchment. Simply put, the bishop of Lyons may have had a faulty memory or a slip of the quill (Gentry p61-2).

It can be shown (Gentry, Terry, others) that all other late date testimonies supposedly corroborating Irenaeus are not actually independent at all, but rather are simply quoting or alluding to the bishop’s above statement. In other words, later authors who quote Irenaeus’ statement (with their interpretation) cannot be considered as independent late date verification. As an example, suppose I read something in the news and then told another about it. Is my “testimony” another independent witness to the events? Of course not; and in like manner, later writers wholly rely upon Irenaeus’ cryptic statement for dating John’s Patmos exile.

Along with some unconvincing but vigorous arm-waving about how the contents of the Apocalypse demand a date later than Nero’s reign, the Irenaeus quote is really the sum and substance of the late date witness. Unfortunately, Irenaeus is a splintered reed upon which to lean, piercing the hand of those who rely upon him too heavily. In jurisprudence, the reliability of a witness affects the acceptance of his testimony. We will now demonstrate that the track record of this southern France bishop is somewhat sketchy. This is not to say that Irenaeus is useless; only that his witness is not exactly on a par with the voice of God.

When was a church father’s position first supported by an appeal to “apostolic tradition?” Well, that would be Irenaeus, who claimed that apostolic testimony taught that Jesus was nearly 50 years old when He was hung on the cross. The unpleasant evidence:
Apostle John (not the Revelation) was seen during Domitian’s reign. Irenaeus confidently testified on alleged apostolic authority that Jesus was nearly 50 years old at His death, proving that his word has something less than genuine apostolic reliability. As Farrar says, “We cannot accept a dubious expression of the Bishop of Lyons as adequate to set aside an overwhelming weight of evidence, alike external and internal, in proof of the fact that the Apocalypse was written, at the latest, soon after the death of Nero” (p408). Nisbett concludes likewise, that if Irenaeus’ testimony to the late date of Revelation is weak, then those who build upon this weak foundation add no strength to it (p35). If the Lord God Almighty in His dreams attained to the slightest trace of an apostle? (Against Heresies 2.22.5b-6; emphasis added).

Though a bit obtuse (per Irenaeus’ usual style), the point is rather obvious; namely, that the apostolic authority verifies Jesus’ being nearly 50 years of age during the events of Jn8:57 (“So the Jews said to Him, ‘You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?’”). Irenaeus’ reliability as a late date witness for the Apocalypse is surely called into question by such a substantial chronological error. If Irenaeus’ testimony is faulty, and this on an important subject like Jesus’ age, could he not be in error on lesser matters? Indeed, Irenaeus accepted the Shepherd of Hermas as canonical, and that the LXX [Septuagint] was written under divine inspiration (Gentry p61). Irenaeus confused the Apostle James with the Lord’s brother; and he wrongly supposed that Papias was a disciple of the Apostle John (Caird p4). Moreover, Eusebius himself (who quotes Irenaeus) says that Papias was a source of error for Irenaeus (Gentry p61).

To sum up, Irenaeus’ childhood memories may have been in error, or he may properly be interpreted as saying that the Apostle John (not the Revelation) was seen during Domitian’s reign. Irenaeus confidently testified on alleged apostolic authority that Jesus was nearly 50 years old at His death, proving that his word has something less than genuine apostolic reliability. As Farrar says, “We cannot accept a dubious expression of the Bishop of Lyons as adequate to set aside an overwhelming weight of evidence, alike external and internal, in proof of the fact that the Apocalypse was written, at the latest, soon after the death of Nero” (p408). Nisbett concludes likewise, that if Irenaeus’ testimony to the late date of Revelation is weak, then those who build upon this weak foundation add no strength to it (p35). If the Lord God Almighty intended for us to know with certainty the meaning of the Apocalypse – it was given for the church’s profit, after all! – and since so much hangs on when these visions were given, then surely God would have provided us with more solid late date proof and more numerous and reliable witnesses than one cryptic quote by a bishop from the hinterlands of southern France! If all the independent external evidence one can gin up is a statement by the occasionally unreliable Irenaeus (others just repeating him), far from the ecclesiastical levers of power and chronologically distant (a century or more) from the giving of the visions on Patmos, then the late date case is weak indeed!

**So What's The Point?**

Having expended a large sum of our gentle reader’s attention on the internal and external evidence concerning the dating of the book of Revelation, let us not miss the goal of dredging up these seemingly esoteric facts. The date when the Revelation was penned is crucial to understanding its contents. Did God have a message for the early church, the original auditors, as well as for us, or not? As Stuart puts it (p197-9):

There is one plain and obvious question, which every interpreter of the Apocalypse is bound to ask, viz. For what purpose was this book written? That is: Was it written to be read and understood by those to whom it was addressed; or was it intended for an enigma, which no Oedipus for centuries to come should be able to solve? ... [H]ere is no book of mere fancies, no tissue of enigmas, no mysticism designed only to amuse or perplex ... The writer was in downright and most sober earnest, if ever the world saw such a writer ... [T]he Apocalypse, we say, is a book that was written for a serious purpose, for an immediate effect ... and for a highly important end. It was sent to the seven leading churches of Asia Minor. Did the writer wish and expect them to understand it? How can there be but one answer to this? He did expect to encourage, console, admonish and instruct them, and all others likewise who in like circumstances should read it; and if so, he of course expected to be understood.

To this, Russell adds (p533):

If the original readers were competent, as Stuart contends, to understand the Apocalypse without an interpreter, it could only be because they recognized its connection with the events of their own day. To suppose that they could understand or feel the slightest interest in a book that treated of Papal councils, Protestant reformations, French revolutions, and distant events in foreign lands and far-off ages, would be one of the wildest fancies that ever possessed a human brain. From first to last the book itself bears decisive testimony to the immediate fulfillment of its predictions. It opens with the express declaration that the events to which it refers “must shortly come to pass,” and it closes with the reiteration of the same statement – “The Lord God hath sent his angel to show unto his servants the things which must shortly come to pass.” “The time is at hand.”

Rather than a Futurist or Historical understanding (or the squishier Idealist or Eclecticist positions), we propose the Partial Preterist Amillennial (PPA) approach to the Revelation. This outlook at once fits the multiple and difficult criteria given by the Apocalypse itself. Recall what Partial Preterist Amillennialism says, and then let us see if the hermeneutical shoe fits the footprints in the visionary sands from Patmos. PPA contends that Rev1-19, along with the closing message (Rev22:6-21), are ancient history, being completed by the termination of the Jewish War and covering the period from about 65-73AD; that Rev20:1-6 (the Millennium) is current, the present church age, which extends from 73AD until Jesus’ 2nd Advent, whenever that may be; and that Rev20:7 to 22:5 portrays the final judgment at the end of time (the eschaton) and the eternal state. There are many particulars from the Apocalypse to hammer out, of course. Fortunately, others have nobly accomplished this end, and we cannot replicate their eloquence. At issue now is whether PPA fits ALL of the requirements stated above; and we find that it does indeed!
1) The book MUST have contemporary relevance for the seven churches of Asia Minor. According to PPA, the Apocalypse presents graphic images of the church’s sufferings under the Neronian persecution (64–68 CE). This persecution begot the violent removal of the Jewish nation by the Romans during the times of the Jewish War (66–73 CE), with a consequent reduction in organized opposition to the fledgling church of Jesus Christ. This must have been exceedingly encouraging to the struggling early churches of Asia Minor (and elsewhere), and therefore had significant and immediate impact upon the Christians of John’s day. PPA gives an interpretive framework where the word pictures of the Apocalypse would have been understood by the churches of the 1st century. PPA contains no wild speculations about modern warfare that could not possibly have had any relevance to the now defunct Asia Minor churches. This may not be as exciting or sell as many books today as that coming from those who spout their “literalism” while actually engaging in far-flung flights of futuristic fantasy, but surely PPA accords much better with the Revelation’s being an epistle directed towards seven real 1st century churches.

2) PPA also squares with the chronological aspects of the Revelation. Rev1:19 is often referenced as a two point outline for the book, where John was commanded by the risen Lord to write “the things which are, and the things which will take place after these things.” The “things which are” applied to the immediate persecution faced by the churches, while “the things which will take place after these things” pertained to the soon-coming removal of the church’s bitter and bloodthirsty enemies, who were the unbelieving Israelites and their enforcement bullies and bouncers, the Romans.

3) Partial Preterist Amillennialism (PPA) fully aligns with the Old Testament prophecies extensively quoted or alluded to in the Revelation. For the Jews who revolted against the rule of their Messiah, there were the Exodus plagues, the invading locust armies of Rome from the north, and the appropriate Old Testament appellation “Harlot” (Ezk16:23 and Hos1:3). For the early Christians, the language of the Exile was right and proper, with those NOT marked for destruction being spared (contra Ezk9). Just as during the Exile, when the Jews who surrendered to the Babylonians survived while all others perished, so the Jerusalem church was saved by being exiled, whisked away to safety in Pella “on eagle’s wings” (Ex19:4 cf. Rev12:14). The city of Jerusalem opposed, persecuted and executed God’s prophets (Mt23:29-36; 21:33-46), and Jesus had said that He must go to Jerusalem to die (Lk13:33). This formerly holy but now wicked city – Babylon – stood astride the progress of the gospel, much like Jericho blocked the Conquest under Joshua. What was the Lord Almighty going to do? Would He sit idly by and let the Jews get away with murder, those who killed Jesus and hunted down His saints? No, like used against Jericho, seven trumpets were now summoned by God to remove Jerusalem, the city that stood in the way of gospel conquest. That the Romans of the 1st century were represented by the Beast of Dan7 requires no further verification. This Beast nearly met its death in 69 CE, the year of four emperors; surprisingly, though, “the fatal wound was healed” (Rev13:3,12) by the Flavian (Vespasian’s) takeover. A quick reconnaissance in force, a scouting sweep survey over the prophetic landscape shows that all of the Old Testament prophecies quoted or alluded to in the Apocalypse are steadfast allies of PPA, fighting for a contemporary application of the bulk (Rev1-19) of the Revelation’s visions.

4) PPA also lines up with the bifurcated structure of the Revelation. The book is not strictly chronological, since events in Rev12 serve as an intermission in the narrative. For example, Rev12:5 gives Jesus’ birth to Ascension in short compass, which we know took place long before the period covered by the Apocalypse. Many have observed that the Apocalypse has two main sections outside of the introduction and conclusion, namely, chapters 4–11 and then chapters 13–19, with chapter 12 (the dragon, woman and child) serving as the spectacular halftime entertainment. It is an historical fact that the 1st century church had 2 primary opponents, the Jewish unbelievers and the Romans who were goaded to action by these selfsame Jews. Doesn’t it make sense, then, that the book is divided into two sections, one focused on each of these two enemies? The first portion (Rev4-11) mostly addresses itself to the Jewish opposition to the gospel centered in Jerusalem and its resulting obliteration by God during the Jewish War. The section even ends with two very specific mentions of Jerusalem. These are: (1) The command to John to “measure the Temple of God” (11:1) – and where was the Temple located? (2) The dead witnesses bodies will lie “in the street of the great city which mysterically is called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified” (11:8) – and where was Jesus crucified?. Is it not clear that Jerusalem’s demise is in view in section one? The city’s removal comes at the end of the sounding of seven trumpets, much like Jericho met its wall collapsing destruction after seven trumpets during the Conquest. Next, section two (Rev13-19) begins by introducing the Beast (13:1ff), which from Dan7 we understand to be the Roman Empire. We might expect that section two contains some degree of recapitulation of section one’s contents, since the same time period is being covered. In part one we see God’s judgment against Messiah-rejecting Jewry, while in part two we have the interplay between Rome and its suppression of the rebellious Israelites during the Jewish War. How does it all end? With the triumph of the gospel, the sword of the Spirit from Jesus’ mouth conquering the world (Rev19:15). Rev19 is not the end of all time, but rather is the progress of the gospel now that the Harlot and Babylon (the Messiah-rejecting Jews with their epicenter in Jerusalem) have been removed. In addition, the Roman Empire (the Beast) that had so gruesomely persecuted the church was effectively incapacitated after the year of the four emperors, the fatal wound being healed by the new Flavian dynasty. Yet again, Partial Preterist Amillennialism is consonant with there being two adversaries of the church before the Jewish War, with section one of the Revelation giving God’s judgment against the Jesus-rejecting Jews and section two covering the same chronological ground but this time including the Roman henchmen employed by the Jews who later turned on the Harlot and burned her (Rev17:16; 18:8,9,18).

5) PPA explains the cryptic language of the Revelation. There can be no debate concerning the identity of the church’s enemies prior to 70 AD: these were the iron-fisted Romans (especially after the Neronian persecution broke out) and the Christ-hating Jews. The Apostles had written clearly against Jewish opposition, even mentioning them by name (e.g., Rev2:9; 3:9; Php3:2). What of the Romans? Where in the New Testament is the Roman Empire fingered as the second
violent adversary of the church? To do so in plain Scriptural language would be to put the church at further risk from their Roman overlords, since the church could have been accused of treason and sedition against the Empire. The believers in the gospel of Jesus were already being blamed for appalling crimes; the key for communicating Rome's future troubles lay with ambiguity, with prophetic language that the authorities could not understand. Such is the book of Revelation. Being well grounded in the Old Testament prophetic literature unlocks the meaning of the Beast for the church (Dan7), for example, information not possessed nor sought by the Roman censors. Yes, Partial Preterist Amillennialism (PPA) even explains the why behind the “apocalyptic” language of the Revelation.

Having established that the Revelation was penned prior to the Jewish War by various and sundry internal and external proofs, we must conclude that the events being described using well-established Old Testament imagery were of the soon-coming invasion of Palestine by the Romans. The war was initiated by Cestius in 66AD, followed by the Roman defeat at Beth Horon. With uncanny timing, Nero had his ablest general of the east, Corbulo, commit suicide one month prior to the outbreak of hostilities in Judea. With nowhere else to turn, in 67AD Nero recalled the disgraced Vespasian to prosecute the Jewish War [Vespasian had yawned or nodded off during one of Nero’s performances, a slight to the throne worthy of execution for one of lesser standing but not for a national war hero; instead, Vespasian was banished]. Vespasian and his son Titus were devastatingly thorough. Beginning in Galilee and driving the Jews southward towards an encirclement and extermination in Jerusalem, with the horrific carnage Vespasian moved slowly but inexorably towards the suppression of the Jewish rebellion against the iron fist of Rome. After steady progress, the war effort was interrupted by the year of four emperors (69AD) that elevated Vespasian to the purple. Finally, the Jewish War reached a climax after 3½ years with the obliteration of the Temple in 70AD. The Jewish War lasted yet another 3½ years until the fall of Masada (73AD) to the Roman General Silva. The unregenerate Jews did indeed drink the cup of God’s wrath to its dregs for its execution of their Messiah and the persecution of Jesus’ bride, the church. The Jews had called for Jesus’ blood to be upon their own heads, and Christ Himself had said that the blood of the prophets would be counted against that generation; and so it came to pass.

Set Aside Pompous Prophetic Sophistry!

Disproving the opposite often provides strong support for the only other alternative. To reduce the options to 2, making this test as easy as possible, was the Apocalypse seen before or after the Jewish War? Let us suppose for a moment that the visions on Patmos came in the mid-90s AD. What happens to the interpretation of its contents? The meaning is cut adrift from the events of that epoch; NO historical application was near term to the original hearers, as demonstrated by the interpretive flailing and vigorous arm-waving often exhibited by late-daters of the Revelation. The Apocalypse, unmoored from the pre-Jewish War era and without any comforting message to the suffering Asia Minor churches, becomes the happy hunting ground of those inclined towards wild prophetic gyrations, who use the Revelation to prophetically detail our own near future; but they are ALWAYS in error! Whether its Napoleon III, the marauding Ottomans, the War of the Roses, a nuclear holocaust, the Russian Bear’s paw over Europe – the soothsayers who read Revelation’s alleged historical tea leaves keep on making predictions, but NONE of their wolf-crying predictions ever come to pass. “It only takes one false prophecy to make a false prophet” (North in Wilson, pxxv; see Dt18:20-22). With such a poor track record, one would think that the “signs of the times” crowd would finally give up or be buried in a mocking heap of derision. Instead, many would-be Apocalyptic prognosticators kick in the afterburners, thrusting themselves forward with greater and greater speed as they generate yet more fantastic speculations concerning our supposed soon-coming future, confident that no one will hold them accountable if they live long enough to see their forecasts miserably fail yet again. With such unholy hands on the Bible, it would be difficult to find a more maligned and misused Biblical book than the Revelation. Surely the reputation of Jesus Christ and His church founders upon the rocks of such reckless irresponsibility. The world may not defeat the unconquerable Jesus, but the prophetic foolishness and predictive inanity of many within the church will surely make Him look as bad as possible in the eyes of the world – and this denigration of the Messiah and His Bride is generated by the very people who claim to defend the truth of the Word of God, even from those who say they take the Bible “literally!” The selectiveness of their literalism makes one question their cloaked Zionist agenda.

Isn’t it time to stop relishing the seemingly tasty but ultimately non-nutritional jejune end times dishes served up by many with respect to the Revelation? Like an icing laden doctrinal cupcake, silly eschatological speculations tickle your spiritual taste buds but offer only empty theological calories. It is high time to cast off prophetic casuistry, put off the predictive puerility, and set aside the end times juvenilia. Your seminary professors may not accept the obvious solution, that the Apocalypse was penned around 65AD and pertains mainly to the punishment of Israel (the Harlot) during the Jewish War (66-73AD), the fall of Jerusalem (Babylon), and the razing of the Temple. Yes, some men have too much at stake to forsake decades of achievement and recognize what the Apocalypse really is, a diatribe against the unbelieving Jews and their Roman accomplices. The pension of a Bible College full professor will not permit a reconsideration of the message of Revelation, and thus he may continue to tepidly teach or occasionally avoid the Dispensational party line with his retirement in view. You, however, are of a different stripe. You don’t have any “skin” in the Dispensational game; you just want to know what God intended to tell us in the visions from Patmos. Of course, this message from the Father is intimately tied to the Apocalypse was given. If given prior to the Jewish War, as vigorously demonstrated above, then the pictorial memorandum from the Lord to the church about the near term demise of the unregenerate Jews and the iron-fisted Romans could hardly be clearer or more potent. The Beast (Rome) would turn upon the Harlot (the Messiah-rejecting Jews) and burn her (Rev17:16; 18:8,9,18); and this is exactly what came to pass. Via the Revelation, the tender mercies of the Lord communicated comfort to His suffering church, those who had cried out for vengeance for their shed blood (Rev6:9-
what Max Planck, that seminal theoretical physicist, said in 1948, a theological insight does not usually triumph by conD
view of nascent Dispensationalism should serve as a firm warning against undue end times speculations.

We thus have, (3) The Old Testament saints, who are not part of the church, and so are not partakers of
millennium. The last three resurrections are inferred, since somehow one must resurrect those who don’t fall into resurrecD
church at the beginning of the Tribulation (during the allegedly Secret Rapture), plus (2) The wicked at the end of the MilD
least five resurrections. Can you believe it – FIVE?! The first two are relatively clear, taken from Rev20, namely, (1) The
Judgments do you need to make your Dispensational system “work.” PPA (and Amillennialism in general) holds all of the
any simpler than this?

The righteous, however, have (supposedly) already been judged at the SeD
deterioration of the complicated Dispensational system. The strident advocates of classic Scofieldism from the 1940s and
1950s yielded to the softer version of Ryrie (1965), then to a yet milder progressive position in the late 1980s and early
1990s, the last being the majority report amongst Dispensationalists today. It seems that few of today’s Bible College
graduates are deeply schooled and firmly committed to Dispensational principles. That breed is dying off, succumbing to
the lingering death by a thousand cuts as one Dispensational “truth” after another is proved Biblically false, typically by
those within the system itself. As North has said:

If dispensational theology were still strong and healthy, it might be able to delay the looming transformation of the
dispensational movement. But it is not healthy. Theologically speaking, meaning as a coherent system, dispensational
theology is dead. Its brain wave signal has gone flat. It has now assumed room temperature. RIP. It was not killed by its
theological opponents. Its defenders killed it by a thousand qualifications. They revised it into oblivion. Like a man
peeling an onion, dispensational theologians kept slicing away the system’s embarrassing visible layers until there was
nothing left (in forward to Bahnsen and Gentry, pxix).

An example of the Dispensationalism’s frailty is detailed by JW Hodges (p38), who says that the system must have at
least five resurrections. Can you believe it – FIVE?! The first two are relatively clear, taken from Rev20, namely, (1) The
church at the beginning of the Tribulation (during the allegedly Secret Rapture), plus (2) The wicked at the end of the Mil-
Dennium. The last three resurrections are inferred, since somehow one must resurrect those who don’t fall into resurrec-
dions one and 2. We thus have, (3) The Old Testament saints, who are not part of the church, and so are not partakers of
either resurrections one and two (and when does resurrection number three take place?); (4) The martyred tribulation
saints, who are not part of the Secretly Raptured church, and so require their own separate resurrection; and (5) The
righteous who die during the Millennium, who also aren’t in the church, but who are not resurrected with the wicked at
the end. Moreover, when are all of them judged, these participants in the inferred and sundry resurrections? In like man-
ner, there must be several separate judgments. The righteous, however, have (supposedly) already been judged at the Se-
cret Rapture and elsewhere, and thus won’t be before the Rev20 Bema (judgment seat); but if this is so, then why is the
Book of Life used, if none present are affected by its contents? So then, how many Second Comings, Resurrections and
Judgments do you need to make your Dispensational system “work.” PPA (and Amillennialism in general) holds all of the
aces for this hand, since it posits only ONE Second Coming, ONE Resurrection, and ONE Final Judgment. Can Occam get
any simpler than this?

Acts1:11 says that Jesus will return as He departed. Doesn’t this mean that He will come ALL THE WAY to earth, not
partway in the Secret Rapture and then make an inexplicable and Biblically unfounded U-turn back to heaven, as forward-
ed in Dispensational lore? As Spurgeon put it, in Acts1 the disciples were doing nothing, just gazing into heaven; and this
is what many seem to be about with the 2nd Coming – curious but disobedient (p73). This is akin to what Spurgeon said
elsewhere, that defeatest premillennialism chimes in nicely with our own idleness and thus is likely remain popular
(Balyeat p161). Spurgeon knew men who were consumed by bowls and trumpets, or by Ezekiel or Daniel, but who didn’t
tend to their family or preach Romans; he urged such men to not neglect the gospel for eschatology (p73-4)! Spurgeon said
that when the earthquakes spoken of do finally come, we won’t need prophecy-mongers to tell us; and he wearied of the
silly way some people play with the Bible like a pack of cards (p77). For those who respect the Prince of Preachers, his dim
view of nascent Dispensationalism should serve as a firm warning against undue end times speculations.

Let us briefly enumerate a host of Futurist inconsistencies. Many Dispies contend that the 1st resurrection of Rev20:4-5
is after the allegedly future seven year Great Tribulation; but if this is so, wouldn’t this be the SECOND 1st resurrection,
since a preceding resurrection took place seven years earlier during the Secret Rapture? Most Dispies say that the Secret
Rapture is not the 1st resurrection, i.e. it doesn’t “count” (a theological nulligan). A return of Christ that isn’t actually a re-

66
turn is hard to fathom. With respect to counting, after the Rapture any unregenerate man could easily count to seven and know exactly the timing of the 2nd Advent at the end of the allegedly future Great Tribulation – but I thought that no one will know the day or the hour when Jesus would return? If all of the wheat (Mt13:24-30) is Secretly Raptured, will Jesus return to rule over a tare field for 1000 years? But I thought that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom (1Co15:50) – how then can unregenerate mortals enter the Millennial kingdom? 2Pt3:9 indicates that the delay of Jesus’ return results in increased numbers of those brought to salvation, but Dispensationalists say that there will be a far greater salvific effort after the Secret Rapture, what with the magical appearing of 144,000 Jewish evangelists – but who teaches these alleged evangelists the gospel message, since the church has been withdrawn? Well, do you want more people brought to eternal life? Don’t hope for a delay in Christ’s return, since far more will be saved after the anemic and ineffective church is extracted; but this effectively disproves what Peter said, that the delay of the 2nd Coming results in many coming to repentance. In 2Pt3:11-12, Christians are called to live godly and thus hasten the final judgment at the coming Day of the Lord; but how can saints who live before the Millennium hasten the Day of the Lord if there exists at least a 1,007 year gap between our day and the Day of the Lord (the seven year Great Tribulation plus the future Millennium)? Speaking of problems raised by 2Pt3, won’t the elements be burned up with intense heat at the Lord’s return (3:7)? It doesn’t sound like many of those “left behind” will able to withstand such a conflagration. Then again, being “left behind” may not be so bad after all, since then you would know for certain that Christianity is true, and you could then walk by sight, not by faith; contrary to a host of Scriptures, you’ll get a second chance at salvation! On an additional negative side of being Raptured per Dispensational lore, are you really looking forward to being secretly taken, only to return to earth seven years later and live amongst mortals, both regenerate and unregenerate? Your unbelieving neighbor could curse you to your face, but you can no longer sin, so you won’t respond in kind. Maybe you could get them back by appearing in their bedroom while they’re in the PJs, just to put a little of the fear of the Lord in them – your resurrected body would be able to surprise your mortal neighbors while they’re brushing their teeth! Now wouldn’t THAT make for some interesting conversations! Besides, why would you live in North Carolina if the Lord Jesus is reigning from His Jerusalem Davidic throne? Wouldn’t you and every other Christian on the planet want to reverse the cultural mandate to populate the earth (Gen1:28) and instead move to Jerusalem, thus depopulating the globe of Christians? Well, I suppose you’d have to go there anyway to offer bloody sacrifices at the Third (or Ezekiel’s) Temple, and these for the oft-repeated sake of sin and atonement (e.g., Ezk43). Sadly, you may not even be admitted, since God Himself says of that Temple, “No foreigner uncircumcised in heart and uncircumcised in flesh, of all the foreigners who are among the sons of Israel, shall enter My sanctuary” (Ezk44:9). If you’re a Gentile, you’d better become a Jew right quick, thereby reversing Paul’s anti-circumcision argument of Gal5! Then again, how could you manage to circumcise a resurrected body? And what would you do if you’re a woman? By the way, there are some serious logistical issues related to this supposed 3rd Temple. If there are seven billion people in the world, how would everybody gather annually for the Feast of Tabernacles? There seems no plausible way to assemble and house that many people in Jerusalem’s environs. If you want to make a mint during the Millennium, start building hotels around Jerusalem! Then again, Mal1:11 says that in every place incense and grain offerings will be made to the Lord’s name – doesn’t this obviate the single location Temple? But it also contradicts Is66:23 and Zch14:16 that say everyone in the world must go to the Temple to worship. Now, what if the Temple infrastructure manages to push through 100,000 people’s sacrifices per day, nonstop, 24/7, 365 for the earth’s seven billion inhabitants – a blistering pace, to be sure! If the priests could maintain the sacrificial velocity without interruption, then you’d get to make a sacrifice and see Jesus once every, oh, 192 years or so (after Murray, p51). During the Millennium, you’d probably be able to get through the intricate Temple sacrificial machinery a total of about five times, if all goes well and nothing breaks down or delays the offerings – and this is supposed to be drawing near to Jesus?! Speaking of the Savior, another sorrowful aspect of this 3rd Temple is that Jesus Himself will also have to offer bloody sacrifices. Really?!! Yup, in Ezk46:2 the Prince (usually understood to be the Messiah) has the priests provide His burnt and peace offerings! Wow! Mortal men offering bloody animal sacrifices on behalf of the Son of God?! My, my, my, such a retrograde redemptive maneuver is passing strange indeed! And who would be the priests? “Ezekiel says four times over that in the day when Israel is restored, the office of the priest...” (Grier p98). It appears that God’s own Word is self-contradictory with respect to the alleged future Millennial priesthood. And what of the hapless critics being slaughtered? In Isaiah, the Lord Himself made a firm guarantee to the animals: “The wolf and the lamb will graze together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox; and dust will be the serpent’s food. They will do no evil or harm in all My holy mountain,’ says the Lord” (Is65:25). This sentiment is replicated in the famous Christmas passage, “And the wolf will dwell with the lamb... They will not hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain” (Is11:6-9). How can one have bloody animal sacrifices when God Himself has assured His creatures that no future harm would come to them? A lamb or ox should certainly fear the reinstatement of Mosaic sacrifices, for it will cost them everything! As you can plainly see, Dispensationalism’s complications become its own undoing; a whole lot of balin’ wire and duct tape is needed to hold together its Millennial mechanics.

Returning to Dispensationalism’s effect on the body of Christ, the great unwashed church-going masses have found that, in fact, the sky is NOT falling any time soon. Having cried wolf so frequently, it is with great difficulty that the prophetic hyperventilators generate enthusiasm in the increasingly apathetic flock of Christ. Besides, few among even the most beligerent advocates actually act upon their Dispensational principles. If you really believed that Jesus would come back any second now, why would you go to several different universities for 10 years or more to obtain a Ph.D. in chemistry? Why would you go to seminary, since in the middle of your boring Systematic Theology III class the world could be “left behind?” C’mon, haven’t you prayed for the 2nd Coming before a particularly difficult test and found yourself disappointed
yet again when you weren’t Secretly Raptured before that exam was plunked on your desk? Why begin a long term mis-
prise a beloved but faulty system. Like the proud father driving the family car who has gotten lost, are you too arrogant to
in a dangerous Biblical location, often having to deny or circumvent what the Scriptures clearly teach in an effort to main-
dition, you’d radically change your behavior; but you see, very few people indeed live like they take such Dispensational
dogma very seriously. Pragmatism dictates mostly paying no attention to the “imminence” folklore, except during heated
eschatological debates with fellow Christians, yelling at them that they don’t take the Scriptures “literally” (i.e., like I do) and
that their borderline deniers of the doctrine of Inerrancy. Sadly, the church will look back a century or two from now and
shake their heads in collective disbelief at an historical theological anomaly, the comfortable USA suburban hope of
being secretly scooped up by God, away from approaching danger while others face the Lamb’s wrath. Dispensationalism
is a speed bump in theological progress, a U-turn away from the truth for those too self-absorbed with self-preservation to
see their myopia, a going the wrong way down the one way prophetic street. After it has been fully shredded by its own ad-
vocates one dogma at a time and disgraced by the “shrill small voice” of its advocates with their repeated “the sky will fall
any second now” failures, the rotted lumber will no longer bear any weight and the Dispensational end times edifice will
simply collapse. Jesus’ church will advance apart from Dispensationalism, not because of it. Count on it!

One of the simplest ways to discount Dispensational dogma is simply to review its writings and teachings – these prove
embarrassing enough, with little further refutation required. Of course, paperback Dispensationalism has a poor track
record – recall Whisenant’s 88 Reasons Why The Rapture Is In 1988, or Lindsey’s The 1980’s: Countdown to Armaged-
don. Needless to say, these confident predictions are laughable in hindsight, resulting in a steady decay of
Dispensationalism’s corporate stock. With such advocates, is it any wonder that the Dispensational market capitalization
has had a steady downward trend, approaching or already occupying penny stock territory? Premillennialist Wilson offers
a “penetrating exposé of numerous miscalculations of the Rapture by noted dispensationalists and premillennialists
throughout this [20th] century,” say Bahnsen and Gentry (p144). They continue with a lucid summary of the complicated
Dispensational system, complete with citations from Dispensational sources (p144-6):

Do dispensationalists have “one passage” that leads to their “system” of an offer of an earthly, political, Jewish king-
dom in the days of Christ, only to have it postponed for millennia after the Jews rejected it [Pentecost Things to Come
p201] with the present era being an intercalation in the plan of God [ibid p133-8,201], but all the while expecting an
imminent, secret rapture [ibid p203: but note how “noisy” 1Th4:16 is!] and secret resurrection of saints only (the first
resurrection), followed by a seven year tribulation in which the Jewish temple will be rebuilt and Jewish evangelism
without the baptism, sealing, indwelling, and filling power of the Holy Spirit [ibid p263] will be more successful in sev-
en years than 2,000 years of Holy Spirit-empowered Church evangelistic labor [ibid p269,273-4], followed by the visible,
glorious Second Coming of Christ “to the earth” [ibid p206,280,478,498], at which point saved Jews of the Old
Testament era and the ‘Tribulation saints will be resurrected (a second resurrection) [ibid p410-11], to establish a
365,000-day [ibid p491ff] literal, earthly, political kingdom with Jews (House and Ice Dom Theol p145,169,174,400-
05) reigning at the highest levels (over their servants, the saved Gentiles) [Pentecost Things to Come p507-8], which
kingdom will be over an earthly population composed also of unresurrected mortals, while a heavenly city will “be
made visible above the earth” for 1,000 years in which dwell glorified, resurrected saints [ibid p489,503ff], and will
witness the divinely approved reinstitution of memorial animal sacrifices [ibid p512ff], followed eventually by the sec-
dom humiliation of Christ, when His personally administered kingdom revolts against Him in an attempt to ‘destroy
the seat of theocratic power and the subjects of the theocracy” [ibid p551, cf p549,578] (despite the heavenly city, popu-
lated with millions of indestructible men, floating above the earth) [ibid p577ff], ending up with the resurrection of the
unsaved (a third resurrection, which leaves in limbo the question of the resurrection of the dead who were converted
but died during the Millennium) [ibid p411] and the Great White Throne Judgment?
The intricate Rube Goldberg Dispensational machine is virtually self-refuting when stated so plainly. Who of us can go to
our Bibles alone and come up with the above system, without employing the Dispensational metanarrative given us by
Study Bible footnotes or forwarded in various paperbacks? I tried once and was totally flummoxed. For instance, it seemed
to me that nearly every other Ryrie Study Bible footnote in Isaiah said that fulfillment of the prophet’s words awaited the
future the Millennium. Really?! Do tell! Stuff written 700 years or so before Jesus Christ came to earth would not happen
until 2,700 years or more thereafter, in our present day – of what use was THAT to the original audience?!

Now, do we despise our Dispensational brethren and enjoy giving them a theological head thumping, a vigorous “noogie” for being so prophetically silly? Certainly not! We beseech them to reconsider their “fundamental” principles, understanding that they have, in fact, taken the wrong trail (to return to the opening metaphor) that leads them to a prophetic dead end. Confusion and anarchy are the regimental
colors of Dispensationalism, with the flock of Christ bewildered by the Revelation, a book designed by
God to give comfort and encouragement to the church. The problem, my Dispensational friend, is that
you’ve started in the wrong spot, so it’s no surprise that you are heading in the wrong way and end up in
a dangerous Biblical location, often having to deny or circumvent what the Scriptures clearly teach in an effort to main-
tain a beloved but faulty system. Like the proud father driving the family car who has gotten lost, are you too arrogant to
stop and ask for Biblical directions? You’ve assumed that prophecy in general and the Apocalypse in particular are about
our soon-coming future, right around the chronological corner, but you can find no sure Biblical footing for such an asser-
tion. You've assumed this beforehand without proof (an a priori), and on this bedrock (or “fundamental”) principle you have erected an entire prophetic house of cards. A gentle breeze easily topples it, so you must defend every spade, club, heart and diamond from the contrary Biblical winds. If the Dispensational structure is so fragile that only shouted acrimony and the hiding of alternate views can preserve it, while the foundations are slowly being undermined by its own advocates – how can such an edifice abide for long?

The vision from Patmos itself testifies against the Futurist outlook. The Revelation squarely dates itself in Nero’s reign, prior to the Jewish War (around 65AD), with a message of comfort to the 1st century suffering churches of Asia Minor and throughout the Roman Empire. Applying it to our day, the Revelation provides not prophetic insight for our near term, an ever-changing landscape of what might soon (but never does) take place; rather, the Apocalypse supplies comfort in the sure knowledge that the Lord will care for His afflicted church and bring Jesus’ bride through whatever “tribulation” (Rev1:9) it may face, while simultaneously punishing those who oppose the gospel. Will you snatch the bread from the children’s teeth, saying that the Revelation is actually a pictorial fantasyland about the future of the western church, a daydream that is ever-changing? World events morph the Bible’s contents according to the whims of each generation’s purveyors of rough and rowdy prognostications – doesn’t something seem amiss? Surely such undomesticated speculation needs to be house-broken and trained in theological stability, that which is provided by the Revelation itself as it applies to the church prior to the Jewish War. Partial Preterist Amillennialism (PPA) gives the visions from Patmos a firm foundation in historical reality. The Apocalypse communicated a coded memorandum from the church’s head, Jesus – firmly established in the prophetic pictures from the language of the Old Testament – a message of blessing and comfort to the persecuted 65AD church. The Christians understood the Revelation’s significance against the Jews and Rome of the 1st century before the Jewish War, knowing that their time of tribulation was short; and we are likewise reassured by its message of deliverance for Christ’s bride during times of trouble, while the church’s enemies meet their sure demise. Instead of confusion and controversy, the view advocated herein (PPA) brings calm, consolation, and (most importantly) a prophetic keel of stability to Jesus’ church, both past and present.

**Conclusion**

John Owen’s massive seven volume commentary on Hebrews gives an eloquent summary in a different context. Owen’s application of Gog and Magog in relation to Heb1:13 (3:234) was that the people of God appear feeble and unprotected, as without walls, and the church’s enemies think they can easily encircle and destroy it; but time and again throughout history this assumption has proved to be erroneous, and the enemies themselves are eradicated and brought to shame. However, later evil generations learn not from their predecessors and repeat the same aggression against God’s church time and again, and they necessarily fail and are ruined. Even if they temporarily gain their point and swallow a segment of the church, the devouring worm is contained therein and sucks the enemies dry of life. To wit: “What advantage if they drink a little precious blood and find sweetness in it, if it make them sick, and swell, and die? The beloved city [the church] still abides, and their misery shall never end.” This is the soothing, reassuring memorandum to the suffering church of Jesus Christ prior to the Jewish War, horrendously persecuted by Imperial might at Nero’s behest, prompted by Jewish hatred of those who worshiped Jesus as Messiah. In words coded by Old Testament prophetic imagery, the Revelation tells the bride of Christ that it could rest assured that its enemies would find retribution. The Messiah-rejecting Jews (the Harlot) with their power base in Jerusalem (Babylon) would be lopped off like a spiritually dead branch during the 66-73AD Jewish War, while their Roman henchmen (the Beast) would nearly collapse, with difficulty recovering from its fatal wound in the year of four emperors (69AD). However, the Jerusalem church (the woman) would be rescued to safety in nearby Pella (Eus3.5.3). This, then, is the sum and substance of the book of Revelation.

In the visions from Patmos, Jesus actually REVEALED His intentions for His bride and her enemies – it is called the Revelation, after all, not the Rev-VEIL-ation. The Old Testament cryptographic visions were given to be understood by the suffering church, not shrouded, masked and cloaked so as to disguise the message from the church for generation upon insufferable generation. Why the code? If the Revelation was plain about God’s judgment against the Romans, the fledgling church could be accused of treason. The point of cryptography is to reveal to the intended audience while concealing the contents from one’s enemies, and this is admirably accomplished by Jesus in the visions He gave to John on Patmos.

The Apocalypse begins as an epistle to seven struggling and persecuted Asia Minor churches. Will we really contend that the bulk of its contents were of NO value whatsoever to their situation? By saying “I am coming quickly” (Rev22:20), Jesus did not mean that the church had to wait some two millennia or more for a host of unimaginably wild and scary things to take place, the original seven churches deriving NO reassurance whatsoever because the fulfillment of the visions was so chronologically remote from their era. The seven churches no longer even exist today, so why would they care what would happen to western civilization in the 21st century?! Will today’s church continue to CONCEAL the book’s contents with outlandish modern day applications of what was intended for the 1st century church? How often will those within the church cry wolf, telling us with arrogant certitude that “the sky is falling?” As night follows day, so NONE of the predictions of these modern soothsayers comes to pass; and yet many within the church still chase after these latter day false prophets. It is no wonder, then, that the Revelation becomes the most maligned of Biblical books, its radical and allegedly Bible-believing advocates spearheading the derisive efforts of the world with their mock-worthy futuristic fantasies and repeatedly failed forecasts. No, no, and again I say, NO! The Lord Jesus Christ Himself gave a sure word of comfort to the persecuted 1st century church and a certain pronouncement of judgment against His Jewish and Roman enemies in the Revelation, and this was understood and acted upon by the suffering Christians prior to and during the Jewish War. This is the sum and substance of what was actually revealed in the Revelation, the clear but prophetically coded message from Patmos.
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We all have to die sometime. "No, you don't understand, Chad. I don't think she died. I think she went to be with the Lord. Without dying. I think she met Him in the air with all those other people who are missing and they all went up to heaven together without ever dying." By then Chad was sure his uncle had cracked under the strain. Poor man! He knew he'd have to try to comfort his uncle. "That's terrible, Ned," he said, "I'm really shocked. Listen, if there's anything I can do..." "No, no, Chad," his uncle said, "I'm not so sure that it is so terrible. Alice might have been one of the lucky ones. I think she's gone to be with the Lord." Wow, thought Chad, he's really taking it well. "That's a great way to look at it, Uncle Ned. We all have to die sometime." "No, you don't understand, Chad. I don't think she died. I think she went to be with the Lord without dying. I think she met Him in the air with all those other people who are missing and they all went up to heaven together without ever dying." By then Chad was sure his uncle had cracked under the strain. Poor man! He knew Ned and Alice had had their problems but he also knew that Ned had loved his wife. "Tell me one thing, Chad," his uncle was saying. "Does anyone have an explanation for all the crazy things that have been happening?" "I haven't heard any yet, Ned, but there's got to be an answer." "So what could it be, Chad? These things have been happening in every nation in the world, haven't they? Do you think a group of people caused them? Some kind of worldwide terrorist attack or something?" "Well, I don't know." "Well, I do, boy, and if you'll pay attention I'll give you the biggest story any reporter ever had. You'll have to work fast though because eventually a lot of other people are going to figure it out, too, and don't worry about Aunt Alice. She's in good hands." And then for nearly 15 minutes Ned talked and Chad took notes. Ned told him what he'd learned from Alice's books and charts, that explained what had happened to all the people who had disappeared and how their sudden departure had caused all the accidents and bizarre happenings. He backed it up with scriptures from Alice's Bible, and Chad carefully took them down. "What a story, Uncle Ned!" he said excitedly. "I might be the only reporter in the world at this moment who knows about this. We won't state it as fact, just as a very likely theory. I've got to get this typed up right away." "Now hang on a minute, Chad," his uncle said. "I've only given you half the story, the part that's in the books. The other half, maybe a lot more than half, in fact, has to do with the future." "What do you mean, the future?" "I mean exactly that. I can tell you when Christ is coming to earth, and some of the major events that are going to happen during the years until he does, and all about what it will be like in the next 1,000 years after that." "You're crazy, Ned! Nobody knows that." "I do. And you can too. The whole world can. It's right there in those books. You can buy them in lots of bookstores. The whole thing's laid out in complete detail. Now do you want to hear it or do you want to wait till some other reporter finds out about this?" "I want to hear it, Ned," Chad said lamely, "but listen, I..." "No, you listen, Chad, while I..." "I know, said Chad, "she went after me a few times, too." "Well, now that we know that it's all true, since the church really was taken away just like she said, I think we ought to take advantage of this second chance for salvation. I mean since we know it's real now, instead of having to take it on faith like Alice did, I think we ought to take advantage of it." "Boy, you're right, Ned, and I'm going to get right at it as soon as you finish telling me the rest of what those books say. We've got that much time yet, don't we?" "Oh, sure, Chad, there's really no hurry yet. We've still got seven years left, but the thing is, you want to get the matter settled in case you die or get killed before the next seven years pass." "Okay, Ned. What do you do? Repent and... and... things like that?" "Yeah, that's it. We say we're sorry for the bad things that we've done, believe the gospel, you know, and then we're in. Maybe just saying it like I am here is enough. It probably is." "Okay, Ned, now give me the rest of the information." "I'll do better than that," Ned said. "I'll bring all these paperbacks down to your office so you get it right."

Chad Nesser and the Clarion Newspapers didn't quite scoop the world because a lot of other people made the same discovery and phoned the radio and television networks before the morning edition hit the streets. Still, Ned's timely tip gave Chad's paper the chance to present one of the most complete and detailed explanations of the big story. These were some of the Clarion's front page headlines:

Appendix A: Yerby, RB, Up, Up and Away, 1976, p43-51
The stories detailed the events of the following seven years, explaining how the Roman Empire was going to be revived as a 10-nation confederacy and how it and the Roman prince that would be its leader would take over the world. An effort to assassinate him would fail and, recovering miraculously from a fatal head wound, he would go on not only to rule but also to be worshipped. At first everyone would be impressed with this leader, especially the Jews because he would settle the Mid-East threat of war with a brilliant solution and make a covenant with them that would re-establish their Old Testament institutions, which presumably they were all eagerly seeking. The temple would be quickly re-built and they would then be able to start offering animal sacrifices again. Meanwhile, 144,000 Jewish evangelists would have appeared and gone forth to convince many that Jesus was the Messiah. These new believers would criticize the doings of the Roman prince and he, assisted by the False Prophet, would see to it that they couldn’t buy or sell or get jobs. Only those who accepted his mark of 666 could prosper. Suddenly the prince would show his true colors as the Antichrist, establish his throne in the temple, cause the sacrifices to cease, and start to persecute everybody, especially the growing number of once-unbelieving Jews who would come to accept their Messiah during the seven years. Finally, the world would see that the Antichrist’s promises of peace were no good, and all-out war would follow.

The Antichrist and his followers would totally annihilate the Russians but then an army of 200 million Chinese would march on Israel. Those kings of the east would battle the Antichrist, with his allies of Western Europe and the Americas, including the United States, and they would be in the process of totally annihilating each other with thermonuclear weapons in the battle of Armageddon when Christ would return. Half the world would have been killed during the seven years. The surviving unbelievers would be judged then and cast off the earth, and the surviving believers would enter the Millennial Kingdom as mortals to repopulate the earth. The Antichrist and the False Prophet would be cast into the lake of fire and Satan would be bound for 1,000 years. Christ would then rule from David’s throne, and there would be total peace and prosperity. Everyone in the world would crowd into Jerusalem once a year to worship. At the end of the 1,000 years, Satan would be released to test everybody on earth and those that rebelled and followed him would be judged and cast off the earth. Satan would then go into the lake of fire, and eternity would begin. ...

In the first frantic hours after the news media broke the story, governments around the world acted with dispatch. Swiftly their operatives obtained copies of the necessary books, and the keenest eyes and cleverest minds of their intelligence agents analyzed them. It was quickly apparent to each major nation where it was supposed to fit into the unfolding order of events. “So be it then,” some of their leaders muttered. “So be it.” But others weren’t so sure. Since they knew in advance everything that was supposed to happen over the next seven years, they were pretty sure they could take the necessary steps to prevent at least some of those things from happening. Russian military experts, for instance, assured their masters in the Kremlin that they had no intention of conducting the kind of Middle East military campaign that was charted and outlined in the books, in which they were totally annihilated by the Roman prince. “Let’s get him before he gets us,” they said. “As soon as he appears, we shoot him.” One of their leaders smiled, his face twisting with infinite cunning, “We will shoot him twice,” he said. “I read the books; he recovers from the first wound.”

In Red China they didn’t take kindly to the expense of marching 200 million soldiers all the way across India, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran and Iraq. “On my map that looks like about a 4,000-mile march just to get into a big fight we can’t win,” one of their leaders said to his chief intelligence agent. “What are we supposed to be after over there?” The agent shook his head. “I don’t know,” he replied. “It can’t be real estate. We’ve got so much already, and the whole nation of Israel is only about the size of the state of Maryland in the United States.” “Well, let’s just hope the Russians shoot him twice as soon as he appears,” his master replied, “and if they don’t, let’s try to use an H-bomb by way of an ICBM and keep our boys at home.”

In the United States, the halls of Congress rang with heated debate as senators and representatives angrily warned the president against sending any troops to fight, either for or against the Antichrist. “This will be worse than Vietnam!” they cried angrily. The Senate passed a bill condemning the use of U.S. troops at Armageddon. The vote was 95 in favor, five had been raptured. And so the world waited. In every nation a majority of the people had all the details of the next seven years committed to memory, and they awaited only the first confirming sign. When it came, some of them planned to get converted immediately to play it safe, while others planned to wait until the seven years were nearly over since the books showed that the Antichrist would persecute and kill many believers.

All eyes were on Europe, watching for the appearance of the dreaded leader. They knew he would be an Italian or some kind of Roman prince, and they waited anxiously for him to start taking over a 10-nation European confederacy. And somewhere the Antichrist, too, undoubtedly waited anxiously, all too aware that the whole world was watching for his every move. Deep in the blackness of his heart he probably cursed the books and charts that had given him away. There was only one thing he could do. He’d have to go to the False Prophet, much as he hated to interrupt the work that the Prophet was doing in preparation for stamping the number 666 on everyone, and ask him what he should do. The F.P. [False Prophet] was clever, devilishly clever; surely he would be able to conjure up a way out of this impossible mess.” ...

What of the Jews?

There at present people in the world who are called, and who call themselves, “The Jews.” They claim that they are the continuation of ancient Israel, and are the “Seed of Abraham” to whom the divine promises were made, and to whom they are to be fulfilled. This claim is conceded by many earnest Christian people who believe that they find in the Bible very important prophecies that must someday be fulfilled in this company who are called “The Jews,” who worship in the synagogue and adhere to the Talmud.

In this chapter we desire to study the problem thus created, in the light of what we have already found in the word of God. To that end it will be useful first to ask whence these “Jews” came, and how they come to have such a book as the Talmud. If this is rightly understood, it will be comparatively easy to decide whether, upon Christian principles, their claim is to be conceded, and whether we are to expect that certain unfulfilled prophecies are to be realized in them. The facts may be found in any good history of the Jews. We take them, for the purpose of this discussion, mainly from Heinrich Graetz History of the Jews 2:321-359, Heinrich Ewald History of Israel 3:33-45; and Solomon Grayzel A History of the Jews (1947).

It appears that during the siege of Jerusalem by the Romans there dwelt in the city a rabbi, highly respected, by the name of Jochanan Ben Zakkai. He was out of sympathy with the policy that led to the war with Rome; and this was no doubt known to Titus, the Roman commander. Within the city the fanatical Zealots had complete control, so that Ben Zakkai could neither alter the course of affairs nor leave the besieged capital openly. He succeeded, however, in escaping by feigning death and having himself carried out of the city as if for burial, by his pupils Eleazar and Joshua. One of the leaders among the Zealots, named Ben Batiach, even assisted him in so doing. Jochanan made his way to the headquarters of Titus, was there received with kindness, and was given permission to settle at Jamnia, or Jabne, a city in Palestine not far from the Mediterranean. “The district in which this town lay belonged to the private domains of the imperial house, to which it had been bequeathed by the last will of Salome, the sister of Herod. Titus had nothing to urge against the harmless wish of Jochanan; for he could not foresee that by this unimportant concession he was enabling Judaism, feeble as it then appeared, to outlive Rome, which was in all its vigor, by thousands of years” (Graetz p324).

At Jamnia, Jochanan Ben Zakkai opened a school, and from time to time other rabbis joined him. Eventually they organized themselves into what they called a Sanhedrin, although without any election or appointment as such. Upon his death Jochanan was succeeded by Gamaliel the Younger, a grandson of the biblical Gamaliel. He was a descendant of Hillel, one of the greatest of all the rabbis, and took the title of Nasi, or Prince, also translated Patriarch.

The rabbis of this Sanhedrin began to expound the Law according to the “traditions of the elders” so strongly denounced by our Lord in Mt15:3-9. In Babylonia there was a similar group. Gradually, in the course of many years, these expositions and traditions were crystallized in the book called the Talmud, of which there are two forms, the Babylonian Talmud and the Palestinian Talmud. The religion thus produced laid the utmost emphasis upon the “middle wall of partition” that Christ abolished, striving to make it higher and stronger than ever. This was due to a correct perception that only in this way could the Jews remain a distinct people. They had no longer a country or a government, and, except for the learned among them, no common language, for they spoke the tongue of every country where they lived. Not even their religion was so distinctive as formerly, for multitudes of the Gentiles worshipped the same God and revered the same Holy Scriptures. How could the Jews be held together and continue to be a “peculiar people?” Only by preserving in all possible rigidity the ordinances handed down from the fathers, with regard to eating and drinking, trimming or shaving the beard, observing fasts and feasts, circumcision, Sabbath keeping on the seventh day of the week, synagogue worship, prohibition of intermarriage, etc., etc. These things must henceforth be their life; for if these were lost all was lost, and they must expect speedily to be absorbed in the mass of the population around them.

This was therefore their program — the exact opposite to that of Christ — and in this unholy endeavor they were only too successful, with the result that untold calamities were brought down upon themselves and upon the whole world. Ignorant that their separateness from the rest of the world was in the divine purpose temporary, they strove to render it permanent. Thus that which had been in itself good and holy became through their error a source of poison in the life of the world; and “The Jew” became the great persistent international problem.

In their teaching the rabbis exalted above measure all the provisions of the Mosaic law that could serve their purpose, and at the same time, strangely and inconsistently enough, threw overboard a large portion of the same law — that which related to the worship of God through sacrifice. They made no attempt to build again any altar, tabernacle or temple, and they paid no attention to the hereditary priesthood of the house of Aaron. No doubt they would have replied, if questioned on this point, that such worship had become impossible, on account of the destruction of the temple; but the reply is manifestly inadequate. They knew very well that the patriarchs and Moses worshipped Jehovah through sacrifice before the tabernacle was built, and that Samuel and Elijah did so at other places than tabernacle or temple, when these were too distant or were inaccessible. The cessation of sacrifice in the Christian church rests upon a good reason. Christians believe that the great and final sacrifice was offered upon the cross, making any other sacrifice now not only unnecessary but wrong. The Jews had no such reason and yet abandoned the sacrificial system, which left them without any way to deal with the problem of sin and forgiveness. From this point of view the following story of the death of Jochanan Ben Zakkai is significant:

His disciples were surprised to find their courageous master frightened and depressed in the hour of his death. He remarked that he did not fear death, but the having to appear before the Eternal Ruler, whose justice was incorruptible (Graetz p333).
This abandonment of sacrifice makes the religion of the new Judaism something different, which has no title to being the
continuation of the religion divinely revealed through Moses.

Now it must be clearly perceived that in all this the Jamnia rabbis had no authority from God, and did not profess to
have. No prophetic voice directed them to set themselves up as the heads of the Jewish people. They did it of their own
mind and on their own authority absolutely. It was a movement not from God but from men. Nor had they any commis-
dion from their own nation or from any recognized governing body in it. How great a proportion of the Jews then living in
the world accepted the new Judaism we cannot tell. Multitudes had by that time become Christians, we do not know how
many. The Jamnia movement was distinctly partisan, by the Pharisees alone. The Sadducees, including the priests and
other remnants of the old regime, had no share in it. Neither did the Essenes. There must also have been many Jews
throughout the world who, having lost their central religious and national authority at Jerusalem, did not seek for any
substitute, but contented themselves with being good citizens of whatever country they lived in; becoming then gradually
absorbed in the surrounding population and having no place in history. For those who accepted their leadership, the
Jamnia leaders did acquire, by virtue of that fact, a sort of representative authority, but this was over a section of Israel,
not over the “commonwealth of Israel” at large.

Most Christian writers on the subject of the Jews and prophecy assume, as if it were a matter of course, that those whom
we now call “The Jews,” who worship in the synagogue and adhere to the Talmud, are the same as the Jews of the Bible,
but this point needs reconsideration. On what ground can they be so regarded? They are nothing in the world but the
Jamnia organization, continued down the centuries, and can have no standing but what that group has handed down to
them.

National continuity with the biblical Israel there was none. Such continuity did exist from the time of Moses until the de-
struction of city and temple in 70AD. Although there had been many forms of government — judges, kings, high priests,
and Sanhedrin, yet there was an unbroken continuance of national life and governmental authority; unless we except the
brief episode of the Babylonian captivity. Therefore Jesus speaks of the rulers of His day as sitting in Moses’ seat (Mt23:2);
and Paul admitted the position and authority of the High Priest in his day (Acts23:5); but neither could have taken such an
attitude towards Ben Zakkai and his successors. The national existence had come to an end with the destruction of Jerusa-
lem. The Sanhedrin had its last meeting and was dispersed. Most of its members were slain. The priesthood, ditto; nor did
the Jamnia rabbis attempt to restore either Sanhedrin or priesthood, or endeavor to secure for their own proceedings any
kind of commission from them. What they did was a new beginning.

Covenant continuity also there was none. The Old Covenant having passed away, and these men having refused the New
Covenant, they stood outside of any covenant relation to God. They were the cut off branches of the olive tree described by
Paul, and what they did was no longer a part of the history of the People of God.

There being thus, as we have seen, neither national continuity nor covenant continuity, nor, on account of their rejection
of sacrifice and their exaltation of the Talmud above the inspired scriptures, any true religious continuity, what was left to
link them with the Old Covenant Israel? Only one thing, tribal descent. That they did have, although not more than their
countrymen who had become Christians. Yet it is true that they were members of the community of Israel. This does not
mean personal blood lineage from the patriarch Abraham, which few would claim and none can prove, and which was not
from the beginning essential, but it does mean community descent. We admit that this was left to the men who organized
the new Judaism at Jamnia and is left to those who follow them.

Can any just claim to the privileges and position of Israel, or any expectation that this group will enjoy the fulfillment of
the divine promises, now or in time to come, be built upon this single ground of community descent? We believe not. As
shown in previous chapters, those promises must be understood as spoken to the People of God, the Seed of Abraham, the
group possessing covenant continuity, and concerning this same group the prophecies were uttered. Any prophecies un-
fulfilled at the time of the transition from the Old Covenant Israel to the New Covenant Israel must be fulfilled to the lat-
ter, if such fulfillment is still appropriate and desirable. Prophecies not appropriate or desirable to the new situation must
be regarded as having lapsed. The Visible Christian Church being now the New Covenant Israel, those whom we call “The
Jews” are outsiders, cut off branches, having no more connection with either promises or prophecies than any Gentile
group. Mere tribal or racial connection, as we have seen, was from the beginning of no importance, unless joined to cove-
nant continuity. To base upon this any expectation that certain promises must still be fulfilled to the Jews is nothing less
than a return to that “confidence in the flesh” against which Paul warns us.

It will help to confirm us in this conclusion if we remember that this new beginning by Jochanan Ben Zakkai took place
knew nothing of any such set of people, and cannot have spoken of them. It is likely that John did know of them and writes
concerning them the scathing denunciation of Rev2:9 and 3:9.