

Eschatology and History

Because of the recent interest in end time prophecy, I thought it might be useful to put together this very brief outline of historical events that may impact our interpretation of Scriptural prophecy. Most folks are unfamiliar with world and church history, and may not know that many of the prophecies, have already been fulfilled. The main prophetic books concerning Christ's return and the Judgment are Daniel, Ezekiel, and Revelation. And of course there are references in other books of the NT such as Matt. 24, 1Thess. 4, etc. There are theological disagreements over what happens when Christ returns. In Revelation, chapter 20, we find the mention of a thousand year period, called a "millennium." It is the sequencing of the events before, during, and after the millennium, that underlie most of these disputes. Here are the main events:

Church Age – this is when the church presents the gospel, acts as a witness to Christ, and serves both the body and the world. In short, it evangelizes, disciples, and worships. It is also referred to as the period of the **New Covenant**.

Intermediate State – after we die, our spirits immediately go to be with Christ to await the resurrection of our physical body. The Bible says some have "fallen asleep" before us, but they will return with Christ. This is speaking of their spirits which reign with Christ in the heavenly realms during the Church Age (the great cloud of witnesses).

Great Tribulation – this is the persecution of the church by the world and Satan. There are many tribulations, but Matt. 24 describes one unlike any other before or since. That suggests it falls between a number of tribulations, and is not the final one.

Return of Christ – this is his victorious return in the clouds accompanied by the angels and the spirits of those who died. No one knows the day or time of this event, not even the Son. We know that he will return like a "thief in the night" and will ask for an accounting of what we did during his absence (a number of parables speak of this).

Resurrection of the Body – This refers to the physical raising of the body from the dead to eternal life. The spirit which went to be with the Lord at the point of death is here reunited with the body, and the body is glorified, and made imperishable. There is a first and second resurrection spoken of in Revelation. Amillennialists say the first refers to the point at which the soul goes to be with the Lord, the second is the physical body.

The **Judgment** – we will all stand before the throne of God, both the elect and the non-elect. This is where we will give an account of how we lived, and make our plea as to why God should spare us from eternal damnation. We plead Christ and him alone.

The **New Heaven** and **New Earth** – the earth itself yearns for renewal, much as we yearn for the resurrection of the body after death. There is also a **New Jerusalem** (Rev. 3:12).

The **Eternal State** – this is where we live eternally, face to face with God, enjoying the New Heaven and the New Earth, much as Adam enjoyed the Garden before the Fall.

Three Views

There are three basic interpretations concerning the millennium of Revelation 20 (the thousand years): *pre-millennialism*, *post-millennialism*, and *a-millennialism*. These represent the view respectively of Christ's return *before* the thousand years, *after* the thousand years, and *without* a literal thousand years. Each has its variations, and its distinctives. I am amillennial, and so you may detect my impatience with the other views. All I have to say on the matter is that they cannot all be true. That is because Scripture cannot have multiple, conflicting, and yet somehow equally valid interpretations. Truth by its very nature is exclusive. Here is a short description of the sequence of events concerning the return of Christ under each interpretation:

Premillennialism – The original name of this Doctrine of the End Times was *Chiliasm*. It was not a doctrine of the church that can be found in any creed or form of devotion. But it was a widely held opinion of such distinguished teachers as Barnabas, Papias, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Methodius, and Lactantius. It was opposed by Caius, Origen, Dionysius the Great, Eusebius, and later both Justin and Augustine. Barnabas was the first and only teacher of premillennialism in the early church, teaching that the church would not go through the Tribulation. He was martyred in 73AD after enduring Nero's persecution in the late 60's. Philip Schaff, the great 19th c. church historian tells us,

The Jewish Chiliasm rested on a carnal misapprehension of the Messianic Kingdom, a literal interpretation of prophetic figures, and an overestimate of the importance of the Jewish people and the holy city as the center of that Kingdom. It was developed shortly before and after Christ in the apocalyptic literature, as in the Book of Enoch, the Apocalypse of Baruch, 4th Esdras, the Testaments of the 12 Patriarchs, and the Sibylline Books. It was adopted by the heretical sect of the Ebionites, and the Gnostic Cerinthus."¹

There are two main versions before premillennialism splinters into a myriad of variations. There is **Classical Premillennialism**, and there is **Pre-Tribulation Rapture**. This latter form was popularized by Hal Lindsey in *The Late Great Planet Earth* in the 1980's, and by Tim LaHaye in his *Left Behind* series of the 1990's. It was a staple of 19th c. Darbyism which was spread through the Scofield Study Bible of 1909 and dispensationalists at Dallas Theological Seminary. Despite its current popularity, it was a minority view. The Classical version says the Church Age is followed by Christ's return at the point of the Great Tribulation. There is a "rapture" (snatching up) of any remaining living believers, and a resurrection of all dead believers, who together are "caught up in the clouds."² There is disagreement whether believers escape the tribulation (pre-trib), or they are raptured *after* the tribulation (post-trib). They are reunited with their spirits in their glorified, eternal bodies during the rapture. In the pre-trib version, this rapture apparently continues for either 3 ½ years, or 7 years of tribulation, depending on who you talk to. In the pre-trib version, it is as if a bus picked up its passengers to be dropped back later. The Classical version makes it an immediate up and down event that takes place at the close of the tribulation (majority view), or at the start (minority view) to herald the event. Either way, the Classical version says that believers will endure the tribulation. One assumes that if the rapture takes place at the start of the tribulation, that Christ will likewise endure it. The essential difference between classical and pre-trib, is that pre-trib requires *two* returns of Christ. There is one at the start of the tribulation to take his people out of it, and there is one at its end to return them to earth. All of the encouragements given to believers in the NT suggest that they need to endure the tribulations, great or small.

At the end of the great tribulation (majority view), Christ and all his believers return to celebrate a millennium-long reign on the "renewed" earth. This would seem to be alongside non-believers in their non-glorious bodies, occupying and enjoying the benefits of a renewed earth. Others hold that the

¹ Schaff, Philip *History of the Christian Church*, 8 vol.(Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1949), II, p. 614

² 1Thess 4:17 - lit. "seized in the cloudiness" or "cloud" as opposed to clouds in the sky – it is more likely a reference to the cloud which engulfed the tabernacle in the OT, representing the glory of God. Ex 40:35

renewed earth must await the Judgment, in which case we get believers enjoying the benefits of a renewed eternal body, while enduring a non-renewed and still-corrupting earth. Living non-believers have the opportunity during this thousand year period to turn to Christ, as if it were purgatory. I assume they do not have eternal bodies. Thus believers live out the millennium, while non-believers continue to die during the millennium. I would also assume that no new believers are being born, but non-believers are. The glorified body in Scripture is not like our bodies now, and there is no giving and taking in marriage (Matt. 22:30). The beginning of the thousand years, according to this view, is also the point at which Satan is bound. As a result, there is universal peace on earth. Satan was bound by Christ in Matt. 12:29; Lk. 10:18. I am unclear as to what purpose binding serves in this scenario, or when Satan was un-bound so as to require re-binding. He will be released at the end of the millennium in this view. So to be bound here would mean he is also released twice: once in the biblical past, and again at the end.

I also don't know at what point these new converts get their glorified bodies, because there is no second rapture (?), and Christ has already returned. Do they receive their new bodies at their conversion, or at the Judgment? If it is at the judgment, then they will die during the millennium just as non-believers do. I therefore assume that they do not immediately enter into eternity with the rest of the believers, and must await another physical resurrection of the dead. And I have no idea what role faith plays in all this. After all, Christ is physically present with them, and they live alongside eternal beings who never age, and who can walk through walls. It would suggest a period that duplicates the NT with living miracles that walk and talk in front of them every day.

At the close of the millennium, according to this view, Satan is released and gathers up any remaining non-believers in his cause. He fights a huge war at Armageddon, which he loses, as if Christ never defeated him on the cross. Then dead non-believers are resurrected to stand before God at the Judgment. I don't know whether believers are judged at their rapture, or whether they share this delayed judgment with the non-believers. If the former, then there are two judgments instead of one (that's why some claim there are two Judgment seats). If the latter, then I suppose they had their glorified bodies "on loan" during the interim millennium. If there are two judgments, then I don't understand how or when the new converts are judged. This is very strange indeed. All of this is then followed by a new heaven, a new earth, and the eternal state.

Postmillennialism – This view says that the Church Age has already endured the tribulation and that all events have already taken place in history. The Church Age will, however, be followed by the millennium, during which the Church dominates the world and its governments. This is sometimes referred to as the *Jewish Dream*, which Christ rejected – it refers to the expectation that he came as a temporal king. The millennium is followed immediately by the return of Christ. And then, as a single event, we have the resurrection of the dead, the Judgment, the new heaven and the new earth, and the eternal state. The issue in this interpretation is the need for, and purpose of, dominating world governments, and establishing human laws based on Scripture. It is as if the nation-state of Israel were to be reinstated worldwide. You see here the theological basis for groups like the Christian Coalition, or Jerry Falwell's Silent Majority. This view was condemned by the Heidelberg Catechism, Q.52, and the Belgic Confession, Art. 37.

Amillennialism – There are two variations of this. Either the Church Age is in fact the millennium (which makes the millennium metaphorical); or the millennium has already taken place in history. It is the period during which the church grows in size and influence around the globe. Both variations of this view deny a future millennium, which distinguishes them from the postmillennialists. Amillennialists instead say that the Church will endure increasing tribulation as Satan gains increasing influence over the world, and particularly following his "release." They also say that, despite being bound by Christ, Satan has always exerted influence on the world (1 Jn. 5:19); but he has no hold on believers (Jn. 14:30), unless they give it to him (Matt. 16:23). The Church Age, according to this view, is followed immediately by the

return of Christ. At that point, in a single event, we have the resurrection of the dead (believers and non-believers alike), the Judgment of both, the establishment of the new heaven and the new earth, and the eternal state. The eternal state is distinct from the right we gained by faith to an inheritance in this estate. It is characterized by having a new and glorified body, living on a new earth, and enjoying a full and undimmed communion with God in the New Jerusalem (an ideal community of elect under Christ's rule).

The issue usually discussed in this view is the timing of Satan's release. Did it already happen, or is it yet to be? *Let me say that any conclusion concerning that would be a matter of conjecture.* And it would involve a determination of the start of the thousand years as well as the end. And so, between a metaphorical and a literal interpretation of the thousand years, the metaphorical is less controversial. But that doesn't prevent us from looking at events that reflect Satan's increasingly severe persecution of the church, so that we may take appropriate action. This amillennial view of eschatology is the historic and reformed view of the church at large.

Proper Biblical Interpretation

Let me give some cautions here. Eschatology is controversial, and often causes heated debates. It has several implications regarding our view of Christ and what he accomplished on the cross. As you know, every heresy is based on two things: who Jesus Christ is, and what he accomplished on the cross. And so our eschatology must be guided by our understanding of these two things. Our view of the end times is also determined by which rules of interpretation we use. Alternative rules have been published during the past 20 years that are at odds with some of the traditional rules. Biblical theology, for example, is quickly supplanting Systematic theology as the preferred approach to interpretation. One could say that biblical theology focuses on the trees and tree-clusters in the forest so that no tree is left unexamined, while systematic theology focuses on the forest so that it knows how each tree contributes to the ecology of the whole. Confessions and Creeds are statements about the forest. They have largely been discarded as divisive because they allow no room for alternative views within their scope. They are sometimes snubbed as nothing more than conclusions reached by systematic theologians. Meanwhile, the underlying texts of Scripture (i.e. the original manuscripts) have been challenged. Newly discovered manuscripts are being brought under the cover of the canon and used to "correct" the texts we had in our possession at the time of the Reformation. In some instances, we have assigned a greater value to the antiquity of a manuscript than to its historicity (its source and transmission). The honored discipline of textual criticism has been corrupted to include supposition about missing documents, motivations, and authorship.

What all of this means is that we are making the text of the Bible a moving target. When we cannot agree on interpretation, we use different rules of interpretation. When the rules won't support a particular conclusion, we use different translations. When the translations won't support our agenda, then we change the text from which the translations are made. I am suspicious that this sloughing off of the rules and the foundations of the past may be motivated more by a desire for theological libertinism than by a quest for theological truth. The time has come when the church no longer speaks the same language, quotes the same Bible, nor confesses the same truth. Satan's lies are succeeding within the confines of the church (as if he had been unbound), and therefore the gospel itself is being corrupted. These are echoes from the Garden of Eden as Satan continues to ask us, "Did God really say...?" (Gen. 3:1)

So let me list 10 traditional rules of biblical interpretation before we explore the historical events related to eschatology. A good book on hermeneutics (rules of interpretation) may help you grasp these rules in greater depth. Try A. Berkeley Michelsen's *Understanding Scripture*, or Bob Smith's *Basics of Biblical Interpretation*. I also suggest you read William Hendriksen's book, *More than Conquerors*, to appreciate that perhaps the *Book of Revelation* is not a linear and chronological portrayal of future events. Much of the confusion in eschatology comes from a misperception of the message of *Revelation*.

Ten Rules of Biblical Interpretation

1. Scripture is the very word of God, and is inerrant in its original autographs.
2. Scripture is best interpreted by Scripture itself, and not by external events or writings.
3. The majority of passages on a specific topic will outweigh any exceptional passages on the same topic.
4. A specific passage outweighs a general passage on the same topic. And consequently, a specific passage would also outweigh a majority of passages that are only general in nature.
5. The truth of any given verse will be consistent with the whole truth of Scripture.
6. Therefore, the context of any given verse is also the whole of Scripture.
7. The meaning of any given verse is determined by its author, audience, circumstance, and intent. In other words, it was written by a known author (even if we don't know his name), to a known audience (even if we don't know their names), at a known point in time (even if we can't specify the year), with a message for *them* to understand, not *us*. From this, we may extract an eternal *principle* that may be applied to similar circumstances in our own time.
8. The author, audience, circumstance, and intent, are determined in large part by the language that is used. This rule refers to the vocabulary, grammar, style, syntax, idioms, allusions, symbols, types, etc. Style refers to whether the specific verse we are reading is literal, metaphorical, poetic, prophetic, etc.
9. We rely on the original language, and not a translation of it, to determine the actual meaning of a Scriptural passage (*that's why altering the underlying text is so dangerous*).
10. To understand the things of God, we depend on the illumination of the Holy Spirit, and not on our own knowledge, logic, or intellect alone.

Symbols and References

Having listed these ten rules, it is clear that using historical events to interpret the Bible is improper. Instead, we interpret first. Next we look to Scripture itself to identify events that fulfill a given prophecy. Only where a prophecy has not been fulfilled within the pages of Scripture do we look to historical events, or to extra-biblical texts such as the Apocrypha, to see if the prophecy was fulfilled outside of Scripture. Even then, there are constraints placed on us: such events must be what the *original* audience was being told to look for (e.g. Matt. 24:33). Yet, when we deal with the millennium of Revelation chapter 20, we encounter a dilemma. If it is a *literal* thousand years, then no one in the original audience would have been alive to see its fulfillment, whether within the pages of the Bible or outside its confines. And so, another generation would be the intended audience. And if it is not a literal thousand years, then there are no events to look for except in a very general way. It needs to be pointed out that the number 1000 in prophetic literature is equivalent to an uncountable or infinite number. A prophetic year is 360 days and not 365 days, and so prophetic years are shorter than calendar years. The number seven is a symbol for perfection. The number 6 is a symbol for imperfection. The number 3 is a symbol of completeness. The only point I am making is that the original audience understood the meaning of these symbols (rule 8). Our job is to determine what they understood, and how they interpreted the message, before we can know what to look for. On the other hand, the NT is a better interpreter of the OT than any interpretation available to those who lived in the OT.

The Purpose of Eschatology And the Limits of Our Knowledge

Because the millennium is a length of time that exceeds the lifetime of the original audience, it is not unreasonable to assume two things. First, that the millennium and other references were *figurative* in a way that the original audience could understand (rule 7), and then apply to their own time. Second, that this applies to all subsequent readers of the text as well. Looking for actual historical events that may or may not fulfill the figurative implications of the millennium (especially the release of Satan), are useful only to remind us that the time is short until Christ returns. We are to be about his business while he is not with us physically. The reason we even look for external historical events to satisfy the prophecies, is to remind us that God is sovereign, and that he is faithful to fulfill his promises. The Bible places constraints on our imagination. We are to stick to what we know (Jn. 3:11); focus on the basics (1Cor. 15:3); and point the discussion to the historic Christ, instead of an unknowable future (Mk. 13:32). We do not want to undermine our testimony by going beyond what is written (1Cor. 4:6). We want to portray the Bible as capable of reasonable interpretation by anyone who reads it (2Tim. 3:16). When we go beyond what is written, and we weave some fantastic story about events that are shrouded in darkness, it may become so complex that only those with special knowledge are able to interpret the Bible. The rest of us are forced to accept their interpretation. This is my objection to pre-millennialism. It smacks of Gnosticism, and New Age mysticism. The JW's were always in trouble for making predictions of the date of Christ's return, and so they stopped. Meanwhile, the Christian community continues to speak of things it knows nothing about. We don't want a label of "lunatic fringe" placed on the children of God (Rom. 2:24; Matt. 5:16; Dt. 13:1-5). But there is something even more sinister in what seems to be a compulsion to predict events, or to "look for signs." It is divination (Dt 18:10,22). It is arrogant to think that we can be privy to the secret things of God. And it is dangerous to portray ourselves as modern prophets who speak the very words of God about things that God has said he will not discuss (Acts 1:7). There is only one thing we all know, and we all agree on, and it is that Christ will return when we least expect it.

Historical Events (things you may not know about)

Now, to put to rest much of the conjecture that I hear, I have gathered together a few historical events that relate to the prophecies contained in the Bible, especially the OT. While there are those who acknowledge that some of the prophecies have been fulfilled by past events, they also maintain that there will be a double fulfillment of some of these prophecies. Others maintain that there will be multiple returns, resurrections, and judgments, as I indicated earlier. We should assume a double fulfillment of a prophecy only in two circumstances. First, where the prophecy has not been completely fulfilled by the first event, and so some portion of the event remains to be fulfilled. The second is where the first is a typical fulfillment, and the actual fulfillment will come later. That is, the initial event is a *type* of the actual fulfillment. It is an example or deposit for what is to come. The most notable of these kinds of prophecies is found in the 7th and 8th chapters of Isaiah. There we find the prophecy of the virgin birth typically fulfilled. You should have your Bible open to the passages listed and read them completely before reading the historical accounts which follow. Here is a portion of Isaiah 7 and 8:

Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz, "Ask the LORD your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights." But Ahaz said, "I will not ask; I will not put the LORD to the test." Then Isaiah said, "Hear now, you house of David! Is it not enough to try the patience of men? Will you try the patience of my God also? Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him **Immanuel**. He will eat curds and honey when he knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right. But before the boy knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right, the land of the two kings you dread will be laid waste. The LORD will bring on you and on your people and on the house of your father a time unlike any since Ephraim broke away from Judah — he will bring the king of Assyria." Isa 7:10-17 NIV

The LORD said to me, "Take a large scroll and write on it with an ordinary pen: **Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz**. And I will call in Uriah the priest and Zechariah son of Jeberechiah as reliable witnesses for me." Then I went to the prophetess, and she conceived and gave birth to a son. And the LORD said to me, "Name him Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz. Before the boy knows how to say 'My father' or 'My mother,' the wealth of Damascus and the plunder of Samaria will be carried off by the king of Assyria." Isa 8:1-4 NIV

This partial fulfillment is to mark the time of the prophecy's completion as it refers to the end of the reigns of the kings of Syria and Samaria. The child of the virgin birth was to be called *Immanuel*. Chapter 8, however, shows that the child of the Prophetess was called *Maher shalal hash baz* (swift is booty, speedy is prey). Yet we know this was the same child spoken of in chapter 7, because 8:4 makes the very same reference to marking the time of the demise of these kingdoms. The name change suggests a dual prophecy. Therefore it is not surprising to find the prophecy repeated in Matthew 1:23 as something finally fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

Most of the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation do not contain partially fulfilled prophecies like this. They do not require something further to occur. Therefore, where that is true, we should not be concerned with the events of today's world as if they related to the prophecies of these books. However, when a reference is made to the return of Christ, or the Judgment, and we have an event such as the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD, the question naturally arises whether that event was a typical fulfillment, or the actual and final fulfillment of Daniel and Matthew.

As you might expect, there is some disagreement within the Christian community. The postmillennialists say it was the final fulfillment. The amillennialists and premillennialists say it was only a typical fulfillment. If was only typical, then we have two or more fulfillments, each being external to Scripture. For example, was the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple at the Babylonian captivity a type for the destruction in 70 AD, which was a type for the destruction of any man-made substitute for God's ordained means of worship? I think a case can be made that the destruction in 70 AD was unique, and that the return of Christ and the events surrounding his return do not fit any type that might be defined by that event. It had a very specific historical and spiritual purpose, and that purpose or need will never arise again. The purpose of Christ's return is not the same as the purpose for the destruction of the temple. In saying that, I must acknowledge that such an interpretation runs counter to some of the church's finest expositors, including Calvin. The contention is over our use of and definition of "type."

Calvin and others say that the destruction is a type for the destruction of the church's enemies. The Reformers said that Christ "returned in Judgment" in 70 AD as God removed any means of worshipping him other than through Christ by faith in the Spirit. And while I agree that both things are true, I deny that these events constitute a type that will be repeated at the Second Coming. But I affirm that the church will continue to endure persecution of increasing strength and cruelty until Christ returns. And I affirm that, from time to time, God will intervene to protect his people and punish their enemies. This has been true throughout the history of physical and spiritual Israel. However, contrary to the postmillennialists, there will be no *Jewish Dream*, no *Golden Age* to come. Satan was bound and the church enjoyed unfettered growth for an eon. However, I suspect that Satan has been unbound. As I said earlier, comparing historical events to the predicted signs of the NT is conjectural at best. It may be that the events we see in history are "typical" fulfillments of NT signs. The destruction of Jerusalem may be both a sign and a type. It was a unique fulfillment of the biblical prophecy in history, but it was also a portent of other destructions to come (e.g. the Reformation). Does every generation see these types uniquely fulfilled in their own time? And are they right to draw such conclusions? I suggest the answer is "yes" to both questions. And if I am correct, then what we are left with, after setting aside interpretations of current and past events, is a sense of urgency. That's because there is nothing to prevent Christ from returning today – there are no unfulfilled prophecies, no remaining signs – only typical fulfillments.

The Biblical Dead-Line

Besides multiple fulfillments of a prophetic sign being unlikely, there is a *specific* prohibition against applying the prophecies of the OT past the coming of the Messiah. And remember, specific passages overrule general ones (rule 4). The prohibition is contained in Matthew 11:13 and Luke 16:16: "For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John. And if you are willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who was to come." In other words, the events prophesied in the OT all pointed to the coming of the Messiah, and the time of John the Baptist, but not beyond. And we are told directly that John the Baptist is the fulfillment of the coming of Elijah, who was to come prior to the Messiah. Therefore, whatever we know of the future, beyond the pages of Scripture, must come from the NT alone, or else this verse does not mean what it apparently says. And it may be that it only means there would be no more prophets. But if that was true, then we would have to throw out John's Revelation, for John could not be a prophet. And it is not speaking of the men and women who were prophets, but of the books of the OT called "the Prophets." Now, let's begin to look at some historical events that fulfilled the prophecies of Daniel as a means of confirming this limitation. Open your Bible.

Daniel 8:1-8. This passage refers to the "Ram" of Persia. For 200 years following the defeat of Babylon by Cyrus, the Persian Ram magnified itself. The Medes are represented by the small horn of the ram. The he-goat who came out of the west and overcame the Ram was Alexander the Great of Macedonia. The victory was swift but so was Alexander's end at age 33. His horn of power having been broken off, 4 horns took its place: the "Diadochi," i.e. rule by the 4 Macedonian generals who succeeded Alexander. Tradition says that Alexander visited Jerusalem's Temple and was read this passage from Daniel. He acknowledged its fulfillment in him and bowed his knee to Adonai for the wonder of His word.

"So when you see standing in the holy place 'the abomination that causes desolation,' spoken of through the prophet Daniel - let the reader understand - then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains."
Matt. 24:15-16 NIV

In Daniel 9 we read about the abomination. Christ refers to it in Matthew 24:15 as an event to be completed after 29 AD. It does not mean it was not already fulfilled. It simply says that what Daniel referred to will happen, again. Someone will sacrifice a pig on the altar of the Temple, as described in the Book of Maccabees. It is my belief that it was an event foretold in greater detail in the book of Revelation. And I believe it was necessarily fulfilled prior to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD when the altar ceased to exist.³ The disciples in Jerusalem thought the prophecy was intended for them, and not for future generations. We know that because, just before the city was destroyed, the Christians heard about the sacrifice of the pig, and they fled the city. They took refuge in the hills, just as Christ instructed them to do in Matthew 24.

As late as 132 A.D. there were men such as Simeon Bar Cocheba, claiming to be the Messiah, but they were rejected by the church. Christ warned the church to beware such impersonators in Matthew 24. And Matthew 24:34 indicates that there were those living in 29 A.D. who would witness the foretold events as they occurred. Matthew 24:25 shows that Christ was speaking only to his disciples when he said, "See, I have told you ahead of time." Why them alone? So that they would not be deceived. They were forewarned and forearmed against such deceivers. Let's continue with Daniel.

³ Interpreting Revelation depends in large part on the *dating* of Revelation. If it was written in 95 AD, then the events of 70 AD could not have fulfilled its prophecies. But if it was written in 68 AD, then they could. Philip Schaff dated it at 68 AD after finding that Irenaeus' mention of the reign of "Domitianou" was not referring to the emperor Domitian (who reigned in 95 AD), but to Nero's nickname. Nero's reign ended in 68 AD. It is also curious that the deaths of between 600,000 and 1,100,000 Jews in 70 AD, and the destruction of the temple which ended sacrifices, is never mentioned in the NT. It points to an earlier date as well.

Daniel 9:24-27. It seems perfectly obvious that this points to the coming of the Messiah, but it is the source of great confusion and debate. I'm going to make some interpretive suggestions about these verses. Nothing I say about the dating is controversial; only the conclusions I draw from it. This is the most extraordinary prophecy in the Bible. That's because, if we can fix the date that the clock begins running here, then we can know the date it predicts for the coming of Messiah. It is fixed by the issuing of the decree (v. 25). Which decree? It is generally agreed that it is the decree of Artaxerxes in Neh. 2:1. The start may then be dated at about 445 BC. Some suggest that Ezra 9:9 mentions a decree. That passage would be dated at about 457 BC. That passage is more metaphorical than literal, and no actual decree is mentioned. So we will use Nehemiah.

Here is the problem. The seventy "sevens" or "weeks" in v. 24, are either prophetic years (360 days) or calendar years (365.25 days). Dan. 4:32 and 9:2 suggest that Daniel is using literal years. We are given two periods of time. The first is 490 years (70x7); the second is 434 years (62x7). They mark two separate series of events. The first marks the end of transgression and sin, reconciliation for iniquity, bringing in everlasting righteousness, sealing up vision and prophecy (see Dan. 12:4; Zech. 13:2-3; Rev. 22:18), and anointing the "most holy." The second marks the time from which the walls of Jerusalem will be restored until the coming of Messiah. Nehemiah spent 49 years rebuilding the walls. If we add on the 434 years until the Messiah, we get 483 years from the time the wall construction began until the coming of Messiah. This means there is a 7 year gap between the coming of Messiah, and the end of sin (490 minus 483). Verse 27 mentions a 7 year covenant. And in the middle of the 7 years, there is an end to sacrifice and offering. Jesus' ministry was 3 ½ years. You can see where the premillennialists get their figures.

The problem with using literal years is that 445 BC plus 483 years, takes us to 38 AD. That doesn't fit any scenario we know of. Therefore we have to assume they are prophetic years. And if they are prophetic years, then the sum cannot be 483 years. That's because the 49 years that Nehemiah used to build the walls were calendar years. So we need to convert the 434 years to 428 calendar years and then add on the 49 years. This is 477 years after 445 BC, which takes us to 33 AD (we skip the year 0). We ignore the adjustment to the calendar in the 1500's, because all of the years would be adjusted by the same amount, and so there is no net change (when we adjust the calendar, Jesus was born 3-5 BC and died 28-30 AD). This would be at the close of Christ's ministry. We know his ministry began at age 30, as required by the law (Lk. 3:23), and it lasted for 3 ½ years. So this date would mark his sacrifice on the cross. The interpretive question here is whether "until the Anointed One comes" refers to his birth, or the promise of our release from sin. We must assume it is the latter, based on the other half of what Daniel prophesied.

OK, fine. We have a date. What about those 7 years, and the middle of the 7? Remember the 490 years? That works out to 483 calendar years. Subtracting our 477 years still leaves a gap of 6 years, the prophetic difference between 490 and 483. No matter how you cut it, there are 3 years unaccounted for, assuming Jesus established the New Covenant of his blood when he *began* his ministry. Jesus "put an end to sacrifice and offering" on the cross (Heb. 10:9,10; 8:13). And Dan 9:27 tells us that it happened in the middle of the week (in the middle of the 7 years). So establishing the covenant of the New Testament began with his ministry in 27 AD or so, and was sealed on the cross with his blood in about 30 AD. What happened during the 3 years following Christ's crucifixion that fits with Daniel's prophecy? We know there was a massive persecution of the church at Jerusalem, and many believers fled (they were scattered). This ensured that they would plant the seeds of the faith wherever they went. In other words, during these 3 years the covenant was confirmed. Many were converted because of the resurrection and the testimony of the Church. The context of these verses is the *covenant*, and its timeframe is marked by "putting an end to sacrifice and offering." Therefore, nothing remains concerning these 6 or 7 years mentioned in Daniel. Beyond these specific years, undated, we have the destruction of the city and the sanctuary (Dan 9:26 is fulfilled AD), and we have the continuing attack by Satan until the end (9:27, which continues beyond 70 AD). Prophetically and figuratively speaking, the temple was destroyed in 33 AD. Christ said, "Tear

down this temple and in 3 days I will resurrect it,” (Jn. 2:19). “A time is coming when you will worship neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem,” (Jn. 4:21-23). Thus, Daniel is not speaking of the temple’s physical destruction. But Christ, in saying, “Not one stone will be left on another,” is indeed speaking of it. And that ensures that the prohibition in Matt. 11:13 remains intact: Daniel’s prophecies end with the coming of Messiah; a new prophetic sign is given which was to have a unique fulfillment.

Now, there is a sticky translation issue in Dan 9:26 that touches on the conclusions I just reached. There is substantial disagreement as to whether the “ruler who is to come” or the “prince who is to come” is a reference to Christ, the anti-Christ, or to some other leader who will tear down the temple. The pronoun “he” in verse 27 has no reference; and so it could be referring to the Messiah or to this prince. And then there is the possibility that the prince and the Messiah are the same person. That means there is some disagreement as to what the covenant is about in verse 27. Is it about the covenant of the New Testament, or a covenant between Satan and many? If this is a covenant between Satan and anyone, or between the anti-Christ and anyone, it would be the only instance in all of Scripture in which such a covenant has been suggested. I am a covenant theologian, and I know that covenants are mentioned throughout the Bible. I have no knowledge of any covenant that exists between Satan and his cohorts that would be comparable to the one that exists between God and his children, or between the Father and the Son. I believe the Messiah and the prince who is to come, are one and the same. It refers to the promise in Deut 18:18 of a ruler or leader who is to arise from among his people. This is the one John the Baptist’s disciples asked about: “Are you the one who was to arise or should we look for another?” Matt. 11:3.

One last thing and we’re done with this passage. It says that the people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. Its end will be a flood, and desolations have been decreed until the end of the war. We are told by some that the city was destroyed by the Romans, not by the Christians, and not by the Jews; and so the ruler and the Messiah cannot be the same person. Well, I suppose we have to consider that the Romans would not have come to destroy the city if the Jews had not mounted an all-out assault, and declared themselves a free state. The issue here is not one of language but of meaning, and of causes. The Romans were the immediate cause, but the Jewish uprising was the stimulus. There is no inconsistency in saying that the Jews, the people from whom the ruler arose to become Messiah, caused the destruction of the city. And so there is no compelling reason to reject the conclusion that these two persons are the same. But notice that this objection has a presumptive premise. The premise is that we are talking about physical destruction, and that is exactly what I am rejecting. Now, what about the flood? The city was destroyed by fire, not flood. Again, that was the physical destruction. I am talking about the prophetic and metaphorical destruction. The flood flowed from the mouth of God: His Word overcame everything in his path. Most translations miss the imagery of words “flowing” from Christ’s mouth (Mat 4:4; 5:2), but it is there in the original language. Bad translations lead to bad interpretations. Let’s move on. In quick succession, here are the historical events, by verse.

Daniel 11:14-19. Antiochus the Great, head of Syria, did indeed wage war with Egypt. He gave his daughter to be queen of Egypt under the Ptolemies. She was named Cleopatra, the first of a line of Cleopatras. Antiochus the Great occupied Judea and made war with Pergamum antagonizing Rome in the process. Rome mounted an allied offensive with Pergamum which defeated Antiochus at Magnesia. Hannibal managed to escape, but Antiochus had stumbled and fallen, as indicated.

Daniel 11:18-20. This speaks of the Seleucid Empire established by Antiochus the Great's son, and the wars it waged with Egypt and Rome. Seleucus sent an oppressor/tax collector named Heliodorus through Jerusalem and Judea to raise funds to pay for the indemnity of his father's war with Rome. Heliodorus later assassinated Seleucus, hoping to take over the Seleucid Empire. Rome instead wanted Antiochus' other son, Antiochus Epiphanes, to succeed Seleucus. They considered him a "friend" because of his indoctrination during the nearly 20 years he spent as a hostage in Rome. He was the security deposit guaranteeing complete payment of the war-time indemnity incurred by his father and brother.

Daniel 11:20,21. Seleucus had two sons. One was about 12. The other was still an infant at the time of his father's murder. Rome wanted their "friend" to control the buffer zone of Judea and arranged an exchange of hostages just before Seleucus' death. The elder son went to Rome. Antiochus was released to go and do as he pleased. He went to Athens where he acquired a love for everything Hellenic. When Heliodorus was rejected by the people to succeed Seleucus, Antiochus IV Epiphanes returned home to rule, backed by an army from Pergamum. The turnover in rule was effected peacefully and even cheerfully. He had the general of the Seleucid armies eliminate the infant son of his brother. He then requested that the Roman Senate permanently detain the rightful heir, Demetrius, in Rome.

Daniel 11:22-12:13. Antiochus began a program of Hellenization throughout the Seleucid domain, including Judea. This was promoted by the wealthy merchants of Judea and a large percentage of the populace. Only a remnant remained faithful to the covenant of God. A citadel was built in Jerusalem to house troops of Antiochus' army. A gymnasium was built to house the nude wrestling events which shocked the Jewish leaders. And social clubs were begun which catered to the homosexual depravities of the time.

The high priest was assassinated and his position sold to the highest bidder, Levite or not. This, plus the program of Hellenization, produced serious unrest in the region prompting Antiochus to begin plans for the suppression and reorientation of the Jewish faith. First, however, he wanted to secure Egypt for himself, something which his father had never achieved. His sister, Cleopatra, had died in Egypt, leaving her two young sons to rule the Ptolemaic Empire. Two generals, Eulaeus and Lenaeus, became self-appointed regents to the boy-king Ptolemy VI. They tried to protect the boy by sending him to Cyprus, but Antiochus captured him there in a few days. The younger brother, Euergetes was then named Pharaoh by the Regents in his brother's stead. This left Antiochus appearing to be the older boy's protector against his younger brother's pretension to the throne via the Regents. Antiochus marched into Memphis without opposition and the regents in Alexandria meekly surrendered to him.

Uprisings began in Judea. Antiochus headed for Jerusalem with a small contingent of soldiers. He selected 50 men from the rebels and the merchants of Jerusalem for execution at the newly built citadel. He doubled the taxes and exacted a tribute from the priests and merchants twice that of the already exorbitant one. He minted a new coin with his image on its face and the inscription, "Antiochus Theos Epiphanes Nicator" which means "Antiochus God-Manifest Victor." Suddenly Egypt rebelled and Antiochus was forced to war against it again. This time victory was more costly for two reasons. Antiochus lost 12,000 men (to Egypt's 25,000) and even worse, Rome entered the confrontation at the peace tables with its own demands. Antiochus had been depending on Rome's preoccupation with the Macedonian conflict to keep them out of his way as he solidified his Empire, but with the Roman defeat of Perseus across the bay from Thessalonica, the royal house of Macedon fell. Rome was free to pursue its desires in other parts of the globe, specifically Egypt. Rome demanded that Antiochus withdraw from Egypt and from Cyprus, effectively restricting him to Coeli-Syria. Rome then demanded that no further military action be taken without the permission of the Roman Senate.

Judea, which was the buffer zone between the Seleucid Empire and the Ptolemaic Empire, would likely be fought for by Egypt. It was necessary, therefore, to ensure its stability. False rumors of Antiochus' death in Egypt at the hands of the Romans reached Judea, and civil war broke out. Judah Maccabee, who would later break the Seleucid control of Judea, waited for the proper hour to lead the full-scale rebellion. Antiochus re-entered Jerusalem with his army. On the Sabbath, he began a terrible massacre of the rebels who, constrained by the Sabbath law, would not fight back. Forty thousand of them died. The veil in the Holy of Holies was removed and sent to Antioch. The Temple utensils of silver and gold that had been returned to Jerusalem by Cyrus, as recorded in Ezra and Nehemiah, were again removed and sent to Antioch's treasury. **The image of Zeus was erected on the altar in the Temple,**

and a swine was sacrificed to him there. The remainder of the pig was boiled and the water then poured over the manuscripts of the Torah. The Temple was re-named the Temple of Zeus.

Similar "renovations" were made to the temple at Samaria in the pass at Mt. Gerizim. The daily sacrifices to Adonai ended along with readings from the Torah; the Jews were forbidden to circumcise their children; the Sabbath was ended; and the survivors were forced to honor Epiphanes as a divine king. Prostitutes were brought in to ply their trade in the priestly chambers. The festival of Dionysius was begun in Jerusalem. The sacrificial entrails of the festival were to be eaten by everyone. Thousands of Jews were taken prisoner and forced into slavery; then they were sent throughout the kingdom of Antiochus as a type of new Babylonian exile. Gruesome tortures were instituted in an effort to enforce the decrees designed to erase Judaism from the world.

Uprisings began, again led by the "pious ones," the Hassidim and Perushim (later to be known as Pharisees). The Essenes joined them (these were the people who maintained the manuscripts of the Torah while hidden in hillside hideaways; in 1949 these ancient writings would be found and named the Dead Sea Scrolls). Another massacre of 1000 men, women and children occurred in the caves just outside Jerusalem. The Maccabees successfully led a full-scale rebellion against the Seleucid Empire. On the third anniversary of the desecration, on the 25th day of Kislev, the Temple was cleansed and restored. This is still celebrated today as the festival of Hannukah. Antiochus reigned from 175-163 B.C.

1Thess 4:13-20 - This "rapture" passage is less an issue of history and prophecy than of translation and interpretation. Here's a personal translation and some footnotes to provide food for thought:

¹³But we would not have you ignorant, brothers, concerning those who fall asleep, so that you do not sorrow like the rest who have no hope. ¹⁴For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, *then* in the same way, God will also bring with him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. ¹⁵For we say this to you by the word of the Lord, that we who live, left for the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶For the Lord himself will descend from the heavens with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpets of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first; ¹⁷then we who live, *who* remain, will be grabbed⁵ together with them in the cloud⁶ to greet⁷ the Lord in the air:⁸ and this is how we will always be with the Lord.

⁴ In other words, those who have fallen asleep in Christ prior to his return have their own advantage. They will return with him to join us as his bride, in a single moment of celebration.

⁵ (NT:726 *harpazo*) to seize, carry off by force, claim for oneself, snatch away. In this case, Christ claims us for his very own, seizing us in his embrace. See note at Mt. 11:12.

⁶ (NT:3507 *nephele*) plural - properly, cloudiness (same root as NT:2217 *nephos* "mist"). This is a prophetic statement, not literal. Rather than the clouds in the sky, this refers to the Cloud of the OT (Mt 17:5; 1Cor 10:2); the promise made to Noah was in the cloud (Gen. 9:13-16); the Lord went before them in the cloud (Ex. 13:21-22); the glory of the Lord appeared in the cloud (Ex. 16:10); God comes to his people in a cloud (Ex. 19:9); the cloud is on the Mount of God along with the sound of trumpets, just as it is here (Ex. 19:16); God calls from the midst of the cloud (Ex. 24:16); Moses entered the cloud and ascended into the mount to be in the very presence of God (Ex. 24:18); the Lord descended in the cloud beside Moses proclaiming his name (Ex. 34:5), which is our name (Num. 6:22); the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the temple (Ex. 40:34); the Lord appears in the cloud upon the mercy seat (Lev. 16:2); the cloud of incense covers the mercy seat and the testimony - the ark of the covenant (Lev. 16:13).

⁷ (NT:529 *apantesis*) refers to a crowd gathering in the streets to greet a conquering hero or a visiting dignitary, and following him into the city for a celebration. Our equivalent today is a ticker-tape parade followed by a champagne dinner and dance.

⁸ (NT:109 *aer*) probably refers to the kingdom of the air (Eph. 2:2) formerly ruled by Satan, who at this time will be deposed. Christ has already descended from the heavens. He has called out the dead from their tombs, as he did Lazarus. It makes no sense to rise into the air with him again. There is one Day of Judgment, not many. There is no pre-millennial or post-millennial rapture, no matter what popular fads may claim. The millennium is at an end here. It is now "That Day" and we are no longer "in that day" or "in that age." Christ has returned to stay, and we shall be with him forever just as described: claimed for his own, seized into his embrace, together with the saints of all ages, the great cloud of witnesses (Heb. 12:1), and in the cloud of God's presence. We are together with his people, the Bride of Christ, held by her lover as the Song of Solomon describes, and just as he promised.

2Thess 2:4 – Some interpret this to mean that someone has to physically sit in the temple at Jerusalem before Christ returns. Because the temple has been destroyed, the temple would have to be rebuilt for that to be possible – unless of course the fulfillment took place prior to 70 AD. Caligula (who reigned AD 37-41) ordered that an idol of himself be set up in the temple to be worshipped as a god. It's an interesting idea that this refers to his idol (as with the idol of Zeus placed in the temple under the Maccabees), but that cannot fulfill 2Thess for several reasons. The first is because, near as we can tell, 2Thess was written 10 years after Caligula was dead. Besides that, it appears that the order was never carried out because a Jewish mob confronted the Roman troops carrying the idol to the temple. The troops considered discretion the better part of valor, and so they retreated.

The larger question is whether the "son of perdition" refers to the antichrist, and whether the language is figurative or literal. If it is figurative, as I believe it is, then almost anyone who declares himself to be God would fit the bill. And Nero certainly did that, as well as being a son of perdition (or destruction). Notice that the temple in 2Thess is not necessarily the temple at Jerusalem. It actually says the "temple of God." Equating it with the Jerusalem temple would go beyond what is actually written. It is a reference to Ezekiel 28:2: "Because your heart is proud, you have said, 'I am God, I sit in the seat of God, in the heart of the seas,' yet you are but a man, and not God, though you set your heart to be the heart of God." Nero certainly made himself out to be God. Therefore he wrongfully sat in God's "seat of authority" and paid for it. Near as we can tell, however, Nero never visited Jerusalem, and so he never literally sat on any seat in the temple there. But neither is there anything in the text that requires it.

Revelation is a book often quoted and seldom understood. Before I give you any of the historical events that I believe fulfilled the visions of John, let me point out just two facts. First, the Roman Empire was centered in Rome which was built on seven hills (see Rev.17:9). It had ten provinces or seats of power traditionally represented as horns (as we saw in Daniel). Secondly, we find a curious span of time in the eleventh chapter of Revelation: the two witnesses lie dead for three and one-half days. I point this out because there is a left-over of three and one-half days, or half a seven, from Daniel 9:27; something remained outstanding. The two witnesses prophesy for 1260 days or 42 months while the Gentiles trample the city. Daniel 12:11 used 1290 days. Therefore John was referring to a similar event, but not an identical event.

I might add one other observation. Many people say that Revelation is laid out in chronological order because God would not be so scatter-brained as to shuffle the events. I can't find a good reason to assume such a chronological order. In fact I believe that the blatant use of so many common and universally acknowledged symbols in John's writing shows quite clearly that he knew that without them the church might be confused by his writing style. He repeats the historical events in increasing detail seven times.⁹ John merely relayed the leadings of the Spirit as He reviewed things that had already occurred (as in chapter 12); the Spirit laid a foundation for the things that were yet to occur (as in chapter 13). He revealed the culmination of 4000 years of God's providential will now unfolding before them so that they would understand that nothing would be left undone, for Christ was the fulfillment of it all.

Matthew 24:34 tells us that this generation of men in 29 A.D. would see *all* the foretold events happen. And the finalization of God's covenant with His people would become evident to them. Christ fully revealed the will of the Father. Those who had waited generation after generation in the resting place of the dead (Sheol) would be resurrected and taken up in Christ at the last event. This was the point at which physical Israel would be destroyed by fire (a symbol of the wrath of God), while spiritual Israel would be

⁹ The sevenfold Revelation of John: chapters 1-3; 4-7; 8-11; 12-14; 15-16; 17-19; 20-22. Each section begins with the New Testament and proceeds to the present in increasing detail and extent. This is called Progressive Parallelism. The first half of Revelation (1-11) depicts the struggle on Earth. The second half (12-22) depicts the struggle in the heavenly realms. See *More Than Conquerors*, William Hedriksen (Baker Books, Grand Rapids MI, 2001)

born free of the law of sin and death. As John puts it, the New Jerusalem would descend from above (see also John 4:21-24). Now let's examine the events that have never been nor will ever be so bad (Matt.24:21). Although many more people have been killed in conflict, and more gruesome tortures have been inflicted by the depravity of men, and more horrible natural catastrophes have been recorded, none of these things could equal the change which was about to take place in man's relationship with God and certainly in the Jews relationship with God.

When Florus, procurator of Judea, took 17 talents (\$61,200) from the Temple at Jerusalem, a riot broke out. In an effort to quickly suppress the riot, his legions scourged and crucified over 3600 Jews. Two factions rose up: the rebels, who wanted autonomy, and the pacifists, who wanted peaceful co-existence for business' sake. In 68 A.D. the animosity between these two factions erupted into a pitched battle. The radicals won after killing 12,000 opposition members, including nearly all the rich in Jerusalem. Another revolt began against the foreign occupation. Masada's Roman garrison was surrounded, falsely coaxed into disarmament and surrender, and then brutally slaughtered. In retaliation, the gentiles of Caesarea slew 20,000 Jews. Thousands more were sold into slavery. The gentiles of Damascus cut the throats of some 10,000 Jews in a single day.

Vespasian, Roman legate sent by the Senate to suppress the rebellion, laid siege to Jerusalem which had some 600,000 rebels walled up within. After his proclamation as emperor, Vespasian left his son Titus to continue the siege against the rebel leader, John of Giscala, who had removed his rival Eleazar (contrary to the TV version). After 5 months some 116,000 bodies had been thrown over the walls of Jerusalem. The Temple was set aflame using Roman brands (by the Jews, says the historian Josephus ... see Daniel 9:26). Of those who survived, 97,000 were sold as slaves. Between 600,000 and 1,197,000 Jews were killed. The high priesthood and the Sanhedrin were abolished. The temple was razed leaving not one stone on another (as Christ foretold). It has never been rebuilt nor have sacrifices ever been made there again. The Sadducees disappeared while the Pharisees and rabbi became the leaders of a homeless people. The forced exodus from Jerusalem was so massive that Jewish scholars began to date the *Diaspora* from the destruction of Herod's temple, rather than from the Babylonian Captivity.

In A.D. 115-16 the Jews of Cyrene, Egypt, Cyprus and Mesopotamia again rose up against Rome. Some 220,000 people died in Cyrene; 240,000 in Cyprus --- for centuries after, no Jew was even allowed to enter Cyprus. In A.D. 130, Hadrian tried the same tactics as Antiochus IV Epiphanes and the resulting rebellion was every bit as fierce as before. One-half million Jews died in battle, as many starved to death, and many more succumbed to numerous pogroms which ensued world-wide. Even so, in A.D. 132 Simeon Bar Cocheba (a self-proclaimed Messiah who was acknowledged as such by the famous Jewish expositor of the law, Akkiba) led the Jews in their last quest to recover their homeland and their freedom. They fought Rome for three years during which the Romans destroyed 985 towns in Palestine and slew 580,000 men. Nearly all Judea was laid waste. The pagan city of Aelia Capitolina rose on the site of Jerusalem with shrines to Venus and Jupiter. Circumcision was forbidden, as was the observance of the Sabbath or any other holiday. The successor to the Sanhedrin (or Council of 70) was known as the Council at Jamnia. It was dissolved and outlawed. Public instruction of the Law was forbidden. Akkiba, now 95, refused to be quieted and died with the basic tenet of the Law on his lips, "Hear O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one."

Church Growth and Satan's Release – Conjectures and Musings

God's remnant, now the Bride of Christ, would itself undergo purges and trial by fire as John tells us in Chapters 6:1 through 10:7 of *Revelation*. This refers to the times preceding the fall of Jerusalem. The later chapters refer to the fall of Rome and the rise of the Church as triumphant. Indeed, in 313 A.D. Christianity was legalized by the Emperor Constantine. In 381 AD, Christianity became the "official"

religion of Rome under the emperor Theodosius. Thus the Church grew unimpeded under the mantle of Rome until it covered the earth. In fact, we are told within the pages of Scripture that the gospel had already gone throughout the earth in the first century (Col.1:5-6, 23). To say that what “prevents” Christ’s return is that we have not reached every man woman and child on the planet yet, is to say that we don’t have to worry about the Judgment, because we are capable of blocking his return by our inaction. This is a complete rejection of God’s sovereign will in the matter. It is also physically impossible – there are more children born each day than we have missionaries to reach. Even if we had enough missionaries, and we could get to each person capable of receiving the word of truth, it wrongfully puts the burden on us to save everyone. That’s an Arminian concept. It is God alone who saves.

Christianity continued to spread unabated until Humanism was spawned in the *Age of Reason*. The Church came into serious opposition at this point, and for good cause. The tares were beginning to overpower the wheat in the fields of the Church (Mat.13:24). The Renaissance was intended to rekindle the energy of man's participation in the kingdom of God. But it degenerated into an attempt to re-measure God's creation by the intellect of man. Reason was placed on the throne of men’s hearts. At the same time (16th century) The *Reformation* tried to expunge the traditions of men from the Church, and to restore the simplicity of the Gospel and the ideal of a universal priesthood. It was perverted by some into an attack on the church as an institution altogether.

The *Age of Enlightenment* (17th century), having been seeded in these two previous social movements, became the battlefield between the Church and its single strongest opponent, *Humanism*. I find it interesting that Satan would masquerade as an Angel of Light (2Cor 11:14). Humanism had emerged as a contender for the affections of men by substituting a man-made philosophy of science and cynicism (which it portrayed as the path to ultimate truth) for the wisdom and hope of God's Word (which it labelled as a fraudulent fairy-tale). Humanism places man on an equal plane with God, able to decide for himself whether God should live or die. Salmon Rushdie is a devout atheist who writes about the religious beliefs of men as mere emotional constructs designed to offer comfort and inspire excellence, but which always degenerate into hatred and bloodlust. He is a humanist. Carl Sagan considered himself a humanist, but he was in fact a pagan who worshipped the Cosmos as if it were a goddess: impersonal, cold, mysterious, discoverable, and alluring.

This is where believers find ourselves today: we are embattled on all fronts, fighting to remain true to the Gospel that was taught to us, and striving to keep faith with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. That's why Paul and John advised us to stand firm, even to the point of death.

I hope this has been of some value in backfilling the history which underlies Biblical prophecy. I encourage you to read more about the history of the times in which the prophecies are set. The mysteries of the Gospel have been accomplished (Rev. 10:7, 11:15-18, Matt.13:24, Luke 17:20-21, Col.1:23). We know the Lord Jesus Christ as our King today (Mat 21:5; Joh 18:33-36). He reigns within us today (Lk 1:33; 17:21). And we preach his Kingdom today (Mat 3:2). And all those who have stumbled over the stone of Zion have been judged accordingly (1Pet 2:8); condemned *now*, they stand outside the door of the kingdom and of the wedding feast, outside where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth (John 12:31).

Consider it, and then praise God that He has left nothing undone, nothing unfulfilled, nothing delaying our inheritance in His Kingdom, an inheritance which His Spirit guarantees for us until Christ returns to make it a reality (Eph 1:13-14). Amen.

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