

## INTRODUCTION : HISTORY FORETOLD IN SCRIPTURE

Any volume on Christian church history should conform to the divine interpretation of Christian church history as it is so marvelously outlined in the book of Revelation in scripture. The book of Revelation begins with these words: "The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John." These words have generated debate as to the purpose of John's book. Preterists, like Dr. Kenneth Gentry, have asserted that these words imply the book of Revelation is simply laying out church history in the first century A.D. Dr. Gentry has succinctly stated his preteristic hermeneutic thus: "I hold that passages specifically delimiting the time-frame by temporal indicators (such as "this generation," "shortly," "at hand," "near," and similar wording) are to be applied to A. D. 70." (July 1997 issue of Chalcedon Report, in an article entitled "A Brief Theological Analysis of Hyper-Preterism)

Now we should readily grant that temporal indicators like "shortly" or "quickly" in scripture be *generally* interpreted according to human time reference. But within the context of the book of Revelation, there are significant reasons to believe this general rule finds exception. Here are but some of those reasons:

- One of the time periods described in the book of Revelation is called a millennium, or "thousand years". Now whether one takes this as a literal thousand years or not, it certainly suggests a more extended period of time, and not a mere several years. So if even one of the time periods outlined in the book is more expansive in time, this implies our interpretation of "shortly come to pass" should be adjusted accordingly.
- The "book ends" of Revelation are not events that we find in the first century A.D., but rather the second book end of Revelation obviously refers to the *future* Great Day of Judgment and establishment of the new heaven and new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness and *no* sin or sorrow (Revelation 20-22). Thus, when the Apostle John is commanded to "write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter" (Revelation 1:19), he is being commanded to record an outline of history of events from the Apostolic era to the yet future Second Advent of Jesus Christ.
- The elements of Revelation suggest something far more expansive in time rather than the limited number of years of the first century. The book of Revelation follows the basic pattern and terminology of the book of Daniel. In the book of Daniel, terms like "beast" and "king" do not merely refer to individual emperors, but rather to empires and kingdoms as well. And empires and kingdoms do not ordinarily arise, last, and expire in brief periods of time.
- The book of Daniel, which sets the pattern for the book of Revelation, should be interpreted historically rather than preteristically or futuristically. So it is reasonable to think the book of Revelation should as well.

So while *ordinarily* temporal indicators like “quickly” and “shortly” should be understood according to human time reference, within the context of the book of Revelation there are multiple reasons to believe they should be understood according to divine time reference. Divine time reference is characterized this way: “But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.” (II Peter 3:8)

But having concluded that the book of Revelation provides an outline of history from the Apostolic era to the *future* Second Advent of Jesus Christ (called the historicistic interpretation of the book of Revelation), we must next consider that historical outline itself. The following table presents a general outline of the book of Revelation as a whole, as suggested in Revelation 1:19 (“Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter;”) and confirmed in Revelation 4:1 (“After this I looked, and, behold, a door [was] opened in heaven: and the first voice which I heard [was] as it were of a trumpet talking with me; which said, Come up hither, and I will shew thee things which must be hereafter.”):

Section #	Chapters in Revelation	General Topic Covered
1	1	the things which thou hast seen
2	2 - 3	the things which are
3	4 - 22	the things which shall be hereafter

Breaking the above outline down into more detail, we discover this basic outline of church history presented in Revelation:

1. The situation for the Christian Church as it appeared at the time of John’s writing, as represented by 7 typical churches of the time. (Revelation 2-3)
2. The time period leading up to and including the sealing of the Seven Seals (Revelation 4:1-8:1). At the conclusion of the sealing of the Seven Seals the church is relieved from a beastial oppression.
3. The time period leading up to and including the sounding of the Seven Trumpets (Revelation 8:2-11:19). At the conclusion of the sounding of the Seven Trumpets the church is relieved from a beastial oppression.
4. The time period leading up to and including the pouring of the Seven Vials (Revelation 15-19). At the conclusion of the pouring of the Seven Vials the church is relieved from a beastial oppression.
5. The Millennium when the nations are no longer deceived by the beast and false prophet (Revelation 20:1-6)
6. The release of Satan for a short season (Revelation 20:7-10)
7. The Great Day of Judgment, accompanying the Second Advent of Jesus Christ (Revelation 20:11-15)
8. The establishment of the new heaven and new earth (Revelation 21-22)

Presented in table format, it would appear thus:

Sub-Section #	Chapters in Revelation	General Topic Covered	Period in History
1	2 - 3	7 Churches, Typical of the State of Christianity at the time the Apostle John wrote Revelation	The time the Apostle John wrote the book of Revelation, before 70 A.D.
2	4 – 8:1	Opening of the 7 Seals	The period up to and including 70 A.D., when Christians were saved from the Roman siege but earthly Jerusalem was destroyed. Before this redemption, there is a 1,260 day period of intense persecution of Christianity by the Roman Emperor Nero.
3	8:2 – 11:19	Sounding of the 7 Trumpets	The “wilderness” period- lasting 1,260 years - up to and concluding in the Protestant Reformation. This is a period, beginning in 70 A.D., marked by the oppression of Christ’s elect by the pagan to nominally Christian Roman Empire (the Beast from the sea of Revelation chapter 13), as well as the rise of the Papal False Prophet (the land Beast of Revelation chapter 13).
4	15 - 19	Pouring of the 7 Vials with the 7 Plagues, including the events leading up to this divine judgment and its immediate aftermath	Rise of the ‘Enlightenment’ in the aftermath of the Protestant Reformation, in which a mysterious Babylonian ‘mother of harlots’ arises. This mysterious Babylon rides upon a new manifestation of the Beast (the Black Pope and his Jesuit order), along with the Papal False Prophet. God sends judgments for this wickedness on earth, culminating in the 7 Plagues which destroy the mysterious Babylon. The Jesuit Beast and the Papal False Prophet assume the superpower status lost by the mysterious Babylon, and there is a brief period of intense Romish persecution. Finally, the Beast and False Prophet are overcome by the preaching of the gospel, ushering in the Millennium.
5	20:1 – 20:6	The Millennium, A	Future period in which deception will be significantly lessened among the nations, so

		Restoration of the Protestant Reformation	that Christ invisibly reigns from heaven over the reformed Christian nations of the world.
6	20:7-10	Release of Satan for a Short Season	A brief period of significant Satanic activity.
7	20:11ff	Great Day of Judgment	Future Second Advent of Jesus Christ in which all are judged
8	21 - 22	New Heaven and New Earth	Future eternal state when Christ visibly reigns on new earth as well as heaven

In the midst of the book of Revelation, what the Apostle John calls a “little book” is described (Revelation 10,12-14). The actual contents of this “little book” extend from Revelation 12-14. The “little book” profiles the oppression of the church by a beast (see Revelation 13), when the church must hide in the wilderness (see Revelation 12), but it also describes the ultimate fall of that beast and the victory of the church (see Revelation 14). The “little book” offers us a picture of all of church history in miniature.

In the history of prophetic interpretation, there have generally been three different theories as to the identity of the beast described in the “little book”. Many preterists have argued that the beast refers to Nero, especially during his 1,260 day period of intense persecution of Christians. Many historicists have argued that the beast refers to the pagan-to-papal Roman empire, during its 1,260 reign of terror against the true church (especially during the Middle Ages). And many futurists have argued that the beast refers to a yet future despot who will tyrannize Christ’s church during a future period of intense persecution.

Actually, all three theories as to the identity of the beast are correct! We must keep in mind that the “little book” offers us a picture of all of church history in miniature. Therefore, to limit the beast of the “little book” to only one period of church history is obviously to err. It must be that the beast presented in the “little book” encompasses the deceptive tyrant which the church has faced in each age when it has undergone intense widespread persecution. There are three such ages of intense oppression and deception of Christ’s church before the Millennium according to the book of Revelation:

1. The time period leading up to and including the sealing of the Seven Seals (Revelation 4:1 – 8:1). At the conclusion of the sealing of the Seven Seals the church is relieved from a bestial oppression.
2. The time period leading up to and including the sounding of the Seven Trumpets (Revelation 8:2 – 11:19). At the conclusion of the sounding of the Seven Trumpets the church is relieved from a bestial oppression.
3. The time period leading up to and including the pouring of the Seven Vials (Revelation 15-19). At the conclusion of the pouring of the Seven Vials the church is relieved from a bestial oppression.

All three instances involve a chief figure that lived during the Apostolic era and yet still lives today: *Pontifex Maximus*. *Pontifex Maximus* is the “highest priest of Roman religion and official head of the college of pontifices. As the chief administrator of religious affairs he regulated the conduct of religious ceremonies, consecrated temples and other holy places, and controlled the calendar. During the time of the empire, and until Christianity became firmly established, the emperor was designated *pontifex maximus*. After the supremacy of Christianity, the popes assumed the title.” (The Columbia Encyclopedia, Sixth Edition.) So before Pagan Rome became Papal Rome, the Pagan Roman Emperor claimed the title of *Pontifex Maximus*, that is, the Greatest Religious Ruler. As a demigod, in some sense descended from their heathen deities, he was worshipped and his statues adored. In Latin, *Pontifex* comes from *pontem faciens*, and means "bridge-maker". The *Pontifex Maximus* then has declared himself to be the supreme bridge-maker, or mediator, between God and man- in essence usurping the place of Christ Himself. The beast of the “little book” is the Roman *Pontifex Maximus*, for its seven heads refer to seven hills (see Revelation 17:9), a clear allusion to Rome, the City of Seven Hills.

The three periods of intense bestial oppression then correspond to the three periods of concentrated oppression and deception by *Pontifex Maximus* in church history, followed by deliverance for the people of God:

- The 1260 days of intense persecution by the *Pontifex Maximus* Nero in cahoots with the Judaistic Jews, followed by the deliverance in 70 AD.
- The 1260 years (according to the year-day principle of prophetic interpretation) from 70 AD to the birth of the Morningstar of the Protestant Reformation, John Wyckliffe. During this time the *Pontifex Maximus* oppressed Christ’s church and greatly deceived humanity, but this was followed by the deliverance of the Protestant Reformation.
- A yet future 1260 day period of intense persecution of Christ’s church by *Pontifex Maximus*, following the fall of the mysterious Babylon of Revelation 17. This period of intense persecution will be followed by the millennial restoration.

The Neronic oppression serves as a type of the oppression of the line of *Pontifex Maximus* in the 1260-year wilderness period from 70 – 1330 AD (John Wyckliffe being born circa 1330 AD) , and a yet future intense 1260-day period of persecution by a *Pontifex Maximus* before the Millennium. To limit the beast of Revelation to Nero rests on the false preteristic assumption that only the history before 70 AD is in view, and to limit the beast of Revelation to some future despot rests on the false futuristic assumption that only some future period is in view in the book of Revelation. But the truth is that this beast enjoys much greater longevity. Not until *Pontifex Maximus* is finally brought down and extirpated will the earth enjoy its millennial restoration. Only then will this false prophet and Man of Sin no longer be able to torment and deceive on earth. Thus, God has given His church a great source of hope and encouragement in the book of

Revelation. He has laid out His wonderful plans for Christ's church, culminating in glory. This is most helpful in the midst of continuing struggle.

The entire history of Christ's church in the New Testament era then – from the age of the Apostles to Christ's Second Advent and the inauguration of the new heaven and new earth – is laid out before us in the book of Revelation. There we read of the spread of the gospel yet the suffering of Christians during the Apostolic age. There we read of Christ's redemption of His people from the earthly Jerusalem. There we read of the rise of heresies and the Man of Sin, which oppresses and deceives Christ's church. There we read of a reformation, yet a later backsliding. There we read of a mysterious Babylonian oppression and deception of the world. There we read of a millennial age when deception is suppressed, after the mysterious Babylon has been overthrown. And there we read of Christ's return and judgment of the earth, when He inaugurates a new heaven and new earth.

There is in all of this foretold history a remarkable correspondence between elements in ancient Israel's past and elements in the account of the New Testament church's history as it is related in the book of Revelation. Indeed, the history of the church outlined in the book of Revelation retraces the history of ancient Israel, not only in its elements, but also in its chronological order. So we read of earthly Jerusalem equated with Egypt (Revelation 11:8) which the church escapes, we read of a wilderness experience of the church (Revelation 12:6) lasting 1260 "days" and beginning in 70 AD when the earthly Jerusalem was trodden under foot (Revelation 11:2), we read of a "Promised Land" experience at the completion of the wilderness years (Revelation 11:15), we read of a "Babylonian" oppression on God's people (Revelation 17:5), we read of a Beastial kingdom that destroys this "Babylon" (Revelation 17:16), we read of a restoration period after the church comes out of its "Babylonian" captivity (Revelation 20:3), we read of a foreign attack on God's people from a Gentile "Magog" (Revelation 20:8), and we read of an Advent of Christ when Christ comes down to earth to be with man (Revelation 21:3). These elements in this order most certainly re-traces the history of ancient Israel. And since ancient Israel's history in many respects fore-shadowed the life of Christ during His First Advent, this means the church's history corresponds not only with ancient Israel's history but Christ's incarnate life as well. In considering this fact, we should ponder how very consistent it is with scriptural principle that the new Israel of the church should walk in the footsteps of old Israel and with her Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ."

It is not merely conjecture that the history of the Old Testament church foreshadowed the public ministry of Jesus Christ. Scripture itself implies as much. This is why we read in a passage like Matthew 2:15 that ancient Israel's calling out of Egypt served as a prophecy of Jesus Christ (who is the quintessential "Israel", meaning "Prince of God"), when He entered and departed from Egypt.

And it is also quite reasonable to believe the New Testament Israel (i.e., the Christian church) is typical of her Lord Jesus Christ, for the church is His body (I Corinthians 12:12,27). And if the Christian church is the body of Christ, does it not make sense that the Christian church should live the life that Jesus Christ has lived in the body? There are

in fact multiple verses which suggest that the Christian church experiences what Jesus Christ has experienced in His ministry to the church. Here are but two examples:

“If we suffer, we shall also reign with [Him]” – II Timothy 2:12

“Wherefore in all things it behooved Him to be made like unto His brethren.” – Hebrews 2:17-18

So we see how the history of the New Testament church parallels the life of ecclesiastical ministry of Jesus Christ, as well as paralleling the history Old Testament church.

If then the history of the Christian church parallels that of the Old Testament church, where are we now in terms of Old Testament church history? There is good reason to believe we are now in the era of “Babylonian” oppression, just as Old Testament Israel experienced a period of Babylonian oppression. But we can look forward to a day when God will bring down the “Babylonian” oppressor, and eventually deliver His people into the millennial restoration. This will be a renewed Protestant Reformation, but grander in scale and more thorough in effect. And it will of course be followed by the even grander new heaven and new earth.

The table below shows the parallel nature of the histories of the Old and New Testament church, as well as the life of Jesus Christ:

<b>Event</b>	<b>Old Testament Church</b>	<b>New Testament Church</b>	<b>Life of Jesus Christ, in His First and Second Advents on Earth</b>
Humble Birth and Stay in an Egypt	The beginnings of the church are in Egypt, where it is in an oppressive and humble condition (Exodus 1).	The church began with few in number under difficult and oppressed conditions in Jerusalem (Acts 1), which Revelation 11:8 calls "Egypt". The earthly Jerusalem is described as a place of bondage (Galatians 4:25), even as ancient Egypt had been a place of bondage for the people of God in Moses' day.	Jesus was born in the humble setting of a stable in a family of humble means (Luke 2:1-38), and in His infancy His family had to flee the oppression of Herod (Matthew 2:13), residing then in Egypt (Matthew 2:14-15)
Escape from an Egypt	The church leaves Egypt, crossing the Red Sea (Exodus 13-14). The army of the Egyptian pharaoh is destroyed.	The church flees from its "Egypt" of earthly Jerusalem, before Jerusalem is destroyed by the Roman army in 70 A.D. (Luke 21:20-21; Revelation 11:8b, 12:14)	Jesus and His family leave Egypt (Matthew 2:19-20) and settle in the Galilee region of Israel (Matthew 2:21-23). Jesus began his public ministry by being baptized (Matthew 3:16), baptism being comparable to crossing the Red Sea according to I Corinthians 10:2.
A Wilderness Experience	The church endures 40 years in the wilderness (each year for a day the spies were in Canaan Numbers 14:34 ), before they may enter the Promised Land (Numbers 14:28-38)	The church endures 1260 years in the "wilderness" (Revelation 11:3), according to the year-day principle of a day representing a year in prophetic time.	Jesus is tempted in the wilderness for 40 days by Satan (Matthew 4:1-11; Mark 1:12-13; Luke 4:1-13)
Time of Great Spiritual	Entry and establishment in the	Protestant Reformation at the end of the 1260 year	At the height of His public ministry Jesus

Prosperity and Blessing	Promised Land (Joshua 3:1-4:24, 11:23, 22:4)	“wilderness” experience commences with the birth of John Wyckliffe 1260 years after 70 A.D. His public ministry began 1290 years after 70 A.D. (Daniel 12:11). The Protestant Reformation is marked by many nations turning to Christ according to the true gospel which is preached (Revelation 11:15, 14:6-8)	has multitudes of followers (John 7:31), especially owing to the miracles they see Jesus perform (John 10:41-42).
Spiritual Decline	Despite the many blessings it has known, Israel forsakes true religion, becoming corrupted by false and idolatrous worship (Isaiah 1, Jeremiah 2).	Many nations and people fall away from the reformed Protestant faith, enticed by the whoredom of a mysterious “Babylon” who rides upon the Romish Beast (Revelation 17:1b-3). This mysterious “Babylon”, which I believe is Washington, DC and the nation it represents, is profane as well as wealthy (Revelation 18).	Many disciples abandon Jesus Christ as they consider the harder doctrines taught by Him (John 12:37-38) .
“Babylonian” Oppression of God’s People	Ancient Babylon destroys Jerusalem and oppresses the Jewish people, taking them captive to Babylon (Jeremiah 39).	This mysterious “Babylon” oppresses God’s people (Revelation 17:4-6).	Satan enters into Judas Iscariot (Luke 22:3). Jesus is apprehended through the treacherous machinations of Judas Iscariot- the Son of Perdition- with the Jewish leaders (Matthew 26:14-16), and He is crucified. Jesus is <i>temporarily</i> captive to death and hell (Ephesians 4:8-10).
Defeat of the “Babylonian” Oppressor by another wicked Beast	Ancient Babylon was destroyed, just as the prophets had foretold (Isaiah 47, Jeremiah 50). It is another Beast (Medo-Persia) that	The mysterious “Babylon” is destroyed by the Romish Beast in alliance with the nations (Revelation 17:16, Revelation 18:2,19). The Romish Beast takes her	Judas Iscariot commits suicide due to Satan’s destructive influence over him (Matthew 27:3-5).

	destroys her, and takes her place.	place (Revelation 17:17).	
Restoration / Resurrection	The Jews are restored to Israel during Persian rule (Isaiah 44:24-45, Jeremiah 50-51), in what is compared to the rising of dry bones from the dead (Ezekiel 37).	The church enjoys a “millennial” restoration (Revelation 20:1-3), following the overthrow of the Romish Beast (Revelation 19:20).	Jesus rises from the dead (Luke 24) and ascends to sit at the right hand of the Father in power (Ephesians 1:20).
Attack by a Satanic Beast	Antiochus Epiphanes attacks Jerusalem, as prophesied in Daniel 8:9-14.	Satan attacks Jerusalem and the church on earth (Revelation 20:7-9a)	As Satan attacks, he is confronted and cast to hell by Jesus (Revelation 20:9-10)
Advent of Jesus Christ	Jesus Christ’s Coming to Israel (His First Advent), which had been prophesied in Daniel 9:24-27, and elsewhere in the Old Testament.	Jesus Christ’s Coming to administer the Day of Judgment, as prophesied in Revelation 20, and elsewhere in the New Testament.	Jesus Christ’s Judgment of the world (Revelation 20:11-15) and His eternal reign on the New Earth (Revelation 21)

It will be the great object of this volume to sketch this history of Christ’s church as it has unfolded up to the present day, and how we may expect it to unfold in the future. And we will follow the outline of history Holy Writ has itself provided.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

### **INTRODUCTION : HISTORY FORETOLD IN SCRIPTURE**

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Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* (Logos Research Systems, Inc.: Oak Harbor, WA, 1997). (see electronic version at <http://www.ccel.org/s/schaff/history/About.htm> )

J. Parnell McCarter, *Sabbath Bible Survey Tests and Assignments* (PHSC: Grand Rapids, MI, 2003). (see electronic version at <http://www.puritans.net/curriculum/> )

J. Parnell McCarter, *Let My People Go* (PHSC: Grand Rapids, MI, 2003). (see electronic version at <http://www.puritans.net/curriculum/> )

The on-line resources of Historicism Research Foundation at <http://www.historicism.net/> also proved invaluable for my understanding of Biblical prophecy as it relates to Christian church history. Biblical prophecy concerning Christian church history, especially as revealed in the book of Revelation, serves as the foundation upon which all other church histories should be based.

It should be noted that I interpret the prophecies of Revelation 4 – 8 as occurring between 30 and 70 AD. Hence, I adhere to the view that John composed the book of Revelation before 70 AD. Although flawed in his preterist interpretation of the book of Revelation overall, Dr. Kenneth Gentry offers cogent arguments for a pre-70 AD authorship of the book in his own book entitled *Before Jerusalem Fell*.