

An Historical Defense Of Covenanting And The Solemn League And Covenant (Part Ten)

Revelation 13:18

January 31, 2010

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We continue this Lord's Day examining another passage of Scripture from the Book of Revelation to which Preterists appeal in claiming that the apostle John penned this inspired prophecy before the destruction of the temple and the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 a.d. Remember that the interpretive system of Preterism claims that either MOST of the Book of Revelation was fulfilled by 70 a.d. (Partial Preterism) or ALL of the Book of Revelation (even all prophecy in Scripture) was fulfilled by 70 a.d. (Full Preterism). The only way that Preterists can view the prophesied events found in the Book of Revelation as MOSTLY fulfilled or TOTALLY fulfilled by 70 a.d. is to defend and promote the view that evidence within the Book of Revelation itself leads one to conclude that the Book of Revelation was penned by John before 70 a.d. To the contrary, I do not agree with Preterists that internal evidence within the Book of Revelation points to a pre-70 a.d. authorship, and thus the reason for the present series of sermons. In fact, it is my conviction that both internal and external evidence points to a post-70 a.d. authorship of the Book of Revelation (most likely in the reign of Emperor Domitian about 96 a.d.).

In the previous sermon we examined Revelation 11:1-2 wherein the Preterist alleges to find a prophecy related to the destruction of the temple and the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 a.d. Reasons were given why we ought not to interpret the passage as prophesying the destruction of the literal temple and the literal city of Jerusalem. I will not take the time to review those reasons at

this time, but you may review them by examining the previous sermon for yourself (it would be #21 in the present series).

This Lord's Day we move forward to another passage which the Preterist uses to defend and promote the view that John penned the visions in this Revelation before 70 a.d. That passage is found in our inspired text read earlier: Revelation 13:18.

I. Preterism and Revelation 13:18.

A. The Preterist claims that the number of the beast that is specifically revealed by 666 in Revelation 13:18 is the emperor of Rome, Nero Caesar. Obviously, if the number (666) of the blasphemous and persecuting beast described in Revelation 13 1-10 is truly Nero Caesar, there would be strong internal evidence to warrant the view that the Book of Revelation was written prior to 70 a.d. (for Nero committed suicide in 68 a.d.). How does the Preterist arrive at such a conclusion?

1. The first step in identifying the number of the beast for the Preterist is to consider the beast that rises from the sea (in Revelation 13:1), that has seven heads and ten horns (in Revelation 13:1), and that has the features of a leopard, bear, and lion (in Revelation 13:2) as signifying the blasphemous and persecuting kingdom of Rome. For we see in Daniel 7, in the vision of the four kingdoms that would successively rule upon the earth from the time of Daniel to the time of their destruction by the Lord, that "four great beasts came up from the sea" (Daniel 7:3). The first beast was like a lion (Daniel 7:4)—this is Babylon. The second beast was like a bear (Daniel 7:5)—this is Medo-Persia. The third beast was like a leopard (Daniel 7:6)—this was Greece. All of these three

descriptions are used with regard to the beast we find in Revelation 13:2. And finally the fourth beast as found in Daniel 7:7-8 is simply described as “dreadful and terrible, and strong exceedingly”. Note also that this fourth beast of Daniel has ten horns as does the beast in Revelation 13:1. There is clearly a prophetic parallel between the fourth beast of Daniel and the beast from the sea in Revelation 13:1. This fourth beast of Daniel is the kingdom of Rome which succeeded Greece as the next worldwide kingdom, and likewise this beast from the sea (in Revelation 13:1) that embodies all of the descriptions and features of the prior three world kingdoms (in Revelation 13:2) is the kingdom of Rome. Thus, when our text states in Revelation 13:18, “Let him that hath understanding count the number OF THE BEAST”, the number 666 identifies in some way the beast that rises from the sea, i.e. the civil power and kingdom of Rome.

2. The second step for the Preterist in identifying the number of the beast is to consider the blasphemous and persecuting nature of the beast (as related in Revelation 13:4-10). The Preterist explains that Nero solicited and received blasphemous titles and attributes of deity unto himself and was the first of the Roman emperors to savagely persecute Christians (both Peter and Paul were executed during the reign of Nero). Thus, the Preterist argues that the description we find of this beast in Revelation 13 fits well with what history reveals about Nero.

3. The third step for the Preterist in identifying the number of the beast is to consider the 666 that is called both “the number of the beast” and “the number of a man” (Revelation 13:18). It is a well-established fact that most Ancient languages (such as Hebrew, Greek, and Latin) did not have a numerical system separate from the letters of the own alphabet. Various letters of their alphabet

were given different numerical values as we see exhibited in Roman Numerals (I=1, V=5, X=10, L=50, C=100, D=500, M=1,000).

Interestingly, when the numerical value of the Hebrew letters used in the Hebrew spelling of the words “Nero Caesar” (נֵרוֹן קֵיסָר) are counted and added, they total exactly 666.

4. Thus, according to the Preterist, when the preceding three steps are weighed together, they provide very strong internal evidence that Nero was the blasphemous and persecuting emperor who was reigning in Rome at the time that John penned the Book of Revelation, which if true would mean that the Book of Revelation was written before Nero’s death in 68 a.d. (and obviously before the destruction of the Jerusalem in 70 a.d.). As was observed in the previous sermon (when we considered Revelation 11:1-2), this appears at first glance to be a very compelling argument from internal evidence for a pre-70 a.d. authorship of Revelation. But I urge caution as we proceed to examine the Scripture in regard to “the number of the beast”.

B. Let us now consider reasons why “the number of the beast” (666) as found in Revelation 13:18 is not Nero, thus removing this as evidence for a pre-70 a.d. dating of the Book of Revelation.

1. The first reason is this: The specific time period at which this beast in Revelation 13 is warring against the saints (Revelation 13:7) is not prior to 70 a.d., but is rather several hundred years later.

a. Let us turn first to the vision of Daniel 7 (which as we have already seen identifies the fourth beast with the ten horns that rises from the sea (in Daniel 7:3-8) with the beast with the ten horns that rises from the sea in Revelation 13:1 as the political kingdom of

Rome). In Daniel 7:19, Daniel indicates that he wanted to know the truth concerning the fourth beast (i.e. the political kingdom of Rome). Daniel had observed that on the head of this fourth beast (political Rome) were ten horns that shall arise from the beast and that there shall arise after them a little horn before whom three of the horns shall fall (Daniel 7:8,20,24). What does this mean and why is it important to dating the Book of Revelation?

(1) I submit that this refers to a period in history when the political kingdom of Rome would be broken and divided by ten kings (or kingdoms) that would arise. When did this occur? Did it occur before 70 a.d. during the reign of Nero? If so, where is the historical evidence to support such a claim?

(a) Some Preterists have sought to identify these ten kings with the Governors of the Roman Provinces that existed at the time of Nero, but there were nearly twice as many Roman Provinces (18) at the time of Nero. Furthermore, before the death of Nero, these Roman Provinces could not be said to be dividing and destroying a unified Roman Empire.

(b) Some Preterists realize they cannot find historical fulfillment for these ten horns among the Roman Provinces prior to Nero's death in 68 a.d., and so they have interpreted the number ten as a symbolic number rather than as a literal number. However, the same Preterists want to interpret the seven heads upon the beast as literal (the fifth head of Revelation 17:10 they assign to Nero). So the beast according to some Preterists has seven literal heads and ten symbolic horns. Where's the consistency in that? Furthermore, the ten horns are not likely to be a symbolic number when in Daniel 7, three of them are said to be "plucked up by the roots" (Daniel 7:8), fallen (Daniel 7:20), and subdued or humbled (Daniel 7:24).

(c) Although there is no historical evidence to which the Preterist can turn for the historical fulfillment of the Roman Empire being divided and broken by ten kingdoms prior to the death of Nero (68 a.d.), I submit there is much historical evidence to confirm that this prophesied division of the Roman Empire by ten barbarian kings (or kingdoms) began about 376 a.d. with the advance of the kingdom of the Visigoths and ten kingdoms had contributed significant division within the Roman Empire by 538 a.d. by which time three of the ten kingdoms had fallen. This division within the Roman Empire included the following ten kingdoms: the **Heruli**, **Ostrogoths**, and **Lombards** occupied various parts of present Italy, the **Visigoths** occupied what is presently parts of Hungary, Austria, Croatia, and Serbia), the **Sueves** occupied what is presently Spain, the **Franks** occupied what is presently France, the **Burgundians** occupied what is presently part of France, the **Anglo-Saxons** occupied what is presently Britain, the **Vandals** occupied what is presently parts of Italy and North Africa, and the **Alemanni** occupied what is presently Germany. When we read concerning the same ten kingdoms in Daniel 2:41 that there shall a division within the fourth kingdom (namely Rome) and a mixture of iron and clay in the feet and ten toes of the image in Nebuchadnezzar's dream, we are likewise to understand this same division that occurred within the Roman Empire by these ten kingdoms just identified.

(2) Also observe in Daniel 7:24 that there is another prophetic character that shall appear at this very time in history after the division of the once unified Roman Empire by the ten kingdoms: a little horn that shall be diverse (or different) from the first 10 kingdoms. Daniel's prophecy states that three of the ten kingdoms shall fall and be humbled before the little horn. This same little horn grows in power and authority to such an extent that it is prophesied

to make “war with the saints” and to “prevail against them” (Daniel 7:21) and to “wear out the saints” (Daniel 7:25). Furthermore, this little horn is prophesied to blaspheme the Lord God by speaking “great words against the most High” (Daniel 7:25). Finally, note that the period of time in which the saints are to “be given into his hand” is for “a time, and times, and the dividing of time” (i.e. for 3 ½ prophetic years which equals 42 prophetic months and 1260 prophetic days). I submit that this little horn of Daniel 7 that is different from the ten kingdoms and arises in power after them, before whom three kingdoms fall and are humbled, that blasphemes God, and that wars against the saints for 3 ½ prophetic years (or 42 prophetic months) and whose throne is in Rome is the ecclesiastical/political kingdom of the Roman Catholic Church with her Romish popes (who assumed the pagan title of the Roman Emperors— Pontifex Maximus or Supreme Priest). For indeed by 538 a.d. three of the ten barbarian kingdoms had fallen in defeat and were uprooted as political kingdoms before the throne of the Roman papacy. These three barbarian kingdoms had at different times conquered and sacked Rome, but were each destroyed within a few short years of one another while the Church and papacy of Rome withstood all of these attacks, grew in power despite these attacks, and witnessed the uprooting of each of these three kingdoms namely, the Heruli in 533 a.d., the Vandals in 536 a.d., and the Ostrogoths in 538 a.d. The destroyers were themselves destroyed, while the little horn (a kingdom different from the others because it was an ecclesiastical/political kingdom) continued to increase in power when in 538 a.d. the Roman papacy was endowed with the title of “Universal Bishop” over all Christian Churches by the imperial decree of Emperor Justinian. In ages to come, anyone who dared to defy this little horn as the Church of

Christ outside of which there is no possibility of salvation, or as the papacy being “Universal Bishop” (or the Vicar of Christ, or the Head of the Universal Church on earth) would find the little horn united with the divided kingdom of Rome as adversaries making war with, persecuting, and murdering faithful Christians into the many millions in number. The persecution of Christians in Rome by Nero pales in comparison to the persecution of Christians within the broken and divided Roman Empire by ecclesiastical and political Rome.

(3) Now when we take this information from Daniel 7 and note the parallels we find with it in Revelation 13, we are given a further confirmation that the prophesied events found in Revelation 13 do not refer to the time of Nero, but to a period of time some hundreds of years after the death of Nero.

(a) We have already noted that the beast that arises from the sea in Revelation 13:1 is the same as the fourth beast in Daniel 7: namely, the political kingdom of Rome.

(b) We have also noted that on the head of both beasts (in Daniel 7 and in Revelation 13) are ten horns signifying ten kings or kingdoms that would break and divide a unified Roman Empire. In fact, these 10 kings or kingdoms have moved from having no crowns on their horns in Revelation 12:3 a period of time in which they were not ruling within the Roman Empire to a time in which they now have crowns and are ruling within a divided and broken Roman Empire in Revelation 13:1. These 10 barbarian kingdoms notably began to exert their rule in 376 a.d. with the Visigoths and subsequently with the other nine barbarian kingdoms.

(c) Let us also note that just as the little horn of Rome (the Romish Church and her Pope) is distinguishable from the fourth beast of political Rome and yet is inseparable from it (as a little horn

on the beast's head) in Daniel 7, so likewise the political beast of Rome that rises out of the sea (Revelation 13:1-10) is distinguishable from the ecclesiastical beast of Rome that has two horns like a lamb and comes out of the earth in Revelation 13:11-17 (which I take to be the Romish Church) and yet inseparable from it. This second prophetic character in Revelation 13:11-17 (the ecclesiastical beast which signifies the Romish Church) is also identified elsewhere as the false prophet in Revelation 16:13 and Revelation 19:20 because of the heresies and false teaching by which it deceives millions. The second beast is also identified as Mystery Babylon, the Mother of Harlots who rides upon and receives the support of the political beast of Rome in Revelation 17:3,5 demonstrating once again that political Rome and ecclesiastical Rome are distinguishable, and yet are inseparable. Mystery Babylon is identified as the "great city, which reigneth over the kings of the earth" in Revelation 17:18, i.e. Rome is the seat of this Harlot Church whose cardinals are clothed in purple and scarlet according to Revelation 17:4, whose Cathedrals are decked with gold and precious stones according to Revelation 17:4, and who has a golden cup full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication wherein blasphemy and idolatry fill the golden cup of her Mass, when it is asserted that the wine in the golden cup is miraculously transformed by means of the priest's words into the literal blood of Christ as is the bread into the literal body of Christ, and which are then both worshipped as the actual body and blood of Christ and which are offered as a sacrifice to God)

(d) And let us also note that the third prophetic character in Revelation 13:14-15, the image of the beast (which I take to be the Romish Pope who lives and receives his being from the Romish Church and from her Cardinals and Bishops according to Revelation

13:15) is also distinguishable from political Rome and ecclesiastical Rome and yet inseparable from them. This image of the beast is worshipped (Revelation 13:15) just as the political beast of Rome is worshipped (Revelation 13:4). In fact, the image of the beast is not a dead idol, but is a dynasty of living, breathing beings who have assumed the pagan title of the Roman Emperors, Pontifex Maximus —Supreme Priest, and appears with the political beast of Rome in Revelation 14:9,11; 15:2; 16:2; 19:20; 20:4).

(e) All the prophetic characters we have considered in Daniel 7 and Revelation 13 are treasonous, blasphemous co-conspirators united in blaspheming God by bestowing and usurping the office of Christ (as the Universal Bishop and the Head of the Universal Church on earth), by warring against and persecuting the faithful saints of Christ for the precise same period of time: 3 ½ prophetic years (or 42 prophetic months) in Daniel 7:25 and 42 prophetic months in Revelation 13:5. Thus, dear ones, when we place Daniel 7 beside Revelation 13, we have an agreement as to prophesied events, and likewise agreement as to the time of these prophesied events, which prophesied events, I submit, were historically fulfilled hundreds of years after the death of Nero (in 68 a.d.) and after the destruction of Jerusalem (in 70 a.d.).

b. Having noted that the prophesied events of Daniel 7 parallel the prophesied events in Revelation 13 and that the prophesied events in both cases preclude a pre-70 a.d. fulfillment, we now turn to another passage (Revelation 11:2) which likewise shines light upon the time of fulfillment of the prophesied events in Revelation 13. We examined closely (in the previous sermon) the events prophesied in Revelation 11:2.

(1) In summary, we concluded that it was not the literal temple

that was profaned or the literal “holy city” that was tread underfoot as is promoted by the Preterist.

(2) To the contrary, it was rather the figurative temple of Christ’s Visible Church (1 Corinthians 3:16) that would be profaned by the “man of sin” and “son of perdition” (2 Thessalonians 2:3) who exalts himself “above all that is called God”, “so that he [the pope—GLP] as God sitteth in the temple of God [i.e. the Visible Church of Christ—GLP], showing himself that he is God” (2 Thessalonians 2:4). It is this “son of perdition” (the papacy) who is the spiritual offspring of Judas (the only other biblical character referred to as “the son of perdition” and who was a devil and sat as a leader in the Visible Church, John 6:70; 17:12—just as does the Pope of Rome). The Pope together with his cardinals, archbishops, bishops, and priests are those that the apostle John is told to cast out of the temple in Revelation 11:2 (i.e. to excommunicate from the faithful Church of Christ that worships the Lord in spirit and in truth).

(3) It is also this same “man of sin” and “son of perdition” with all his officers and followers that tread underfoot the “holy city” of Christ’s Visible Church by invading, oppressing, deceiving, and persecuting the “holy city” of Christ’s Visible Church for a period of 42 prophetic months (Revelation 11:2).

(4) Now is it simply a coincidence or is it the Spirit’s intention to reveal the same prophesied events under two different visions (in Revelation 11 and Revelation 13)? Clearly, it is not coincidental, but intentional. For the Roman beast of Revelation 13 also wars against and persecutes the faithful saints of Christ (Revelation 13:7), profanes the tabernacle of God i.e. the Visible Church of Christ (Revelation 13:6), and performs this wickedness for exactly 42 prophetic months—the precise period of time in which the temple

(or Visible Church of Christ) is to be profaned and the holy city (or Visible Church of Christ) is to be tread underfoot, invaded, oppressed and persecuted by profane Gentiles (in Revelation 11:2) which I submit is led by “the man of sin” (the Pope of Rome).

(5) Thus, as we compare the prophesied events of Revelation 11 with those of Revelation 13, we see they must prophesy about events occurring at the same period of history, which period of history we demonstrated from Revelation 11 in the previous sermon to be fulfilled hundreds of years after 70 a.d. when the excommunicated Romish Church and her Pope reach their zenith in profaning and trampling underfoot the Visible Church of Christ. So likewise do the events prophesied in Revelation 13 occur hundreds of years after 70 a.d. since they parallel the events prophesied in Revelation 11.

2. Let us now consider the second reason why “the number of the beast” (666) as found in Revelation 13:18 is not Nero, thus removing this as evidence for a pre-70 a.d. dating of the Book of Revelation: There is a much more suitable identification for the number of the beast (666) than Nero Caesar.

a. The first reason why Nero Caesar is not a suitable identification for the number of the beast (666) is because Nero does not fit the time period that is described by the political beast of Rome with the ten horns in Daniel 7 and the ten crowned horns in Revelation 13:1), which as we have seen addresses a period of history in which the unified Roman Empire is broken and divided by ten barbarian kingdoms, three of which fall and are humbled at the time of the rising and exaltation of the little horn of the Romish Church and Papacy by the Emperor Justinian, who in 538 a.d.

decreed that the Pope of Rome should thenceforth be given the title of Universal Bishop. It appeared that this little horn of ecclesiastical and papal Rome had almost miraculously risen out of the ashes of Rome that had been captured and sacked by the three kingdoms, but the little horn of ecclesiastical Rome and papal Rome prevailed over its captors each time. Thus, to identify Nero with the beast with ten crowned horns (in Revelation 13:1) is completely out of sync with the historical fulfillment of the ten ruling barbarian kingdoms that divided a unified Rome which occurred over four hundred years after the death of Nero.

b. A second reason why Nero Caesar is not a suitable identification for the number of the beast (666) is that the actual number of the beast as found in Revelation 13:18 is recorded in Greek letters not Hebrew letters. How then is it suitable for the number of the beast to be in Greek letters, and yet the name of the beast to be in Hebrew letters? Preterists point to Hebrew words in the book of Revelation that are translated into Greek (such as “Abaddon” in Revelation 9:11 or “Armageddon” in Revelation 16:16). However, that is not what is in dispute here. That I willingly grant. What I have a problem with is that there are not Hebrew letters that when calculated equal 666 in Revelation 13:8, but to the contrary Greek letters. And thus, we should likewise expect not the Hebrew spelling of a name, but the Greek spelling of a name. It also seems much more suitable for the original audience in the seven Churches of Asia Minor that first received the Book of Revelation and that all spoke Greek (while fewer spoke Hebrew) to signify a Greek name using Greek numerical letters than a Hebrew name using Greek numerical letters.

c. A third reason why Nero Caesar is not a suitable identification for the number of the beast (666) is that for nearly

1700 years no one in the Church was known or recorded (to the best of my knowledge) to offer Nero's name as the number of the beast (666). Moses Stuart (*Commentary on the Apocalypse*, pp. 457-458, 1845), himself a Preterist, identifies Professor Benary of Berlin (c. 1840) as the first recorded scholar to propose Nero Caesar (and particularly Nero Caesar in Hebrew letters) as the name of the beast. Although it is not impossible that the true meaning of the number of the beast (666) might be hidden from the whole Church until about 1840, it does seem very unlikely that such would be the case, especially when Nero Caesar is not known to have been even mentioned by any coming from the first century (prior to 70 a.d.) to whom (according to the Preterist) the Book of Revelation was intended. According to the Preterist, those to whom the apostle John wrote the Book of Revelation were supposed to understand that Nero Caesar was intended by the number of the beast, and yet there is not a trace or even the mention of Nero Caesar as the name of the beast prior to about 1840. That seems remarkable to me.

d. A fourth and final reason why Nero Caesar is not a suitable identification for the number of the beast (666) is because there is a name that fits very well with the historical division of the Roman Empire into ten kingdoms, that is also a number of a man, that is the number of a name in Greek letter rather than in Hebrew letters, and that is of ancient origin (mentioned by Irenaeus in the second century as a probable choice): the Greek word ΛΑΤΕΙΝΟΣ which means "Latin one" either referring to the Roman Empire as the Latin one or to a Latin man (Latinus being the founder of Rome). The Western Roman Empire (with its capital in Rome) was the Latin branch of the Empire where the language of Latin predominated, whereas the Eastern Roman Empire (with its capital in Constantinople) was the Greek branch of the Empire where the

language of Greek predominated. And it was in the Western Roman Empire that the 10 kingdoms took up their rule. Thus, I submit that the name and number of the Roman beast in Revelation 13:18 is not Nero Caesar which removes another alleged piece of internal evidence from the Preterist in seeking to establish a pre-70 a.d. date of authorship for the Book of Revelation.

Dear ones, how we must learn from the description given by the apostle John of the second beast (which is also the false prophet and the harlot Church of Rome) in Revelation 13:14 in regard to the “miracles” that this harlot Church shall perform and of “the man of sin” in 2 Thessalonians 2:9 in regard to the “signs and lying wonders” that the Papacy shall perform that we must not walk by sight but must walk by faith in Christ (our only Mediator between God and man and only Head of the Church whether in heaven or on earth). The Lord Jesus made it clear that it is not the one who performs miracles (and even does so in the name of Christ) that shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but rather the one who does the will of God (Matthew 7:21-23). It is easy to swing to the opposite extreme and to deny that God performs no miracles for His people after the age of the apostles. God is not restrained to perform a miracle for His people or to use ordinary means to help and encourage His people (“For with God nothing shall be impossible” Luke 1:37). How then do we discern between the false prophet and the faithful prophet? He must teach and obey what God has revealed in His Word whether or not a miracle is performed (Deuteronomy 13:1-3; Matthew 7:15-16). If the most faithful Church was based upon miracles, signs, and wonders, the Church of Rome would no doubt be the most faithful Church (where miracles, healings, exorcisms etc.) happen almost regularly in conjunction with their holy relics, pilgrimages, and prayers to the saints.

Beware, dear ones, that your faith be firmly anchored in Jesus Christ alone and His revealed doctrine, worship, and Church government that the enemy gain no entrance into our lives by way of lies and deception.