

The Historical View of Prophecy and Antichrist

'It is the bounden duty of every Christian to pray against Antichrist and as to what Antichrist is no sane man ought to raise a question. If it be not the Popery in the Church of Rome, there is nothing in the world that can be called by that name.'
-- Charles Spurgeon



This is the continuation of the book, [The Foundations Under Attack: The Roots of Apostasy – By Michael de Semlyen](#)

PART I HISTORY AND PROPHECY

Chapter 1

The Historical View of Prophecy and Antichrist

There are two great truths that stand out in the preaching that brought about the Protestant Reformation—the “*just shall live by faith*” (Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11; Hebrews 10:38 (and Habakkuk 2:4) (not by the works of Romanism or any other religion) and “the Papacy is the Antichrist revealed in Scripture.” It was a message for Christ and against Antichrist. The entire Reformation rested on this twofold testimony. In losing the second, unquestionably we have done injury to the first; ecumenical Christianity and “new evangelicalism” provide abundant testimony to this.

Iain Murray in his book *The Puritan Hope* described the Reformers as “unanimous in their belief” that the Papal system is both the “man of sin” (2 Thessalonians 2:3) and the Babylonian whore of which Scripture forewarns. Rome was the great Antichrist, and so firmly did this belief become established that it was not until the nineteenth century that evangelicals seriously questioned it. (Iain Murray: *The Puritan Hope*, Banner of Truth.)

Victorian Bible scholar Dr. Grattan Guinness ringingly declared, “Thousands of martyrdoms have sealed the testimony against the Papal antichrist, and on this testimony rests the Reformation. To reject it is to reject the foundation of the noblest and divinest work which has been wrought in this world since the day of Pentecost.” – H.Grattan Guinness: [Romanism and the Reformation](#).

The Protestant or Historical interpretation of prophecy views the prophecies of Daniel, Paul, and John as fully and faithfully laying out the entire

course of Christian history; and sees the Book of Revelation as a pre-figuration in detail of the chief events affecting the church and Christendom. "*A great cloud of witnesses*" (Hebrews 12:1) has given testimony to the correctness of this view. Wycliffe, Huss, Savonarola, Luther, Calvin, Melancthon, Zwingli, Tyndale, John Rogers, Latimer, Ridley, Hooper, Cranmer, John Foxe, Bunyan, the translators of the King James Bible, the men who published the Westminster and Baptist Confessions of Faith, Sir Isaac Newton, Wesley, Whitefield, Jonathan Edwards, Matthew Henry, and (more recently) Spurgeon, Bishop J.C. Ryle, Hudson-Taylor, and Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones—these men, among countless others, steeped and soaked in Scripture, recognised the office of the Papacy, the Vicar of Christ, as "*the man of sin*", the new face of the old paganism that is "MYSTERY, BABYLON" (Revelation 17:5) in the Bible. They saw it all in the Scriptures; it was quickened to them. They saw the counterfeit bride, the Harlot that would be judged at the end of history. All of them were immensely burdened for the souls of those in bondage to such an evil and corrupt system and imprisoned in what Luther called "the Babylonian Captivity of the Church." They knew that it was their duty to view the Church of Rome as God views her and stand clearly against all her heresies. If they were right about this then, they are still right today. God's Word does not change, and Rome has since added to her many heresies.

What Is Historicism?

The Historicism Research Foundation has a helpful summary on historicism on its web site: (Now off-line.)

"In brief, Historicism teaches that biblical predictions are being fulfilled throughout history and continue to be fulfilled today. The Book of Revelation is a pre-written history of the Church from the time of its writing to the future Second Advent of Christ, which shall usher in the new heaven and new earth."

Historicists agree on the following unique concepts:

- The "Year-Day" principle of prophetic language defines a day of symbolic time as representing a year of actual historic time.
- The "Time, Times, and Half a Time", "3 1/2 years", "1260 days", and "42 months" time period, which occurs seven times in Daniel and Revelation, is understood by Historicists to be fulfilled in history.
- All Historicists believe that the Papacy is that Antichrist, the Man of Sin of 2 Thessalonians 2, and the Beast of Revelation 13.
- Historicists generally agree that Revelation 9 speaks of the Muslim scourge which afflicted Christendom.
- All Historicists agree that the book of Revelation prophesies the history of the Church from the Apostolic era to the future Second Advent of Jesus Christ.
- The Historicist interpretation was the standard interpretation from Wycliffe to Spurgeon (spanning 500 years) and is known as the Protestant interpretation, in distinct contrast to Preterism and Futurism which were Jesuit interpretations contrived during the Counter-Reformation.

Additionally, the Reformation confessions, including the Irish Articles

(1615), the original Westminster Confession of Faith (1646), the Savoy Declaration (1658), and the London Baptist Confession (1688), have adopted the Historicist interpretation.

The “Little Horn” of Daniel

The Reformers also identified the Papacy as the persecuting “little horn” of Daniel 7. John Wycliffe asked, “Why is it necessary in unbelief to look for another Antichrist?” In the seventh chapter of Daniel, Antichrist is forcefully described by a horn arising in the time of the fourth kingdom, which will “*wear out the saints of the most High.*” (Daniel 7:25) The Reformers believed, as do many Christians today, that the little horn of Daniel 7 had risen out of the fourth beast, the Roman Empire, and had sprung up among the ten kingdoms into which Imperial Rome was divided. The little horn is “*diverse*” or different from the other kingdoms. (Daniel 7:7,19,23-24) The Papacy proved to be different from the other kingdoms, claiming spiritual as well as temporal power. The little horn has “*a mouth speaking great things.*”¹³ Over the centuries the Papacy has repeatedly laid claim to rule the world as Christ’s representative. It has also claimed to speak with infallibility on matters of faith and doctrine as well as continuing to insist, that “there is no salvation outside the Church of Rome.” (Boniface VIII: Unam Sanctum)

In Daniel’s dream, the little horn “*had eyes*” and his “*look was more stout than his fellows.*” (Daniel 7:20) The Pope, who lays claim to the keys of the kingdom of heaven, is said to watch over more people than any other leader. He is responsible for the spiritual oversight of more than one billion people across the world today.

The little horn “*made war with the saints and prevailed against them*” (Daniel 7:21) and would “*wear out the saints of the most High..... and they shall be given into his hand until a time and times and the dividing of time.*” (Daniel 7:25) This part of the prophecy was comprehensively fulfilled over the many centuries of Papal Rome’s ruthless persecution of Bible-believing Christians—through the Dark Ages, during the Inquisition, and right up to the French Revolution. Evangelicals, frequently referred to as belonging to “fundamentalist sects”, are persecuted in Roman Catholic countries today.

The little horn would “*think to change times and laws.*” (Daniel 7:25) The Papacy has changed both human laws and divine laws. It has annulled and abrogated the laws of kings and emperors and, relatively recently, in 1870, declared itself infallible in defiance of Scripture. It has presumed to annul marriages, too, and to ordain a celibate “Priesthood” in place of the biblical model of married pastors. Not only laws but also times have been changed. The calendar of Pope Gregory has replaced the calendar of Emperor Justinian. There are all the many different “Saints’” days, and we have both Christ’s Mass, Christmas, to celebrate our Lord’s birth and the pagan goddess Astarte’s festival, Easter, 19 for His death and resurrection.

1260 “Year-days”

In prophetic language, a day of symbolic time represents a year of actual,

historic time. 20 The "Time, Times, and Half a Time" (also rendered "3 1/2 years" or "42 months") time period, which occurs seven times in Daniel and Revelation, is understood by Historicists to be fulfilled in history. Futurists interpret this as a literal 3 1/2 years. Historicists, utilising the "Year-day" principle, interpret this as 1260 years (one month being equal to thirty days).

The interval from the Pope-exalting decree of the emperor Phocas, AD 607, to the Revolution of 1848 and formal deposition of the Pope, on 8 February 1849, spans 1260 years or 31/2 day-years (with 1260 lunar years passing from the Papal Decree of Phocas to the Revolution of 1830).

The Man of Sin and the Mystery of Iniquity

The picture that emerged from Daniel's dream was clear for those guided by the Holy Spirit at the time of the Reformation, as it had been to the early Christians. There seems to have been a remarkable consensus of understanding among the church fathers as well as the Reformers. According to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, during those first centuries, "Christians universally believed that the power that was retarding the revelation of the Antichrist was the Roman Empire."

They equated the little horn with the "*man of sin*" and the Antichrist. They knew that "*the mystery of iniquity*" already at work in Paul's day (2 Thessalonians 2:3-7) would follow the fall of the Roman Empire. It was widely understood that the Apostle, writing to the Thessalonians, wrote mysteriously, that "*he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way*", because he was referring to Imperial Rome. Had he been more explicit and spelled out his belief, that the Empire which was restraining the Antichrist would fall at some indeterminate time, he would surely have brought the Christians, especially the Thessalonians, into conflict with the ruling power.

The following quotes from the exposition of chapter 2 of 2 Thessalonians by prominent early Church Fathers illustrate the general Christian identifying of the restraining power.

- Irenaeus (AD 130-202) – On the dismemberment of the Empire now in existence [the Roman Empire] the catastrophe will occur.
- Tertullian (AD 160-250) – What is the restraining power? What but the Roman State?
- Lactantius of Gaul (A.D. 240-320) – Beseech the God of Heaven that the Roman State might be preserved, lest more speedily than we supposed the hateful tyrant [the man of sin] should come.
- Chrysostom (A.D. 345-407) – As Rome succeeded Greece, so Antichrist is to succeed Rome.
- Jerome (A.D. 342-420) – All ecclesiastical writers have delivered to us that when Rome is to be destroyed, ten kings will divide the Roman world among them and then will be revealed the Man of Sin.

All five quotes from The Church Fathers are referenced in Samuel J. Cassels, *Christ and Antichrist*, Philadelphia Presbyterian Board of Publication. 1846

Others such as Augustine of Hippo (A.D 354-430), Cyril of Jerusalem, Theodoret of Antioch, and Hippolytus of Rome all believed that the antichrist would emerge with the fall of the Roman Empire. Nearly fifteen hundred years later, even Roman Catholic convert, Cardinal John Henry Newman, felt obliged to admit that “the withholding power, mentioned in 2 Thessalonians 2:6 was the Roman Empire. I grant this, for all the ancient writers speak of it.”

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