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I-800-611-8080 / www.cgom.org
PO Box 54621, Tulsa, OK 74155-0621

PARALLEL TIMES

History, it is claimed, repeats itself. But not always in the same way

by James McBride

Unraveling the prophetic themes of the Christian Bible can be a challenge. So many strands. So many principles of interpretation. So many historical scenarios. And so much baggage carried by the Bible student. That theme mentioned above — *'history repeats itself'* — is one factor which will apply in the end time.

It is helpful to our understanding on that basis to link the prophecies of the prophet Daniel (Old Testament) with those of the apostle John in Revelation (New Testament). Together they identify the main players in a modern context.

Kingdoms Overthrown

In Daniel chapter seven, Daniel had a vision from God that encompassed all of history from then till now. In vision, God revealed that there would be four kingdoms—from Babylon (6th c. BC) until *'...one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days'* (v.13) having deposed all previous kingdoms (v.12).

Successive empires—Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, Rome—dominated and then faded, only the last surviving, currently represented by the *Treaty of Rome* nations gathered in the European Union. The return of Jesus Christ will end their rule for ever: *'...there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed'* (v.14). Daniel picks up the story, predicting the path of the Roman Empire.

A Weird Animal

The creature he saw was *'...diverse from all the others, exceeding dreadful, whose teeth were of iron, and his nails of brass; which devoured, brake in pieces, and stamped the residue with his feet; And of the ten horns that were in his head, and of the other which came up, and before whom three fell; even of that horn that had eyes, and a mouth that spoke very great things, whose look was more stout than his fellows'* (v.19-20). A crystal clear snap of Rome through the last fifteen hundred years!

The prophet gets detailed. Those ten 'horns', from whose midst the 'little horn' emerges are ten kings (kingdoms) to arise out of Rome—fulfilled historically. He then describes a *different sort of 'king'* arising within the Roman Empire and coming to dominate it. Indeed the latter overthrew three of the ten kingdoms [v. 24, Heruli (493AD), Vandals (534), Ostrogoths (553)]: *'...I considered the horns, and, behold, there came up among them another little horn, before whom there were three of the first horns plucked up by the roots: and, behold, in this horn were eyes like the eyes of man, and a mouth speaking great things'* (v.8).

The Wilderness Church

But just how 'different'? He is describes as initially low-key but gaining power and arising within the Roman Empire. More—he meddles with God: *'...he shall speak great words against the most High, and shall wear out the saints of the most High, and think to change times and laws'*. That is, he occupies the discipline of religion within the confines of the Roman Empire—at that time, Catholicism, all else being suppressed.

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So, a religious power with authority to depose kings, to defy God with strange doctrines, to change God's 'times and seasons', violently persecuting the people of God and driving them into 'the wilderness' for a thousand years.

Times
Daniel 7:25, 12:7
Revelation 11:2,3, 12:6,14, 13:5
all seven point to 1260 days/years

The 'saints' were the '*church in the wilderness*' (Acts 7: 38), and God revealed to Daniel for how long this persecution of His people would continue: '*...and they shall be given into his hand until a time and times and the dividing of time*' [see side panel]. On the Bible basis of a day for a year this is 1250 years.

The death certificate of the Roman Empire is usually signed off as around 539AD. For the next twelve hundred and fifty years the Papacy—which amply fulfils the criteria for the 'Little Horn'—violently dominated the Western world's political and religious systems. The incumbent was then Pope Virgilius. It continued until the ousting of the Papacy at the extreme end of the eighteenth century.

'...In 1929, Prime Minister Benito Mussolini and Cardinal Pietro Gasparri signed an accord whereby the Pope had to pledge his own political party's support to Mussolini in exchange for the return of his papal seat and power'.

In 1798 Napoleon's General Bernier entered Rome and declared a Roman Republic, requiring Pope Paul VI to forego all temporal authority. He refused and was arrested, dying soon after in exile. To all intents and purposes the Papacy was 'dead', having lost all political authority: The persecution and murder of 'heretics' drew to a close.

Since the Papacy's revival the power of the 'Holy See' has burgeoned. Most national leaders have publicly acknowledged the Pope as a world leader and hang on his every word. He, head of the world's smallest political State, has embassies in every nation and has addressed the United Nations assembly. His influence is global and subtle.

Daniel's prophecy was fulfilled—but there are some anomalies.

End Time

There comes a time when the Father says '*Enough*'! and sends Jesus to our planet to take control (Acts 1:7)—perhaps imaged by Daniel. The prophet continues: '*...I beheld till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of days did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like the pure wool: his throne was like the fiery flame, and his wheels as burning fire*' (v.9). The apostle John describes the coming of Jesus in almost identical terms (Revelation 1:13-15).

But Daniel indicates that the persecution of the faithful is continuing until Jesus returns: '*...the same horn [the Little Horn, the Papacy] made war with the saints, and prevailed against them until the Ancient of days came, and judgment was given to the saints of the most High; and the time came that the saints possessed the kingdom* (ch 7:22).

Clearly, as of writing, the presence on earth of the 'Ancient of Days' is yet future. We can therefore conclude that the events described by John in Revelation are a *recurrence* of what happened in the Middle Ages, under the auspices of the revived Papacy.

This event, however will be short-lived, though at the same time it is the worst period of persecution ever: '*...he shall speak great words against the most High,*

'...there was given him a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies; and power was given unto him to continue forty and two months. And he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme his name, and his tabernacle, and them that dwell in heaven. And it was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them: and power was given him over all kindreds, and tongues, and nations. And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world'. Revelation 13:5-8

and shall wear out the saints of the most High, and think to change times and laws: and they shall be given into his hand until a time and times and the dividing of time' (v.25). That is, for 1260 literal days—not years, as in the mediaeval era by the Inquisition.

Mankind, when the end comes, will have sunk into

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the abyss of violence, cruelty and self destruction paling past atrocities into insignificance: *'...This will be the worst time of suffering since the beginning of the world, and nothing this terrible will ever happen again. If God doesn't make the time shorter, no one will be left alive. But because of God's chosen ones, he will make the time shorter'* (Matthew 24:22-23). Just a relative few are destined to survive physically into God's new world (Isaiah 24:6).

Global Effect

Notice, too—another anomaly—that this is a *global* calamity: *'...all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life'* (Revelation 13:8). The persecution by the authorities, unlike as under the auspices of the Papal Inquisition, will affect all who refuse to submit to him.

The apostle Paul addresses this in writing to the brethren in Thessalonica: *'...the man of sin, the son of perdition, who sets himself against, and exalts himself above, every so-called 'god' or object of worship, and goes the length of taking his seat in the very temple of God, giving it out that he himself is God* (II Thessalonians 2:4)

The apostle had warned that a great apostasy from the truth was even then under way, over ensuing centuries becoming the dominant 'Christian' church; a church dominated by pre-Christian pagan philosophy and vile practices. Now he tells them—reflecting Daniel's prophecy—that a leader would arise claiming divine attributes. He would be enthroned in 'the temple of God'—historically the church, in future perhaps a re-built Temple in Jerusalem.

It is well-known that the Papacy has usurped not only the titles owned solely by Jesus but also the authority to change God's laws and to substitute heathen practices for God's revealed way.

Duality

As noted, history, it is claimed, repeats itself. But not always in the same way. Human behaviour doesn't change much and the same patterns repeat—with variations—through the centuries. Characters change, locations change, languages change, but much stays the same.

Ancient Babylon, as Daniel and Revelation tell us, has imprinted its stamp on the twenty-first century. Bible believers (indeed everyone!) must be vigilant. The church of God will again taste that wilderness experience.

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