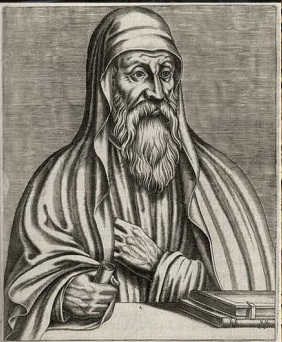




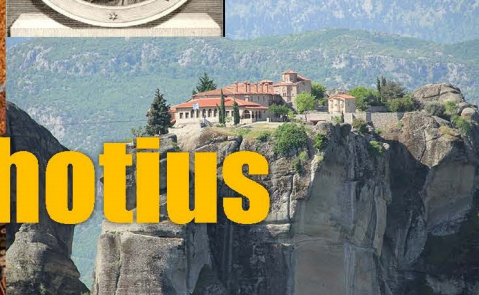
*"The mystery of God should be finished, as he hath
declared to his servants the prophets"*

The Encyclopedia of Christianity in the Book of Revelation

A Neo-Historicist Interpretation



Jonathan Photius



"Today. St. John's Apocalypse reads like a typical history book on Christianity through the ages"

Jonathan Photius, the author of *Seven Times Unto The Dispersion Consummation*, offers new research in supporting the long forgotten Classical Historicism method for interpreting biblical prophecies. Historicist scholars always viewed prophecies as a continuous fulfillment of events throughout our history up to the Second Coming. Neo-Historicism is a post-modern method of reinterpreting the Apocalypse through a similar historical lens, but with a newer Eastern Orthodox perspective and its emphasis on a more Christological-centric view of the Book of Revelation. This groundbreaking work offers biblical scholars never-seen-before analysis and an alternative perspective on chapters 6 to 20 in the Book of Revelation, showing that St. John foretold these events:

- The Ante-Nicene Era and its fight against heresies
- The rise and fall of the greatest Christian theologian
- The Arian conspiracy that tortured the church for 150 years
- The fall of the Western Roman Empire to the Barbarians
- The Age of the Councils and rise of monasticism
- The Rise of Islam, the Inquisitions and the Black Plague
- The Papacy, the Reformation and Age of Enlightenment
- The Fall of the Ottoman Empire and return of the Jews

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Jonathan Photius is an avid researcher of biblical and non-biblical Byzantine-era end-times prophecies. His primary area of focus is interpreting Daniel and Revelation with a newly-revised Eastern Historicist view, using Church History and mathematical concepts to demonstrate accurate fulfillment of the prophecies.

The Encyclopedia of Christianity

In the Book of Revelation

Eastern Light Publishing

The Encyclopedia of Christianity in the Book of Revelation

A NEO-HISTORICIST INTERPRETATION ON
CHAPTERS 6 TO 20 OF ST. JOHN'S APOCALYPSE

Jonathan Photius

Eastern Light Publishing
Sheridan, WY

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“But in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God should be finished, as he hath declared to his servants the prophets.”

—Revelation 10-7 (King James Version)

Introduction to Neo-Historicism

The book of Revelation, the last book in the New Testament, is an awesome book shrouded in mystery. Many evangelical Christians here the word “apocalypse” and associate it with images describing cataclysmic events related to the end of the world with falling asteroids, blood moons and a black-holed sun. However, the literal meaning of the Greek word ἀποκάλυψις (apokálypsis) means “unveiling” or “uncovering” and thus the reason for the more appropriate English name of the book – the Revelation. This mysterious book that reveals to us the hidden things has perplexed theologians for the past 2000 years. However, for most people this book still has not revealed anything worthy of understanding and to them remains uninterpretable. There are many Church fathers and post-Reformation scholars that have labored in providing an explanation of the Apocalypse, but still, many of them failed to understand the true meaning of the text. Different schools of interpretation on the Apocalypse have formed over the years, but many of their ideas only seemed to leave the reader more confused as ever as they diverge down the wrong path of understanding, to the point of the creation of new denominations and heresies. Today, there are four primary schools of prophetic interpretation that are applied to understanding Bible Prophecy. These are recognized to be Preterism, Futurism, Historicism and Idealism. This variance of opinions and methods of interpretation have led to many disagreements and at times open hostility between camps as

they try to understand the mysterious book. Out of the four, the Preterists and Futurists are the most hostile to one another, accusing the other of being deceived and led astray in their spiritual blindness. In addition, there is a definite over-reliance on the Church fathers when it comes to studying the Book of Revelation by the Preterists and Futurists, as many of these early writings provided vastly different views that didn't necessarily agree with one another. So then, the reader might be wondering why this book is any different to the same old recycled interpretations presented before. And how can I then boldly make the claim of authority to comprehend the biblical truths and then decide to publish a new interpretation of the Apocalypse?

The answer to this question is relying on the art and science of biblical interpretation, often called Hermeneutics, to derive the correct interpretive "key" for a successful interpretation of the prophetic texts and applying it through the course of study of the book. And the key for successfully decoding and unlocking the apocalyptic passages is understanding just one simple verse in chapter twelve of the Book of Daniel, where God points out the exact time for the revelation and understanding of the mysterious prophecies of the End-Times:

"In a time of times and a half of a time, ***when the dispersion hath been consummated***, all of these things shall become known" – Daniel 12:7, Theodotion-to-English Translation

What are the "*times*" mentioned in this verse? What is meant by the *consummation* or completion of the *dispersion*? What "*things*" will become known after this event? Let us first examine the text in finer detail. The reader who is familiar with the book of Daniel might first notice that the wording used here in constructing the verse shown above is not typical of the various English translations that one can recall of this passage of Daniel. The rendering of the text shown in the quoted verse above is taken from an English translation of the Greek LXX (Septuagint) based on the *Codex Vaticanus*, the oldest version of the Old Testament including the Book of Daniel in existence today. The Orthodox Church has

always held the belief that the Septuagint is the authoritative version of the Old Testament. Many current scholars consider the Codex Vaticanus to be one of the best Greek texts of the New Testament, and the authentic Greek translation was of course used by Jesus and the Apostles to spread the Gospel message. It is important to highlight the fact that this rendering of Daniel 12:7 shown above is based on the *Theodotion* version of Daniel which is different than the original Old Greek or LXX version. Theodotion was a Hellenistic Jewish scholar who lived in the second century AD and produced a Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament around the year 180 AD. Theodotion's version of Daniel appeared in the sixth column of Origen's *Hexapla* and in Justin Martyr's *Shepherd of Hermas*. Jerome also affirms in his preface to his commentary on Daniel that the Theodotion version of Daniel is the superior translation. Therefore, this *Dispersion Consummation* revealed by the Greek Theodotion translation of Daniel is the very 'encryption' key to unlock and understand the hidden mysteries of Daniel and Revelation. That is, after a *1260-day* or *three-and-a-half-year* length of duration when a scattering of peoples or a '*Diaspora*' is completed, then we will finally be able to understand the prophecies. It is this author's belief that this verse examined from the perspective of the Theodotian version is a direct reference to the historical scattering of the Jews and Israelites, and their eventual return from the nations in the year 1948 after the fall of the Ottoman Empire, which occurred "*in a time of times and a half of a time,*" or 1260 years, after the appearance of Islam in Jerusalem. And therefore, we are given the primary reason for the failure to interpret the apocalyptic prophecies earlier in Daniel 12, verse 4. It is this verse that we read the command to seal and hide the meaning of the prophecies. This command was instituted by Christ as he makes a pre-incarnate appearance in the Old Testament. That is, this "*man*" clothed in "*linen*" in Daniel 12 is none other than the Christ Himself, the Logos and the very God-Man responsible for the locking of the prophecies, giving the following commandment:

“But thou, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, ***until the time of the consummation***, until many have been taught, and knowledge shall have been multiplied” – Daniel 12:4 Translated from the Theodotian

“And you, Daniel, hide the ordinances, and seal the book ***until the time of consummation***, until the many rage violently and the earth is filled with injustice” – Daniel 12:4 – LXX Old Greek NETS Translation

Thus, the Theodotian and Old Greek Septuagint texts reveal to us that the understanding of the words of the prophecies would remain hidden until after the “*time of the consummation*.” That is, when the “*time to restore the kingdom to Israel*” is fulfilled, when the Jews return from the great Diaspora back into the Holy Land, would we be able to understand the hidden mysteries and the “times” calculations foretold in Daniel and Revelation. And thus, we know the primary reason for the failure of the early scholars and fathers up through the first millennium to provide any authoritative commentary on the Book of Revelation. The true knowledge of future events was not even granted to the Apostles (until John received his visions) by Jesus, as we read in the Book of Acts:

“Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, “Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” And He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority.” – **Acts 1:6-7 (NKJV)**

These words spoken by Jesus also help to explain the reason for the failure of the early fathers of the church to interpret Daniel and Revelation successfully. The authority was fixed by God to seal to hide these things until the appointed time was finished. That is, a “seal” was placed on the prophecies which prevented a successful interpretation too early in the progress of time. However, we now sit here 2000 years later looking back at this mysterious book armed twenty centuries of Church his-

tory, documented through thousands of history books and historical artifacts as a witness. Is it now possible to look back and have a better understanding on the Apocalypse as we now live in an age of communications where knowledge “has been multiplied” and quickly available to us at our fingertips through a simple web browser search? This is the primary motivation for writing this book. This author will show that the prophetic parts of the Book of Revelation, beginning with the prophetic content in chapter 6, reads no different than many of the available encyclopedias and books on the history of Christianity. If this can be accurately demonstrated, it would completely invalidate the two most popular methods of prophetic interpretation: Futurism and Preterism. And the true meaning and understanding of the Apocalypse today is such that it was to be interpreted as a general short summary for the history of the Church from the dawn of the second century up until the Second Coming. A great analogy is to think of St. John’s Book of Revelation as a sort of condensed *CliffsNotes* or *Reader’s Digest* version of the history of Christianity, described in the many books that have been published on Church history. And this historical approach to interpretation of the prophecies is what is known as Historicism.

Definition of Historicism and Neo-Historicism

Historicism was the most dominant method of interpreting the Apocalypse after the twelfth century up until the nineteenth century. Traditional early reformed Protestant methods of interpretation and calculations of the prophecies were largely based on historicism. This is what we will refer to here as *Classical Historicism*. Its limitations and failures will be soon explained, and as a result we will define a newly revised version of Historicism defined as *Neo-Historicism*. Neo-Historicism is a new perspective of decoding the prophecies of the Apocalypse using Classical Historicist methods but from a *New Eastern Orthodox* perspective of history (hence the meaning of N.E.O. = New Eastern Orthodox historicist method). The Neo-Historicist method of interpretation goes against many of the current popular end-times theories that have been

proposed in the last 150 years and have poisoned the church with heresies like the Rapture. This author believes that a return to a revised Historicist method of studying the Apocalypse is the only true and valid method of interpretation. Many of the earlier Classical Historicist commentators certainly on the right path to successfully decode and understand some of the hidden meanings of the prophecies. However, the Classical Historicist approach was eventually abandoned thanks to the failure of William Miller and his *Great Disappointment* of 1844 A.D. with his prediction of the date for the Second Coming. This failure gave rise to Futurism and Preterism from the 19th century onwards, both competing views have their roots in Jesuit origins from the sixteenth century and gained traction. There appears to be no common ground between the Futurists and Preterist with their eschatological views. But what if, in fact, there was a middle ground between these opposite extremes? Is it possible to be a partial-preterist and partial-futurist? The answer is “yes”, that is what Historicism ascribes to. As a Historicist, one believes that some prophecies were fulfilled with the destruction of the second Jewish temple in 70 AD, while other prophecies were left for future events in the shaping of Europe and the Middle East, all the way until the Second Coming and general Resurrection of the Dead. Many of the Preterist/Futurist critics will also say the curse and downfall of Historicism was that the Historicists often revised and reinterpreted sections of scripture based on new current events of the time. But this is also one of the strengths of Historicism. Interpreting prophecy sometimes is a long process, especially if God intended for a 1260-year period of tribulation upon the Church. As Sir Isaac Newton and Henry Grattan Guinness tell us relative to the decoding of the prophecies: “*Time is the Interpreter.*” This concept of time revealing the answers to all things is the basic premise behind Historicism.

Evolution of Classical Historicism

The heart of the Historicist method of interpreting biblical prophecy is the *day-year principle* method of interpreting Biblical Prophecy. That

is, the word “day” in the prophecies is considered to symbolically represent a “year” in time. Take for example, the duration of “1260 days” or “42 months” referenced in Revelation would be an actual or literal period of 1260 years. The scriptural basis for interpreting a “day” as a “year” can be found by referencing the old testament scriptures such as: Numbers 14:34, Ezekiel 4:5-6 and Daniel 9:24-27. However, the Preterists and Futurist primarily reject the full use of the Day/Year principle and seem to “cherry pick” its application only to Daniel 9:24-27 in calculating the arrival of Jesus with the 490 year “seventy-weeks” calculation. But the scriptures are very clear in following this rule when interpreting the prophecies:

“After the number of the days in which ye searched the land, even forty days, *each day for a year*, shall ye bear your iniquities, even forty years, and ye shall know my breach of promise.” - **Number 14:34**

“For *I have laid upon thee the years of their iniquity, according to the number of the days*, three hundred and ninety days: so shalt thou bear the iniquity of the house of Israel. And when thou hast accomplished them, lie again on thy right side, and thou shalt bear the iniquity of the house of Judah forty days: *I have appointed thee each day for a year.* – **Ezekiel. 4:5-6**

The beginning of historicism and the use of the Day/Year principle is often attributed to Joachim of Fiore (in the 12th century). Joachim of Fiore claimed he had a vision that told him the 1260 days of the Apocalypse prophesied the events of church history from the time of the apostles until the present. He was one of the first to attribute the Papacy of the time as the Antichrist and believed the second coming would happen 1260 years after Christ in the year 1260 AD. Thus, Joachim was the first person on record that tried to apply the 1260 “days” as years. Nicolas of Lyra (14th century) was the first to apply parts of the Apocalypse as predicting the rise of the Arian heresy and the spread of Islam. The histori-

cist was supported by many Western reformers such as: Albert Barnes, Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Knox, Thomas Cranmer, John Thomas, Joseph Mede, Thomas Brightman, Isaac Newton, and John Wycliffe. Many of these reformers viewed the Papacy as the Antichrist or “Man of Sin” and man of their ideas were the main contributor to the rise of postmillennialism where they envisioned a fall of the Papacy and a 1000-year period of peace upon the earth before the Second Coming. Thus, the dominant view held by the Protestants since the start of the Reformation is that all the prophecies of the beast of Revelation 13 and 17 describes the rise and fall of the Papacy. This idea of the Papacy as the Antichrist would extend to 19th century Historicists such as Edward Bishop Elliott, Henry Grattan Guinness, George Stanley Faber, William Cuninghame, Albert Barnes and James Aitken Wylie.

Reasons for Failure of Classical Historicism

Historicism eventually fell out of favor in the nineteenth century. One of the key problems of historicism is that different interpreters gave priority or attention to different historical events and geographical locations, leading to inconsistent interpretations. It's a long-forgotten method today partly because it was unable to account for actual events in history related to our time. At least that is the prevailing thought. We will show that is not entirely true, as there are parts of the Apocalypse that were fulfilled in the twentieth century. But this method requires the biblical scholar to go outside their comfort zone and look to the fulfillment of the prophecies based on events in world history. This is certainly a difficult task to accomplish if one is not well versed in history. Most Historicist commentators believed the images in the book of Revelation referred only to the Western Church. Many Classical Historicist commentators mostly ignored the existence of the Eastern Roman Empire that was to exist for 1000 years after the fall of Rome.

The weakness and failure of Classical Historicism can be attributed to the following reasons:

- Identification and correlating events only to Western Church history. Almost nothing is mentioned about events that would affect the Eastern Christians. Many commentators like Edward Bishop Elliott incorrectly interpret the Fifth and Sixth trumpet to the rise of Islam and the Turks and applying the two beasts of Revelation 13 only to the history of Rome.
- The overemphasis that the Papacy is the one and only Antichrist, “Man of Sin” or “Little Horn” without consideration for other possible fulfillments through other great empires of the Middle Ages
- Incorrect identification of the Abomination of Desolation in a spiritual sense, instead of a literal sense of a physical occupation of some structure on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem
- Overemphasis of each event pointing to only political or geographical events instead of events within the church. For example, Edward Bishop Elliott, in his famous book *Horae Apocalypticæ*, believed that the trumpets covered the period of 395 A.D. to 1453 AD, beginning with the fall of the Western Roman Empire to the Goths and ending with the fall of the Eastern Byzantine Empire to the Turks, skipping over any significant events related to the early struggles of the church. This political-only context explains the failure highlighted in the next bullet point.
- Lack of a Christological view of the Trumpets and Vials due to inadequate understanding of the symbols used in the Revelation. We know that St. John spoke of the Divinity of Christ in his Gospel. He also continues that concept in the Book of Revelation and thus he places a strong emphasis on the understanding of the God-Man. Thus, many of the prophecies would most certainly speak about rising heresies that would challenge the understanding of the God-Man and Holy Trinity, and the struggles to address these issues by the Seven Ecumenical Councils and the schisms in the Church. It would have been impossible for John to not talk about those critical events in the formation, understanding and defense of the Divine and Human natures of Christ.

- Attempting to fully interpret historical events of the 1260 years before its full termination by the years 1948 and 1967, when the “Times of the Gentiles” came to a completion in Jerusalem.
- Using the Historicist method to attempt to predict the date of the end of the world. For example, the failure of William Miller to predict the Second Coming led to the Great Disappointment in 1844 A.D. William Miller proposed that the end of the world would occur on October 22, 1844, based on the historicist model applied to Daniel 8:14 and the 2300 “days” prophecy.
- The promotion of the failed 1844 interpretations by the Millerites eventually reorganized as a newer corrupted form of Historicism through the forming of the Seventh Day Adventists and Jehovah’s Witnesses. These groups continue to harm the case for Historicism today by continuing to place relevance in the year 1844 and a cleansing of a “spiritual sanctuary” as a fulfillment of the 2300 days and 2520 days of Daniel.
- The belief by many Protestant Historicists that the “Sun-like Angel” holding the “Little Book” in Revelation 10 represents the Protestant Reformation, and that Revelation 11 represented the Reformation.
- Interpretation of the two witnesses as Luther and Calvin against Rome, who would ultimately overthrow the Roman Papacy.

Benefits of Neo-Historicism

Neo-Historicism, as defined previously, provides a more complete Christological emphasis in that it focuses on events in history that defined the idea of Jesus as the God-Man. Neo-Historicism provides a perspective in the Book of Revelation about the Church’s struggle with heresies like Gnosticism and Marcionism in its early days, and defending the truth through the Ecumenical Councils and the formation of the Nicene Creed, all the way through the many schisms and reforms within the Church. Neo-Historicism highlights the central theme in the Apocalypse that there would be one True Church, or woman, that would develop, retain and protect the definition of the God-Man throughout the

course of history, and at the time of the end will be elected as the worthy and ready Bride at the future “Wedding Feast” of unity in the Church through the Lamb, our Lord Jesus Christ after an Eighth Ecumenical Council.

Neo-Historicism uses the art and science of biblical interpretation, referred to as Hermeneutics, to arrive at a successful interpretation, primarily through the method of interpreting key prophetic scriptures through other scriptures, and using mathematical concepts and calculations to verify the results using benchmark events throughout history. The Neo-Historicist method is successfully achieved by analyzing and noting key historical events, with a with a strong correlation to end-times biblical prophecies, also backed by exact mathematical analysis of the historical dates as solid evidence., In addition to the mathematics involved, Neo-Historicism places an emphasis on laying the proper foundation of the symbols used in the Apocalypse. Without a thorough understanding of these symbols often borrowed from the rest of the scriptures, the reader will fail to see what the author was trying to convey in the true context of the prophecy. Parts of Revelation contain many symbols re-used from the Old Testament, such as the books of Ezekiel, Daniel and Zechariah. So then, the reader must either have knowledge of these symbolic references to understand the true context of the passage. Neo-Historicism, therefore, attempts to analyze all the symbolism of various entities or objects described in Revelation before showing their use in a larger context of a sentence. Again, this leads us back to the Christological emphasis behind the definitions. How do these symbols relate to Jesus, in what way, using other key scriptures in the Old or New Testaments? For example, does the use of “Sun”, “Moon” and “Stars” refer to astronomical phenomena, or are they really expressions used to describe Jesus, his Church and the leadership of the Church. We will examine many of these symbols in the next chapter.

The primary objective of this book is to provide evidence to show that the Historicist view should be reconsidered once again by biblical scholars, with a new appreciation for its use in interpreting the scriptures. Especially during our times after the recent failures by many

Evangelicals who have attempted (and failed) to predict the exact date of the “rapture.” This updated view of Historicism offers a fresh perspective and understanding into the events of the middle east crisis in the past 20th century with the return of the Jews to Palestine. In the end, this new Historicist model offers the reader a logical solution to interpreting biblical prophecy. No other prophetic method of interpretation (specifically Preterism and Futurism) offers the same level of authenticity with the calculation and confirmation of dates and events with fulfilled events in scripture as Neo-Historicism. And no other method of interpretation offers a more *Christological-centric* view of the Book of Daniel and St. John’s Apocalypse. Centered around the nature of Christ as the God-Man, Neo-Historicism demonstrates the biblical foretelling of the rise of every major heresy that challenged the *One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church* for the last 2000 years.

CHAPTER 3

Revelation Chapters 7, 8 and 9: A Church in Christological Crisis from the Ante-Nicene Times Until the Fall of Rome

Revelation chapters seven, eight and nine are an interesting time period when grouped together, as they appear to describe a sequence of events beginning with the spread of Christianity under a period of relative peace throughout the Roman Empire until the fall of Rome in 476 AD. The prophetic content in the Apocalypse begins in Chapter 6 with setting the stage and cast of characters for the coming age of the Church. However, chapter 7 begins to prophecy about a time in history which we would consider to be the latter part of the Apostolic Era. Chapter 8 details key events and crisis during the Ante-Nicene era of the Church, while Chapter 9 continues on with critical events that threatened the livelihood of the Church during from the age of the ecumenical councils through the post-Nicene era until the Fall of Rome.

Remember that Christ himself promised to John in the beginning of the Apocalypse that he would provide insight into events “which must shortly come to pass.” The Preterist schools of prophetic interpretation assume this statement “which must shortly come to pass” means everything described in the Book of Revelation was fulfilled by the fall and destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. This is a grave misunderstanding of

the statement and promise by Christ, for John's Apocalypse was written between 90 to 96 AD, and we will see events spoken of from the beginning of chapter seven begin fulfillment within John's exact time frame of exile on the island of Patmos and chapter eight thereafter describes many other events from the second century. These earlier events shape the course of history for the church as it struggles to challenge new ideas about the nature of Christ. These struggles set the stage for the final major crisis of the church in the East and West during its long period of persecution and divisions from the middle ages until the modern era.

Revelation Chapter 7

THE ROMAN EMPIRE IN TRANSITION – THE RELATIVE CALM BEFORE THE STORM

John begins chapter seven by starting the vision in his own time period, so that he can provide more details on the breaking of the seals.

“And after these things I saw four angels standing on the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, nor on the sea, nor on any tree. And I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God: and he cried with a loud voice to the four angels, to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea, Saying, Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads.” - **Revelation 7:1-3**

We first begin with the four angels standing on the four corners of the earth holding back the four winds. What do the four corners represent? The four corners set the stage where the story of the Apocalypse will be told, around the lands of the Roman Empire situated around the Mediterranean Sea. The “earth” represents the civilized Roman provinces and cities situated around the Roman Empire. The “sea” represents the barbarian tribes which attack the outer regions of the empire as when the rough seas hit the shore. The “winds” represent the activities

of Satan and his demons to use the barbarian and warring tribes to attack or spread pestilence upon the earth. The fruit-bearing “trees” represent the churches and great church fathers who were spreading the Gospel. During this period of the Roman Empire after Christ, the four angels of God held the movements of the barbarian nations to a standstill and prevented any significant attacks on the Roman Empire until the Gospel of salvation was preached to the elect. And history shows that there were no significant wars and crisis during this time period as the Gospel spread throughout the empire. “Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads.” This command tells the four angels to keep the Romans and barbarian tribes and other Asian empires from fighting each other and the keep peaceful until the number of sealed servants are marked and baptized into the faith. This time period of political stability was most crucial for the teaching of the Gospel. The “seal” on the forehead means that the servant has true knowledge of the nature of God and Christ and his commandments and are baptized in the name of the Holy Trinity.

The Foundation Stones of the 144,000 Jewish Christians

“And I heard the number of them which were sealed: and there were sealed an hundred and forty and four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel. Of the tribe of Juda were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Reuben were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Gad were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Aser were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Nepthalim were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Manasses were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Simeon were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Levi were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Issachar were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Zabulon were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Joseph were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Benjamin were sealed twelve thousand.” - Revelation 7:4-8

This is a strong reminder by the author for the skeptics and unbelieving Jews that the birth of Christianity was primarily a Jewish move-

ment to preach the good news of the salvation of Jesus Christ before it was to spread to the gentile nations. The tree trunk is Jewish, the branches and leaves represent the gentiles. This 144,000 are the Jews represented from each of the twelve tribes of Israel. That these would be Jews from Israel or scattered Jews (some who might have lost their way to paganism) from as far back as the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities, no one knows. But these 144,000 from the seed of Abraham are chosen by grace to help proclaim and spread the Gospel to the gentile nations, and they will have a special place in heaven in the city as part of one of the twelve foundation stones for the heavenly Jerusalem.

The Early Great Persecutions of the Gentiles

"After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; And cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb." - Revelation 7:9-10

Next, we have a vision of the gentile Christian converts before the throne clothed in white robes. These Christians were numbered so high that John was unable to count the number. What is the special significance of these Christians? John is given the answer in the following verses.



Figure 3-1. Persecutions under Diocletian¹

“And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they? And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” - Revelation 7:13-14

These gentiles that are visible before the throne of God are the martyrs of the faith that suffered through the great persecutions and slaughter at the hands of the Romans from 33 AD until 312 AD. History documents this *Great Tribulation*, in which the Christians suffered at the hands of the unbelieving Jews and gentiles. The first persecutions at the hands of the Romans began in 64 A.D. by emperor Nero and lasting until 312 A.D. before Constantine. Statistics vary on the number of Christians killed during this time period, but it has been documented to be as high as 2 million Christians through the Roman and Persian empires. During this time period of persecutions, the four angels continue to hold

¹ Public Domain. The Christian Martyrs' Last Prayer, by Jean-Léon Gérôme (1883)

back the four winds from the barbarian nations to allow the dissemination of the Gospel. For as the severity of the persecutions increased, the number of converts to the faith increased to replace them. The baptism by blood is what causes the robe to become bright and white. As the four winds were held back in the Roman Empire, the Christians were suffering persecutions like the sheep led to the slaughterhouse. In summary, chapter 7 of the Apocalypse reveals to us a time we easily confirm in the history books of an era of Jewish establishment of Christianity, and gentile conversions and persecutions. The events fall into the time period between the “*Apostolic Era*” of Christianity through the “*Ante-Nicene Era*” which is also when we have a period of continued political stability in the late great Roman Empire. And we now conclude this stability of the empire was due to the four angels holding back the four winds upon the “*earth*.”

Revelation Chapter 8

Now we move on to Chapter 8, which contains many important symbols that make the text very difficult to understand unless these symbols are taken in the proper context. We reviewed a few of these symbols (“*sun*”, “*moon*”, “*stars*”) earlier in the book. Other important symbols identified in this chapter include “*earth*”, “*sea*”, “*trees*”, “*islands*” or “*ships*”. Before we dive into chapter 8 let’s review these symbols. The “*earth*” represents the Roman Empire, the center of civilization through its schools of philosophy, math, science, architecture and arts. The “*sea*” represents the surrounding barbarian nations from North Europe, Asia and Africa. The “*trees*” describe the churches who bear fruit for the nourishment and sustainment of the people of the earth, whereas the “*ships*” and “*islands*” represent the bishops and churches in the sea, which provide safety and sustainment in the less populated regions which include Persia and parts of Asia. The bishops navigate the ships full of Christians on their fleet through the treacherous sea waves and the islands provide spiritual nourishment and safety to the Christians from the storms of

paganism in the barbarian regions or sea. These symbols are the keys to understanding the seven trumpets and help to identify the threats to the new flourishing faith entering the second and third centuries, called the *Ante-Nicene* era of the church.



Figure 3-2. Marcion of Sinope²

² Apostle John (left) and Marcion of Sinope (right), from Morgan Library MS 748, 11th century

The First Trumpet – Heresies Within the Roman Empire

“And the seven angels which had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound. The first angel sounded, and there followed hail and fire mingled with blood, and they were cast upon the earth: and the third part of trees was burnt up, and all green grass was burnt up.” - Revelation 8:6-7

The first trumpet and its effects were cast upon the “*earth*”, or upon the lands which are known today as the former Roman Empire. The second century church faced many pains as the faith began to spread within the empire. But the largest threat to the orthodox Christian faith would be new dualistic heresies that would challenge the faith through the next two centuries. Many of the converted pagan Greeks would bring their Platonic philosophical ideas into the faith and attempt to merge these ideas within Christianity, giving rise to the heresy of Gnosticism. The Gnostics claimed a “secret/hidden” knowledge or “*gnosis*” of interpreting scriptures. They promoted the dualistic belief of the spirit and matter and believed the material world was evil. They claimed to have a higher knowledge of the spirit world around them. Therefore, they mixed this hidden spiritual knowledge or “*fire*” with the teachings of the “*blood*” of the New Covenant scriptures and attempted to introduce alternative Gospels to the four we have in the canon today. But another dualistic belief system very similar to Gnosticism would be introduced by Marcion in the city of Rome about the year 144 AD. Marcionism promoted that the God of the Old Testament was a punishing tyrant who was jealous and genocidal, and thus Marcion combined the wrathful “*hail*” and “*fire*” with the “*blood*” of the New Testament. Marcion also rejected the human (body and “blood”) nature of Christ. Marcion attempted to create a new official canon in which he completely rejected the entire old testament, the Gospels and other epistles, and promoted Paul’s epistles. Thus, the “*green grass*” of the old testament scriptures were “*burnt up*.” However, the Old Testament and four Gospels do not characterize such a tyrant God but in reality provides to us the nourishment and comfort of “*living waters*”, as the prophet and King David pro-

claims that our Lord of the Old Testament is a Good Shepherd in Psalm 23, “*He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.*” Thus, the dualist philosophical ideas presented in Gnosticism and Marcionism would be the first to create significant heresy and schism in the early church, and a “*third part of the trees*” to become “*burnt up*”, that is one third of the churches and bishops (“trees”) in the Roman Empire would become separated from the true orthodox Christian faith. Marcionism was denounced as a heresy and refuted by Tertullian in his work “*Adversus Marcionem*” in 208 AD. After his excommunication, Marcion would return back to Asia minor where he led many churches into heresy and develop and promote his on gospel, called the Gospel of Marcion.



Figure 3-3. Mani

The Second Trumpet: The Great Monotheistic Heresy of the East

“And the second angel sounded, and as it were a great mountain burning with fire was cast into the sea: and the third part of the sea became blood; And the third part of the creatures which were in the sea, and had life, died; and the third part of the ships were destroyed.” - Revelation 8:8-9

The first trumpet sounded upon the “earth”, or within the Roman Empire to announce the arrival of the Gnostic and Marcionian heresies. The second trumpet would affect the “sea” or the barbarian regions outside of the empire to announce the arrival of a similar heresy in the middle of the 3rd century. This new teaching which branched from Gnostic thought is described as *“a great mountain burning with fire”* and would have significant impact in the barbarian regions to the east of the Roman Empire and would find its roots in the Sassanian Empire of Persia. This second trumpet is identified with Mani, the Iranian prophet and founder of a new monotheistic religion called Manichaeism. Manichaeism is a Gnostic religion that was once widespread but today no longer exists. Mani’s background was primarily a mix of Judaism and Christianity and received heavenly visions at the age of 12 and 24 to preach the *“true Gospel of Christ”*. At around the year 240, Mani traveled to India and studied Hinduism and various eastern philosophies. Mani would combine some of these eastern philosophies with Gnosticism and Christian teachings. Mani taught that the teachings of Jesus, Buddha and Zoroaster were incomplete, and that his new religion “of Light” was the completed teachings for everyone to follow. This new combined religion of Manichaeism promoted a dualistic view of the universe such as the struggle between good and evil and struggle between spiritual world of light and a material world of darkness. Manichaeism quickly spread through lands known today as south-eastern Turkey, Syria and Iran, India and as far away as China. It flourished between the 3rd and 7th century, and at its peak was one of the largest monotheistic religions in the world that was the main rival to Christianity in the quest to defeat

paganism. It survived longer in the eastern “sea” than in the west and faded away from existence in China around the 14th century. As a result of the dominance and influence of Manichaeism, the *“third part of the sea became blood; And the third part of the creatures which were in the sea, and had life, died; and the third part of the ships were destroyed.”* That is, the *“third part of the creatures”* would be swept away by the tide of Mani. These creatures of the sea we know to be “fish” or Christians, as the disciples of Christ were destined to become *“fishers of men.”* One third of the *“ships”* were destroyed as many churches (ships) located in the region called the *“sea”* would be associated with Manichaeism. This second trumpet calls to significance of this monotheistic movement, which would help to plant the seed for another more aggressive and fateful monotheistic religion to sweep these same countries in the next few centuries.

Third Trumpet: Fall of the Greatest Father & Theologian of the Church

“And the third angel sounded, and there fell a great star from heaven, burning as it were a lamp, and it fell upon the third part of the rivers, and upon the fountains of waters; And the name of the star is called Wormwood: and the third part of the waters became wormwood; and many men died of the waters, because they were made bitter.” - **Revelation 8:10-11**

The first two trumpets described heresies that would arise to outwardly attack the true Christian faith and viewed as a competitor to the new monotheistic faith worshipping the True God. The third angel’s trumpet would announce a significant event that would occur from within the young universal Christian church. Recall our analysis in the previous chapter, we were able to show that the *“stars”* in scripture represent great leaders or bishops. For example, the *“seven stars are the angels of the seven churches”* in Revelation confirm that these are the bishops or leaders of the eastern Asia minor churches. So then, the third angel de-

scribes that there would be a “*great star*” that would fall from “*heaven*” or as we say in today language: a “*fall from grace*” to humiliation. A star that is also depicted as “*burning as it were a lamp*,” that is, a beacon of the light of Christ to all Christians to behold. However, this shining star would soon fall would become a great scourge and punishment to the church that would continue to have effects into future generations. This fall would be the cause of all the Christological heresies to come because of its great influence and inspiration. This great star which reflected the light of Christ and guided and navigated the world through the darkness of the night of Satan, the great start which would lose its luminosity and come dark and from heaven is none other than Origen.

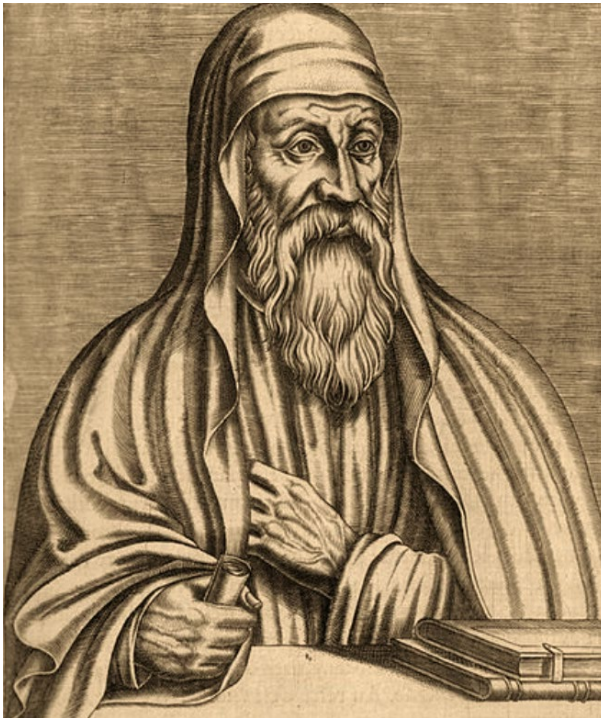


Figure 3-4. Origen

Origen was one of the greatest fathers of the church in the 3rd century, a skilled writer and theologian from Alexandria. Origen was born in 185 AD and died in 250 AD. He studied under Clement of Alexandria and was influenced by his thought. Origen became more famous than any other church father in his works and deeds and was recognized for his intelligence and theological abilities. Origen wrote many commentaries on scripture and his works are some of the most influential through the history of the Church. However, Origen was never canonized as a saint because of some of his teachings contradicted the teachings of the Apostles. Origen was anathematized in the fourth ecumenical council and other later councils due to some of his heretical teachings. Origen's downfall was his mistake of interpreting scriptures "allegorically" in that he eventually fell into error by proposing new interpretation on the nature of Christ. He taught that the only begotten Son cannot behold the Father, and the Holy Spirit cannot behold the Son. These teachings would influence Arius to derive his own teachings. Therefore, *Origen is recognized by the author of the Apocalypse as the "Father of all Christological Heresies."* Origen was at first a bright navigating star and teacher of the early church with his uncanny ability to interpret scriptures. However, Origen brought Platonic philosophies into interpreting scriptures allegorically and ended up confusing and misinterpreting the scriptures. John describes him as a star fallen from grace named "Wormwood" that would embitter the "rivers and fountains of waters" of scripture. The "rivers" represent the priests, bishops and teachers of the Church, while "fountains of water" represent the scriptures. In John 7:37-38 Jesus said: "(...) *If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. To the one who believes in Me, it is just as the Scripture has said: 'Streams of living water' will flow from within him.*" And King David describes the source of these fountains of water in the Psalms 68:26: "*Bless God in the congregations, Even the LORD, you who are of the fountain of Israel*". Many, especially in the schools of Alexandria, would accept the views of Origen, and as a result he would be the cause of many bishops or "rivers" to misinterpret scriptures and become poisoned with respect to the exact nature of Christ and the Trinity. This would, at a future appointed