

## **THE ANTI-PRETERIST HISTORICISM OF JOHN CALVIN AND THE WESTMINSTER STANDARDS**

Futurism teaches that most Biblical predictions will only **start** being fulfilled in the yet-future (such as after a questionable future "rapture" of the Church before or during a questionable future "great tribulation"). Both historicism and preterism firmly and rightly oppose futurism. However, they also oppose one another.

Preterism teaches that most Biblical predictions were finally fulfilled within the same generation in which they were given. In its extreme form, this would mean that the promised "seed" in the *Protevangelium* of Genesis 3:15 refers neither to Christ nor to Christians but solely to Abel (and to other 'good' descendants of Eve within her lifetime). In its extreme form, it would also mean that the final coming of Christ referred to in Matthew chapter 24 and Second Thessalonians chapter 1 already occurred during the apostolic age.

Historicism teaches that most Biblical predictions would be fulfilled only some considerable time after they were given — fulfilled either once or repeatedly during the whole course of world history. Thus historicists regard the promised "seed" in the *Protevangelium* of Genesis 3:15 as referring not principally to that generation's Abel and Seth *etc.*, but principally to Christ and His Christians (only to be born many centuries later).

Historicists would agree with preterists that there is indeed a very important sense in which Christ did come (invisibly) to Jerusalem, in punitive judgment, during A.D. 70. Yet historicists regard the various mentions of His coming inscripturated in Matthew chapter 24 and elsewhere, to refer to events throughout world history which all point principally toward His still-future visible coming on the clouds of heaven in power and great glory at the final judgment. Second Thessalonians chapter 1.

### **Genesis and Calvin on the historicistic nature of the very first predictions**

When God created the first human beings — He appointed them to have dominion, and blessed them. Genesis 1:26-28. This was not a preteristic suggestion merely to Adam and Eve alone that they dominate solely the garden of Eden. This was a historicistic mandate to the entire human race in every age, to subjugate the entire globe.

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As Calvin comments,<sup>1</sup> God here "appointed man...lord of the world.... This authority was not given to Adam only, but to all his posterity as well as to him.... Adam with his wife was formed for the production of offspring, in order that men might fill the earth.... The earth everywhere lies open, that it may have its inhabitants — and that **an immense multitude of men** may find, in some part of the globe, their home."

After the end of the sixth day, God rested and blessed His seventh day. For "on it He had rested from all His work which God created, in order to make it" — *la'a:soth* — through mankind! Genesis 2:3. God's sabbathing in mankind, is thus co-extensive with the whole of world history — from the past appearance of the first Adam, to the future re-appearance of the Second Adam.

Comments Calvin:<sup>2</sup> "First, therefore, God rested. Then He blessed this rest, that in **all ages** it might be held sacred among men.... This is to be the common employment not of one age or people only, **but of the whole human race**.... The Sabbath...was commanded to men from the beginning, that they might employ themselves in the worship of God. It is right that **it should continue — till the end of the world.**"

The same applies to the statement in Genesis 2:15 that the Lord God took the man to cultivate and to guard the garden. Comments Calvin:<sup>3</sup> "Men were created to employ themselves in some work.... Let him who possesses a field, so partake of its yearly fruits that he may not suffer the ground to be injured by his negligence.... Let him endeavour to hand it down to posterity as he received it — or even better cultivated!"

Moving on to Genesis 2:21-24, it is obvious that marriage and the family were not instituted merely for Adam alone. Both would last, and shall continue to last, throughout the history of the world — repetitively, whenever young men leave their fathers and mothers in order to cleave to their wives and then raise their own families *etc.*

Comments Calvin:<sup>4</sup> "In the person of the woman, the human race was...like a building **just begun**.... After he had demonstrated what God had done, he also demonstrated the **end** of the divine institution.... Among the offices pertaining to human society, this is the principal and as it were the most sacred — that a man should cleave unto his wife.... Therefore they who, for slight cause, rashly allow of divorces — violate, in one single particular, all the laws of nature!"

This is underscored by God's historicistic warning to Satan: "I will put hatred between you and the woman, **and between your seed and her seed which shall crush your skull**" *etc.* Genesis 3:15.

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<sup>1</sup> *Comm.* on Gen. 1:26-28.

<sup>2</sup> *Comm.* on Gen. 2:3.

<sup>3</sup> *Comm.* on Gen. 2:15.

<sup>4</sup> *Comm.* on Gen. 2:21-24.

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Some preteristic rabbi's and modernistic rationalists see this as a quickly-fulfilled prediction that a literal seed would soon bounce off the head of a literal snake — and that this snake would nick merely the 'heel' of that literal seed in the garden of Eden! But the whole Bible clearly shows that this prediction would only be fulfilled many centuries later. For it would be fulfilled principally when Christ crushed the skull of Satan at Golgotha (the 'place of the skull') — and as Christ-ians themselves continue treading down Satan under their own feet. Revelation 12:1-9 & Romans 16:20.

Comments Calvin:<sup>5</sup> "Though all do not dissent in their minds from Satan..., in reality Satan is their enemy.... In order to show that he should be odious **not to one generation only**, God expressly says 'between thee and the seed of the woman' — **as widely, indeed, as the human race** shall be propagated.... Other interpreters take the seed for *Christ* without controversy [alias without further application] — as if it were said that some one would arise from the seed of the woman who should wound the serpent's head.

"Gladly would I give my suffrage in support of their opinion, but that I regard the word *seed* as too violently distorted by them. For who will concede that a *collective* noun is to be understood of one man *only*? Further, as the perpetuity of the contest is noted, so **victory is promised to the human race through a continual succession of ages....**

"The sense will be (in my judgment) that the human race which Satan was endeavouring to oppress, would at length be victorious..... **The whole Church of God under its Head will gloriously exult** over him. To this the declaration of Paul refers, 'The Lord shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly.' Romans 16:20.... **The power of bruising Satan is imparted to faithful men**, and thus the blessing is the common property of **the whole Church.**"

### **Daniel and Calvin on the christianizability of the Pagan Roman Empire**

Around B.C. 603, Daniel interpreted a dream of the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel 2:27-45. On this passage, Calvin comments<sup>6</sup> that the worldly kingdoms were predestined to get "broken up by Christ — according to this dream of King Nebuchadnezzar.... The dream was presented to King Nebuchadnezzar so that he might understand all future events, [right down] to the renovation of the world" — more than six centuries later at the first advent of Jehovah-Jesus, and beyond.

Calvin then prayed: "May Almighty God grant...that we may raise our eyes upwards, and consider how much power You have conferred upon Your only-begotten Son. Grant also, that He may rule and govern us by the might of His Spirit...and compel the whole world to promote our salvation...until **at length** we enjoy the fruit of the **victory** which You have promised!"

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<sup>5</sup> *Comm.* on Gen. 3:15.

<sup>6</sup> *Comm.* on Dan. 2:31f.

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Going on to discuss Daniel 2:44f, Calvin further comments<sup>7</sup> that "the Prophet here puts an end to the Roman Empire when it **began** to be torn in pieces. As to the **time** when Christ's reign began..., it ought not to be referred to the time of His birth but to the **preaching** of the Gospel. From the time when the Gospel began to be promulgated, we know the Roman monarchy to have been dissipated and **at length** to vanish away.... 'God,' therefore, 'will set up the kingdoms of the heavens which shall never be dissipated.' It is here worth while to notice the sense in which Daniel uses the term 'perpetuity.' It ought not to be restricted to the person of Christ, but belongs to all the pious and the whole body of the Church."

Chiefly by way of evangelization, yet also to some extent in ways such as the above, ultimately even the Pagan Roman Empire would inevitably become christianized. This would be accomplished through the ongoing *witness* of the members of the earthly church of the Ascended Christ — equipped as they were (and still are) with the power of His outpoured and indwelling Spirit.

As Daniel (7:9-27) had predicted: "Thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of days did sit.... I saw...the Son of man come with the clouds of heaven...[not *from* but] to the Ancient of days.... There was given Him [to the Son of man] dominion and glory and a Kingdom — so that *all people, nations and languages should serve Him*. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which shall not pass away."

As a result, continued Daniel, "the *saints* of the Most High shall take the Kingdom — and possess the Kingdom for ever, even for ever and ever." True, the fourth kingdom [of Pagan Rome] and the later "stout horn" of the Antichrist Romish Papacy would still make "war against the *saints* [alias earthly Christians] — and prevail...*until* the Ancient of days came" to grant them relief. Cf. Daniel 12:6-11f and Revelation 13:1 to 14:5. Then, however, "*judgment*" or political rule would be "given to the *saints* of the Most High — when the *time* came for the saints to take possession of the kingdom" of Rome. Cf. Second Thessalonians 2:3-8 and Revelation 14:6 to 18:4f.

Daniel explained that "the fourth beast shall be the fourth *kingdom* upon the earth.... Out of this kingdom, ten kings shall arise" — *viz.* after the collapse of the Roman Empire during the fifth century A.D. "Then another [the Romish Papacy] shall rise *after them*, and he shall be diverse from the first...and 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*. And they shall be given into his hand — until a time and [two] times and the dividing [or half] of a time. Daniel 7:23-25.

"But the *judgment* shall sit, and *they shall take away* his dominion.... And the kingdom and dominion and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven shall be *given to the people of the saints of the Most High*, Whose Kingdom is an everlasting Kingdom. And *all dominions shall serve and obey Him*." Daniel 7:26-27.

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<sup>7</sup> *Comm.* on Dan. 2:44f.

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**Calvin on Christ's World Conquest through His Heavenly Rule in  
Daniel 7:13-14**

On this ultimate conquest by the Ascended Christ's earthly *saints* — their conquest of Pagan Rome and even of the subsequent Romish Papacy — Calvin comments<sup>8</sup> on Daniel's predictions that although "many persons extend this prophecy to the **second** Advent of Christ" — this is "an interpretation by no means correct." For "the subject treated, is the **first** coming of Christ." Calvin adds: "It ought not to be restricted to the thirty-three years of His sojourn in the world. But it embraces His **ascension** — and [also] that **preaching** of the gospel which ushered in His Kingdom.... Daniel appropriately relates how God was seated, when the first advent of Christ is depicted....

"After Daniel has narrated how he saw God on the throne of judgment...., he now adds the second part of the vision. As it were, 'the Son of man appeared in the clouds.' Without doubt, this is to be understood of Christ.... It afterwards follows, 'He came to the Ancient of days.' This, in my judgment, ought to be explained of **Christ's ascension**. For He then **commenced His reign**, as we see in numberless passages of Scripture.... He really appeared...'in the clouds'...when He ascended to heaven." Acts 1:8-11.

Thereafter — Calvin continues, commenting on Daniel's predictions about Christ — "'He now arrives at the Ancient of days'...[after] He ascends to heaven.... Christ truly ascended into heaven.... We ought clearly to weigh the *purpose* of His doing so.... Christ left the world and ascended to the Father — first, to subdue all powers to Himself...; next, to restrain the devil and to protect and preserve the Church....

"The prophet [Daniel] adds, '*power* was given to Him'.... We will *not* say it was bestowed with relation to His being [or essence] — of being called *God*. It was given to Him as *Mediator* — as God manifest *in flesh*, and **with respect to His human nature**.... For this reason, therefore, '**all power, honour and kingdom**' was given to Christ" — so "'that all nations, people and tongues should serve Him'.... *The events* which the prophet here narrates, *are not yet complete*....

"This vision suits very well with many assertions of Christ — where He bears witness to the power given Him by the Father. Matthew 28:18.... *He does not here [in Daniel 7:14] speak of the last judgment* — but is only teaching us the object of *His ascension* to heaven.... When the prophet says Christ's dominion is eternal, he doubtless signifies the constant endurance of His Monarchy — even to the end of the world....

"'Judgment was given to the saints' — [even] **at the commencement of the gospel era**.... [But then,] **domestic enemies arose**.... [At that time,] **the Kingdom of Christ never flourished in the world**.... But God wished to propose this *solace* to His prophet [Daniel] — by showing him **the future reputation of the Church and its elevation to some degree of honour after emerging from obscurity.**"

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<sup>8</sup> *Comm.* on Dan. 7:9 & 7:13f & 7:22.

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**Calvin on Christ's Kingdom's demolition of the Roman Empire in  
Daniel**

Calvin next explains Daniel's predictions regarding the Roman Empire — during the continuance of which Christ ascended into heaven. First, Daniel explains the strength of "the fourth beast" — Pagan Rome. Daniel 7:19. However, thereafter Daniel goes on to describe how the ascended Christ — over and through His people in His earthly Empire — would slowly but surely demolish it. Daniel 7:22 & 7:26-27.

Comments Calvin:<sup>9</sup> "I have no doubt that in this vision the Prophet was shewn the figure of the Roman Empire.... The fourth beast signifies 'a fourth kingdom...which shall differ from all the kingdoms' [before it].... The Roman Empire, we know...to have been more extensive and powerful than the other monarchies.... Miserably and cruelly, the Church has been harassed by many tyrants.... We shall find the Church to have been much more heavily afflicted after Christ's advent, and to have been opposed by the Caesars in open warfare.... The Caesars became more and more stirred up to carry on war against the elect, and to oppress the Church....

"It was God...Who delivered into the hands of that [Roman] king the saints...and the institutions of piety — allowing him to pour out promiscuously human blood; to violate every national right; and to ruin as far as possible all religion." In God's good time, it is certain that "these calamities should come to an end.... [Yet] 'for a time and times and the division of a time'...license would be given to the tyrants and enemies of the Church — to pervert all things, to despise God, and set aside all justice....

"[However,] he says also, 'judgment shall then sit'; that is, God shall again restore to order.... The world shall feel His Providence ruling over the earth and the human race.... The restoration is here called a 'sitting in judgment' — **when the Roman Empire was blotted out....**

"These two things, then, are mutually in accordance — namely the slaying of the fourth beast; and the giving of the kingdom and authority to the people of the saints. **This does not seem to have been accomplished yet**" — in 1561, when Calvin was still writing these words in his *Commentary on Daniel*.

Calvin thus summarizes Daniel seven. "Let us now return to the passage. Daniel first of all says, 'a kingdom and power and extensive dominion shall be given to the people of the holy ones.' This was **partially** fulfilled when the Gospel emerged from persecution.... Daniel or the angel does *not* predict here occurrences connected with the [*second*] advent of Christ as Judge of the world, but with the **first preaching** and promulgation of the Gospel and the celebration of the Name of Christ. **But** this does not prevent him from drawing a magnificent picture of Christ's reign — **and** embracing its final completion....

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<sup>9</sup> *Comm.* on Dan. 7:7 & 7:23-27.

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"**When** the preaching of the Gospel *commenced*, no one would have thought its *success* could **have** been so *great* and *prosperous*.... In consequence of the intimate union between Christ and His Church, the peculiar attribute of Christ Himself is often transferred to His body [the Church].... God's royal sceptre went forth from Jerusalem, and shone far and wide — while the Lord was **extending** His Hand and His Authority....

"*All nations shall* come — **all kings shall serve**. At that [previous] time, **no king** existed who was not professedly an enemy of true piety, and **who did not desire the abolition of the very name of His Law**. [Yet] the prophets enlarge thus, magnificently, on the **future** restoration of this Kingdom [Psalm 2:8-12; Isaiah 2:2f; Zechariah 9:9f; *etc.*].... '*All powers*' — says he [Daniel] — '*shall serve and obey Him!*' That is, no power shall so boast in its loftiness — as not **willingly to become subject to the Church**." True, wrote Calvin in 1561, "**at present**...they tread it most ignominiously **under foot**." However, at that future time, he added: "Then, they shall be subject to it." Emphases mine — F.N. Lee.

### **Calvin on Daniel's replacement of Pagan Rome by Papal Rome**

The above are the comments of Calvin on Daniel 7:9-27 — regarding the destruction of the Pagan Roman Empire by Christ's Spirit-empowered Church. However, that would be followed by the corruption even of the Church herself — by the Romish Papacy which at the beginning of the Middle Ages stepped into the shoes of the then defunct Pagan Roman Empire. Yet gradually, even the Antichrist-ian Papacy would ultimately be destroyed by the powerful and progressive Protestant preaching of the Word of God — and by the expansion of Protestant institutions, including its Biblical legal systems.

In his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*,<sup>10</sup> Calvin further observes: "To some, we seem slanderous and petulant when **we call the Roman Pontiff Antichrist**. But...Paul says that Antichrist would sit in the temple of God. Second Thessalonians 2:4. In another passage, the Spirit...says that his reign would be with great swelling words of vanity. *Daniel 7:25*....

"This calamity was neither to be introduced by one man, nor to terminate in one man.... Second Thessalonians 2:3; *Daniel 7:9*. Moreover, when the mark by which he [Paul] distinguishes Antichrist is that he would rob God of His honour and take it to himself..., it is certain that the Roman Pontiff has impudently transferred to himself the most peculiar properties of God and Christ. There cannot be a doubt that he is the leader and standard-bearer of an impious and abominable *kingdom*."

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<sup>10</sup> *Inst.* IV:7:25.

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Paul himself deals with this in detail, in his own inspired discussion of Daniel's predictions — in Second Thessalonians 2:2-8. There, Calvin gives us the following vital insights on the many events which would **follow** the destruction of the Pagan Roman Empire — **before** the second advent (or coming again of Christ in final judgment).

"The false prophets...who are refuted by Paul," comments Calvin,<sup>11</sup> "were bidding men feel assured of His *speedy* advent" even during apostolic times. However, Paul then retorts: "The 'day of Christ' will **not** come, until [after] the world has fallen into **apostasy** and the **rule of Antichrist** has held sway **in the Church**.... The word 'apostasy'...cannot be confined to a few individuals.... Paul, then, is predicting a **general defection** on the part of the **Visible Church**....

"We may at once conclude how *useful* this prediction of Paul's is. For it might have seemed that a building [the Christian Church] which...lay for so long in ruins, could not have been the work of God — had Paul not warned them **long before**, that this **would** take place.... Paul, however, is not speaking of one individual — but of a kingdom that was to be seized by Satan for the purpose of setting up a seat of **abomination** in the midst of God's temple. This we see **accomplished in Popery**.... The sect of Mohammed [570f A.D.] was like a raging overflow which in its violence tore away about half of the Church. It remained for **Antichrist** to infect the part which was left."

Not until after A.D. 590 was the Bishop of Rome ever called the sole 'pope' or universal father of the church. According to Calvin in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*,<sup>12</sup> Bishop Gregory of Rome then repudiated that new title – saying that anyone who accepted it, was the forerunner of Antichrist.

### **Calvin on Daniel's predicted centuries of papal oppression ere the Reformation**

In the last chapter of Daniel (12:1-12), there are important predictions anent the first advent of Christ and the resultant gradual advance of the cause of His Church. The latter would certainly occur — after and in spite of troubles stretching over very many years. For the Church would need to struggle forward, down the centuries, toward the prosperity to be inaugurated by the Protestant Reformation.

States Daniel: "Michael shall stand up.... There shall be a time of trouble such as never was.... It shall be to the end of these wonders...a time, times and an half.... From the time that...the abomination which desolates is set up [in A.D. 70], there shall be a thousand two hundred and ninety days. Blessed is he who keeps on waiting, and who comes to the thousand three hundred and thirty-five days!"

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<sup>11</sup> *Comm.* on II Thess. 2:2-8.

<sup>12</sup> *Inst.* IV:7:4f.

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Here "Daniel," comments Calvin,<sup>13</sup> "represented Michael as the guardian of the Church.... I embrace the opinion of those who refer this to the person of Christ.... It was in no degree superfluous...to predict such great calamities as impending over the Church.... In the present day [A.D. 1561], the same expressions are most useful to us.... **At the present time in the Papacy and throughout the whole world, impiety prevails...."**

Nevertheless, "I do not hesitate to suppose...the arrival of a **period** when God should collect many disciples to Himself.... God should gather to Himself a great multitude.... The sons of God shall soon become increased.... *'Many shall investigate, and knowledge shall increase'*.... The Lord will **at length** cause many to embrace it, to their own salvation....

*"'For a time, times, and half a time' [Daniel 12:7f]. I have stated my objection to the opinion of those who think one year and two and a half to be here intended. I confess the passage ought to be understood of that pollution of the Temple which the Prophet has already treated [Daniel 7:23-25 & 9:24-27].... With reference to the doctrine here delivered, its meaning is very simple: 'time' means a long period; 'times' a longer period; and 'a half' means the end or closing period.*

"The sum of the whole, is this: **many years** must elapse — before God fulfils what His Prophet had declared.... **I admit the allusion to years**, but the words are not to be understood literally but metaphorically....

"How sad is the dispersion of the Church **in these days** [A.D. 1561]! God indeed defends it by His power, but...how has it appeared throughout all **ages**? Surely, it has ever been torn in pieces and...dispersed — **but yet the end shall be prosperous**....

"I have no hesitation in referring this language...to that [A.D. 70] profanation of the Temple which happened after the manifestation of Christ when sacrifices ceased.... *'From that period, there shall be 1290 days'*.... The angel, then, purposely puts 'days' for 'years' — implying...that time may seem **immeasurably prolonged**.... Yet it must be endured....

"Then he adds, *'happy is he who shall have waited and endured until the 1335 days.... Some think the days should be understood as years.... The faithful ought constantly to persist in the hope of deliverance...after God has sufficiently proved the patience of His people and **by long and numerous...contests** has humbled His Church and **purged** it — until the end shall arrive!'*"

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<sup>13</sup> *Comm.* on Dan. 12:1-13.

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**Calvin on the historicistic predictions in Christ's Olivet Discourse**

In his comments on Christ's Olivet Discourse, Calvin further discusses *inter alia* the fulfilment — during the course of church history — of the 1335 day-years in Daniel 12:12. In Matthew 23:38 to 24:34, Christ predicted the **de**-struction of the **obs**-olescent Jewish temple in A.D. 70 — **and**, more importantly, the **con**-struction of the **ad**-olescent Christ-ian Church!

Jesus told the first-century A.D. Jerusalem Jews who opposed Him: "Lo, your house is left to you desolate!" Matthew 23:38. Calvin comments<sup>14</sup> that Christ here "threatens the destruction of the temple, and the dissolution of the whole frame of civil government" among those first-century apostates.

More importantly, the sixteenth-century genius of Geneva then immediately adds: "It was therefore a dreadful vengeance of God that the place which [He] Himself had so magnificently adorned, was not only forsaken by Him and ordered to be razed to the foundation — but consigned to the lowest infamy, **to the end of the world**. Let **the Romanists** now go, and let them proceed — in opposition to the will of God — to build their Tower of Babylon!"

In the next verse, Jesus tells the first-century Jews **why** He was going to desolate their temple during their own generation. "For I tell you, you shall not see Me henceforth, till you shall say 'Blessed is He Who comes in the Name of the Lord!'" Matthew 23:39.

Comments Calvin:<sup>15</sup> "We now come to inquire **what period** is denoted by this phrase. Some restrict it to the last day of judgment [*cf.* the futurists]. Others think that it is a prediction which was soon afterwards fulfilled when some of the Jews humbly adored Christ [*cf.* the preterists]. **But I do not approve of either of these interpretations**. And I am certainly astonished that learned men should have stumbled at so small an obstacle — by taking great pains to inquire how unbelievers can say concerning Christ 'Blessed be He Who comes in the Name of the Lord!' For He does **not** declare what **they** will **be** — but what **He** Himself will **do**!

"In short, He declares that He will not come to them *until*, trembling at the sight of His dreadful majesty, they shall exclaim — when it is too late — that truly He is the Son of God! And this threatening is addressed to **all** despisers of the Gospel — more especially to those who falsely profess His Name, while they reject His doctrine.... The same song is now sung by **the Papists**.... We are also reminded that...**we** ought not only to honour Him with our lips, but sincerely to wish that He would make us and **the whole world** subject to Himself!"

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<sup>14</sup> *Comm.* on Matt. 23:38.

<sup>15</sup> *Comm.* on Matt. 23:39.

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Christ soon went on to say that the "Gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations — and then shall the end come." Matthew 24:14. Calvin comments here<sup>16</sup> that "Christ does...**not fix a particular time**, but only affirms that *the Gospel*...would be spread to the farthest bounds of the world **before the day of His last coming**.... 'And *then* will the end come.' This is improperly restricted by some [the preterists] to the destruction of the temple....

"It **ought** to be understood [historicistically] as referring to *the end* and **renovation of the world**.... We ought to explain this latter clause: 'The end of the world will not come before I have tried My Church **for a long period**, by severe and painful temptation.... Hence too **we** ought to learn that **no particular time** is here fixed — as if the last day were to follow in immediate succession those events which were just now foretold."

In the very next verse, Jesus then referred to the time when "the abomination of desolation spoken by Daniel the prophet stand[s] in the holy place." Matthew 24:15. Calvin here comments<sup>17</sup> that "in the twelfth chapter [of Daniel] the angel predicts what is called the *final* abrogation of the service of the Law.... He fixes **absolutely the time** both of the ruin [A.D. 70] and of the restoration" — by Wycliffe in A.D. 1360 and by Huss in A.D. 1405. "*From the time, says he, that the daily sacrifice shall be taken away and THE ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION set up — there will be a thousand two hundred and ninety days. Blessed is he who shall wait till he come to the thousand three hundred and thirty-five days!* Daniel 12:11-12....

"As that message was sad and melancholy — he again recalls the prophet to one year, and two years, and six months.... The Spirit therefore exhorts believers to prepare themselves for the exercise of patience not only for a single year — that is, **for a long period** — but to lay their account with **enduring tribulations through an uninterrupted succession of many ages**....

"He had formerly used this form of expression: The calamity of the Church shall last through *a time, times, and half a time*. Daniel 7:25. But now [in Daniel 12:7] he reckons the period of *three years and six months* by days — that believers may be more and more hardened by **a very long continuance** of calamities. For it is customary with men in adversity to compute time not by years or months but by *days* — **a single day being, in their estimation, equal to a year**. He says that those will be *happy*, who bear up to the end of that period" — *viz.* A.D. 1405, alias the beginning of the Protestant Reformation under the Wycliffite Huss!

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<sup>16</sup> *Comm.* on Matt. 24:14.

<sup>17</sup> *Comm.* on Matt. 24:15.

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Finally Jesus then stated: "Truly, I tell you this generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled." Matthew 24:34. It is true that "within fifty years, the city was destroyed and the temple was rased" — Calvin concedes to preterism. But then he also comments, historicistically, that "**the same evils were perpetrated in uninterrupted succession — for many ages afterwards**.... The apostles endured **the same things which we see in the present day** [A.D. 1555-63]. And yet, it was not the design of Christ to promise to His followers that their calamities would be terminated within a short time. For then, He would have contradicted Himself — having previously warned them that *the end was not yet!*"<sup>18</sup>

**Calvin on the Reformation's destruction of Romish Law and the Papal Antichrist**

In respect of the Pauline passage Second Thessalonians 2:2-8, on the above matters, we now give a final comment by Calvin. He insists:<sup>19</sup> "Anyone who has learned from Scripture what are the things that belong particularly to God, and who on the other hand considers well what the Pope usurps for himself — will not have much difficulty in recognizing Antichrist...."

"Scripture declares that *God is the only Lawgiver*.... It represents Him also as the Author of all holy observances.... There is not one of these things which the Pope does not claim to be his own prerogative. He *boasts* that it is his right to *bind* men's consciences with such *laws* as he pleases." Daniel 7:25 *cf.* Second Thessalonians 2:4-8.

The A.D. 400 Chrysostom, continues Calvin, "explains why the state of the Roman Empire [then] delayed the manifestation of Antichrist.... So Antichrist [held Chrysostom] was about to seize for himself the *vacant rule* of the Roman Empire." For the Roman Empire successively fell to the northern hordes, from A.D. 410 onwards.

**Prior** to Chrysostom, adds Calvin himself, "the power of the Roman Empire [itself] prevented the rise of Antichrist.... Satan had not yet amassed such strength that Antichrist could openly oppress the Church.... The name 'Antichrist' does *not* designate a single *individual* — but a *single kingdom* which extends throughout *many generations*...."

"[Yet] the reign of **Antichrist** will be **temporary**.... He [Paul] **had** predicted the **destruction** of the reign of Antichrist, and **now** describes the **manner** of his destruction. He will be annihilated **by the Word of the Lord**.... Paul does **not** think that Christ will accomplish this **in a single moment**...."

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<sup>18</sup> *Comm.* on Matt. 24:34.

<sup>19</sup> *Comm.* on II Thess. 2:2-8.

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"Meantime, Christ will scatter the darkness in which Antichrist will reign, by the rays which He will emit.... This **victory** of the **Word** will therefore be seen in the world. For 'the Breath of His Mouth' [alias 'the Spirit of the Word of God'] means simply **His Word**, as in Isaiah 11:4 — the passage to which Paul appears to be alluding....

"**True and sound doctrine**...is represented as being *sufficient to put an end to all ungodliness* — and as destined at all times to be **victorious** over all the devices of Satan. It is also a commendation, when a little further on the **preaching** of this doctrine is referred to — as **Christ's coming to us!**" Second Thessalonians 2:8 *cf.* 3:1. Indeed, all of this will yet occur — **before** the final visible return to earth of the Lord Jesus Christ at the very end of world history. Second Thessalonians 1:7-12; 2:1-17; 3:1-4f.

### **The anti-preteristic historicism of the Puritans' *Westminster Standards***

It should not be necessary to need to add that, just like John Calvin himself, so too the Calvin-istic *Westminster Standards* — the official teaching of all Presbyterian Churches worldwide — are not preteristic but historicistic. Nowhere do they assume that the predictions of Daniel were fulfilled in Daniel's day, nor that the predictions of John's Revelation anent the Roman beast were primarily fulfilled in the apostolic age. For to Westminster, Antichrist alias the Roman beast is not first-century Pagan Rome — but the later Romish Papacy!

Just before the Westminster Assembly, the 1639 *Confession of Faith of the Kirk of Scotland* equates "Papisty" with "that Roman Antichrist" — and later again "that Roman Antichrist" with "the Papistical Kirk." Similarly, the 1645 *Westminster Directory for the Publick Worship of God* urges prayer: "for the propagation of the gospel and kingdom of Christ to all nations; for the conversion of the Jews, the fulness of the Gentiles, the fall of Antichrist, and the hastening of the second coming of our Lord; for the deliverance of the distressed churches abroad from the tyranny of the antichristian faction and from the cruel oppressions and blasphemies of the Turk; [and] for the blessing of God upon the reformed churches" *etc.*

The 1647 *Westminster Confession* 23:4 cites Second Thessalonians 2:4 and Revelation 13:15-17 against the political pretensions of "the Pope" — in A.D. 1647. Indeed, chapter 25:6 cites Second Thessalonians 2:3-9 and Revelation 13:6 to show that "the Pope of Rome...is that antichrist, that man of sin and son of perdition that exalteth himself in the church against Christ and all that is called God."

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Finally, the 1648 *Westminster Larger Catechism* (QQ. 191 & 195) makes it plain that in the Lord's Prayer we are not to pray preteristically — thanking God merely for preserving the first-century Hebrew Church against Pagan Rome. To the contrary, we are to pray historicistically — "that the kingdom of sin and Satan may be destroyed (Psalm 68:1-18 & Revelation 12:10-11), the gospel propagated throughout the world (Second Thessalonians 3:1), the Jews called (Romans 10:1), the fulness of the Gentiles brought in ((John 17:9-20 & Romans 11:25-26 & Psalm 67); [and] the church...purged from corruption (Malachi 1:11 & Zephaniah 3:9)" *etc.* For we are to "pray that God would...over-rule the world and all in it...and restrain Satan" — till he be "trodden under our feet...for ever!"

— (Rev. Prof. Dr.) Francis Nigel Lee  
Queensland Presbyterian Theological Seminary (Australia)