

Pagan and Papal Rome

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The vision of the eighth chapter of Daniel begins with the supremacy of Medo-Persian dominion, B.C. 538, and covers the remaining portion of the world's history till the close of time. The 25th verse says that the power represented by the little horn, Rome, "shall be broken without hand." This evidently refers to the same thing that is mentioned in Dan. 2:34, 44, 45, where the stone cut out without hands is represented as smiting the image on the feet and breaking up the entire image—all the kingdoms of earth—in pieces.

Paganism was the prevailing religion during the Medo-Persian and Grecian rule, during the first portion of the Roman Empire. In the vision of the second chapter of Daniel there is no distinction made between pagan Rome and Rome papal, but in every other prophecy the distinction is clearly marked. In the seventh chapter, pagan Rome is represented by the "dreadful and terrible" beast with teeth of iron and nails of brass. Papal Rome is represented by the "little horn" which came out from this beast. In reality, the beast, after the rise of the little horn, is papal Rome, i.e., Rome under the popes.

In the 12th and 13th of Revelation the Roman power is brought to view. It is not difficult to identify the red dragon with seven heads and ten horns. It is represented as standing ready to devour a certain child as soon as it was born. This child we know is Jesus, from the fact that he is to "rule all nations with a rod of iron" (verse 5, compared Ps. 2:7-9), and he was "caught up to his throne." These particulars will apply to no one but Jesus. And Rome, through Herod as its representative, stood ready to slay Jesus when he was born. See Matt. 2. The dragon, represents Rome. The question is, Does it represent the whole of Rome, or only a part? This can be answered when we have identified the next beast.

"And I stood upon the sand of the sea, and saw a beast rise up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and upon his horns ten crowns, and upon his heads the name of blasphemy. And the beast which I saw was like unto a leopard, and his feet were as the feet of a bear, and his mouth as the mouth of a lion; and the dragon gave him his power, and his seat, and great authority. ... And there was given unto 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."

Compare this description with what we are already familiar in Dan. 7, and there will be no difficulty in deciding that it also represents Rome. What! two symbols in succession representing the same thing? The answer must be that they represent two phases of Rome. Now we know that Rome in the time of Christ was pagan; therefore this second

phase, represented by the leopard beast, must be papal Rome. Notice its blasphemous words, and its work of persecuting saints, and compare with the description of the little horn of Daniel 7. Notice also a time during which it was to have power to continue—“forty and two months.” This, at thirty days to the month, is just 1260 days (as prophetic symbols, years), which we have already learned was the period of papal supremacy. Here, then, as in the seventh of Daniel, the prophecy marks a change from pagan to papal Rome.

Once more we turn to the Roman power as brought to view in the eighth of Daniel. The little horn that waxed “exceeding great,” we have already seen to be Rome. There is no possibility of its representing any other power. But it is to be “broken without hand,” which shows that the little-horn power covers the whole of Roman history, reaching even to the coming of the Lord. This being the case, it is evident that here also we must have the two phases of Rome,—pagan and papal. How are these two phases indicated? First, we repeat that the word “sacrifice” which occurs in verses 11, 12, and 13, is not found in the original, and there is nothing in the text that gives any idea of sacrifice. In the face of this, the Revision Committee, as if to get as far as possible from the true meaning of the passage, have placed “burnt-offering” in the Revised Version, in the place of “sacrifice.” This is simply making a bad matter worse. They could have used the word “persecution,” or “prophesying,” or “dreaming,” with just as much reason. Some one will ask, If there is no word in the original where the translators have placed “sacrifice,” why did they place any word there at all? It would have been better if they had not, for then no one would have been misled. Try it in verse 13: “Then I heard one saint speaking, and another saint said unto that certain saint, How long shall be the vision concerning the daily and the transgression of desolation, to give both the sanctuary and the host to be trodden underfoot?” A very slight examination will convince anyone that the only word that can be properly supplied after “daily,” is ‘desolation;’ thus, “How long shall be the vision concerning the daily desolation and the transgression of desolations?” By supplying a word that is already in the text (and we have no right to go outside of the text for a word), we make harmony, and get rid of the real sense of the passage.

Rome, then, is here termed to be a desolating power. Examine Matt. 24:15, 16, and Luke 20:21, 22, and you will find the Roman armies spoken of as the “abomination of desolation.” And this term, “desolation,” is a very fit one to apply to a power that shall “break in pieces and bruise,” and “shall devour the whole earth, and shall tread it down, and break it in pieces.” Then we have two forms of desolation, in the “daily” and the “transgression.” Rome in its pagan form was well indicated by the term “daily,” or “continual,” because paganism had been the main religion of the world from almost the beginning. A few people worshiped the true God; but these were so very few that it might well be said that paganism had always been the religion of the world. But under the Roman dominion a change was to take place. Paganism in the civilized world was to receive its death blow, and a form of worship professedly Christian was to take its place; yet this new form of religion was to be of such a character, as compared with paganism, that it was called the “transgression.” It is doubtful if the abomination of paganism for

four thousand years equaled the crimes perpetrated by papal Rome in its twelve centuries of supreme power.

This same change is set forth by Paul in the second chapter of 2 Thessalonians. He told the Thessalonians brethren that the day of the Lord could not come until there had come an apostasy, and the “man of sin” had been revealed, and had accomplished his work of blasphemy and opposition to God and history. Said he, “Remember ye not that when I was yet with you, I told you these things?” That it is, when he was in Thessalonica he preached to them from the book of Daniel concerning the rise of the papacy. “And now ye know what withholdeth that the man of sin might be revealed in his time.” That is, you know what now hinders the setting up of the papacy; it is paganism, which still has a controlling influence in the government. “For the mystery of the iniquity doth already work; only he who now letteth [hindereth] will let [hinder], until he be taken out of the way. And then shall that Wicked be revealed.” Verses 7, 8. The apostasy had begun in Paul’s day. “Grievous wolves” had already begun to devour the flock, and men speaking perverse things had drawn many away. This spirit of the papacy—“the mystery of the iniquity”—was already existing; but it could not fully develop itself until paganism—the hindering power—should be “taken out of the way,” and then “that Wicked” should stand forth undisguised.

Note the similarity in the terms used by Paul and the angel in describing the papacy. The angel calls it “the transgression of desolation;” Paul calls it “that Wicked,” just as though the papacy embraced all the wickedness in the world, and so it did. The papacy was to be so pre-eminently wicked that it could be sufficiently designated by the expression “that Wicked.”

In Rev. 13:2, the change from paganism to papacy is noted in these words: “And the dragon [pagan Rome] gave him [that is, the beast, papal Rome] his power, and his seat, and great authority.” If any one, however supposes that this change was an instantaneous one, accomplished by a sudden revelation, he is greatly mistaken. For several hundred years the papal power was growing almost unnoticed, before it succeeded in exalting itself above the ruins of paganism. Paul, 2 Thess. 2:6-8, brings this state of things to view, when he represents the “mystery of the iniquity” as working, but obliged to wait for its full development until paganism should be removed. We propose to give a few quotations that will indicate, as fully as is possible in a brief space, the rise of the papacy and the overthrow of paganism.

“In the last great persecution under Diocletian [A. D. 284-305], the bishops of Rome probably fled once more to the Catacombs. Their churches were torn down, their property confiscated, their sacred writings destroyed, and a vigorous effort was made to extirpate the powerful sect. But the effort was vain. Constantine soon afterward became emperor, and the Bishop of Rome emerged from the Catacombs to become one of the ruling powers of the world. This sudden change was followed by an almost total loss of the simplicity and purity of the days of persecution. Magnificent churches were erected by the emperor in Rome, adorned with images and pictures, where the bishop sat on a lofty throne, encircled by inferior priests, and performing rites borrowed from the

splendid ceremonial of the pagan temple. The Bishop of Rome became a prince of the empire, and lived in a style of luxury and pomp that awakened the envy or the just indication of the heathen writer, Marcellinus. The church was now enriched by the gifts and bequests of the pious and the timid; the bishops drew great revenues from his farms in the Campagna and his rich plantations in Sicily; he rode through the streets of Rome in a stately chariot and clothed in gorgeous attire; his table was supplied with a profusion more than imperial; the proudest women of Rome loaded him with lavish donations, and followed him with their flatteries and attentions; and his haughty bearing and profuse luxury were remarked upon by both pagans and Christians as strangely inconsistent with the humility and simplicity enjoined by the faith which he professed. The bishopric of Rome now became a splendid prize, for which the ambitious and unprincipled contended by force or fraud.”—*Historical Studies*, pp. 17, 18.

Constantine became sole emperor of Western of Rome in 312 A.D. Shortly after (March, 313), he issued the famous Edict of Milan, which restored all forfeited civil and religious rights to the Christians, and it secured to them equal toleration with the pagans throughout the empire. This was an important step in advance. Gibbon, speaking of Constantine’s relation to Christianity, says: “By the edicts of toleration, he removed the temporal disadvantages which had hitherto retarded the progress of Christianity. ... The exact balance of the two religions continued but a moment; and the piercing eye of ambition and avarice soon discovered that the profession of Christianity might contribute to the interest of the present as well as of the future life. The hopes of wealth and honors, the example of an emperor, his exhortations, his irresistible smile, diffused conviction among the venal and obsequious crowds which usually filled the apartments of a palace. ... As the lower ranks of society are covered by imitation, the conversion of those who possessed any imminence of birth, of power, or of riches, was soon followed by [the conversion of] dependent multitudes.”—*Decline and Fall*, chap. 20, par. 18.

In his “History of Latin Christianity,” book one, chapter 2, Milman quotes a single paragraph from an ancient historian, which shows the advancement made by the bishop of Rome by the close of the fourth century: “No wonder that for so magnificent a prize as the bishopric of Rome, then should contest with the utmost eagerness and obstinacy. To be enriched by the lavish donations of the principal females of the city; to ride, splendidly attired, in a stately chariot; to sit at a profuse, luxuriant, more than imperial, table,—these are of the rewards of successful ambition.”

In the same chapter, Milman again says:—

"The Pontificates of Damasus and Siricius [A.D. 367-398] beheld almost the last open struggles of expiring Roman paganism, the dispute concerning the Statue of Victory in the Senate, the succession of a large number of the more distinguished senators, the pleadings of the eloquent Symmachus for the toleration of the religion of ancient Rome. To such humiliation were reduced the deities of the Capitol, the gods, who, as was supposed, had achieved the conquest of the world, and laid it at the feet of Rome. But in this great contest the Bishop of Rome filled only an inferior part; it was Ambrose, the bishop of Milan, who enforced the final sentence of condemnation against paganism,

asserted the sin, in a Christian emperor, of assuming any Imperial title connected with pagan worship, and of permitting any portion of the public revenue to be expended on the rites of idolatry. It was Ambrose who forbade the last marks of respect to the titular divinities of Rome in the public ceremonies.”

The final triumph of the pseudo-Christian religion was gained in the early part of the 6th century, when Pope Symmachus anathematized the Emperor Anastasius. See *Cyclopedias*, art. “Anastasius,” and “Decline and Fall,” chap. 47, par. 22. At the same time, paganism in the West was overthrown by Clovis, king of Franks, a cruel and bloodthirsty tyrant, who had been converted to the Christianity that was then popular, by his wife, Clothilde, who was a Catholic. Clovis had promised her that if he were victorious in a battle which he was about to fight near Cologne, A.D. 496, he would turn Christian. After a severe struggle, he gained the victory, and soon after had several thousand of his followers baptized. He afterward, A.D. 507-8, by virtue of his superior skill and strength in battle, succeeded in “converting” the entire nation of the Visigoths, so that Christianity became the nominal religion of the entire Roman world. (See “Decline and Fall,” chap. 38, par. 1-30; Guizot’s “History of France,” vol., chap. 7.) Because of these Christian acts, he received from the pope the title of “Most Christian King.”

Thus was the “continual desolation” taken away that the “transgression of desolation” might run its course. In A.D. 538, as previously shown, the papacy became supreme by the conquest of its rivals, and it pursued its career unchecked until 1798. Since then its temporal power has gradually become extinct, but its spiritual power, though seemingly limited, is greater than ever. Its opposition to “all that is called God, or that is worshiped,” has not diminished, nor will it cease until the Lord shall consume that Wicked with the spirit of his mouth, and destroy it with the brightness of his coming. 2 Thess. 2:8.

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