

David Chilton's Exposition of Revelation 13: Damning for the Christian Religion

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David Chilton, though dead now, is still the leading Preterist Scholar. The now present dominance of Ken Gentry is only because of the death of Chilton in 1997. Chilton's *The Days of Vengeance* is the standard Preterist commentary of the book of Revelation. I read his account of the book of Revelation in its entirety in *Revelation: Four Views* edited by Steve Gregg, when I was in seminary back in 2008-2009. I recently read his entire commentary of Revelation 13. Chilton **admits** that the Sea beast is a collage of Satan's Kingdoms with Daniel's 4th Beast being the Roman Empire:

The Roman Empire is further symbolized as a ravenous, ferocious animal, untamed and under the Curse. St. John says the appearance of the Beast was like a leopard, with feet like those of a bear, and a mouth like the mouth of a lion: "The three animals, thus combined by the writer, symbolize swiftness and ferocity in springing upon the prey, tenacity in holding it and dragging it away, and a ravenous appetite for **devouring.**"³ These are also the very animals (listed in reverse order) used to describe the first three of the four great world empires in Daniel 7:1-6 (Babylon, Medo-Persia, and Greece; cf. Daniel's description of the same empires under a different symbol, in Dan. 2:31-45). The fourth empire, Rome, partakes of the evil, beast-like characteristics of the other empires, but it is much worse: "Behold, a fourth Beast, dreadful and terrifying and extremely strong; and it had large iron teeth. It devoured and crushed, and trampled down the remainder with its feet; and it was different from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns" (Dan. 7:7).⁴ This, as we noted at 12:3, is the origin of the

3. Moses Stuart, *A Commentary on the Apocalypse* (Andover: Allen, Morrill and Wardwell, two vols., 1845), Vol. 2, p. 276.

4. According to Moses Stuart and Milton Terry, Daniel's beasts are Babylon, Media, Persia, and Greece. Even if this were the case (which I doubt), its "rebirth" in the imagery of Revelation would mean simply that Rome combines the worst characteristics of the four preceding world empires.

Sadly, however, he claims that the fourth beast is personified in the person of Nero. (pg. 329) However, the fatal wound being healed in verse 3 he gets right and corrects the dishonest

interpretation by most Preterists and accepts my Historicist view, which is damning to the Christian doctrine of Christus Victor:

3-4 And I saw one of his heads as if it had been slain, and his fatal wound was healed. Some hā've pointed out that, after Nero was killed, the rumor began to spread that he would rise

5. Ibid.

6. See Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars*, Robert Graves, trans. (New York: Penguin Books, revised ed., 1979), pp. 213-46; Tacitus, *The Annals of Imperial Rome*, Michael Grant, trans. (New York: Penguin Books, revised ed., 1977), pp. 252-397; Miriam T. Griffin, *Nero: The End of a Dynasty* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984).

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again and recapture the throne; in some way, they suppose, St. John must be referring to this *Nero redivivus* myth. This, it seems to me, is a very unsatisfactory method of dealing with Scripture. St. John mentions the Beast's "death-wound" three times in this passage (see v. 12, 14); clearly, this is much more than a casual symbol, and we should attempt a Biblical explanation for it.⁷

The Beast, as we saw, resembles the Dragon. The fact that he receives a *head wound* should make us think of the scene in the Garden of Eden, when God promised that Christ would come and crush the Dragon's head (**Gen. 3:15**). Daniel had prophesied that in the days of the Roman rulers, Christ's Kingdom would crush the Satanic empires and replace them, filling the earth. Accordingly, apostolic testimony proclaimed that Christ's Kingdom had come, that the devil had been defeated, disarmed, and bound, and that all nations would begin to flow toward the mountain of the Lord's House. Within the first generation, the Gospel spread rapidly around the world, to all the nations; churches sprang up everywhere, and members of Caesar's own household came into the faith (**Phil. 4:22**). In fact, Tiberius Caesar even formally requested that the Roman Senate officially acknowledge Christ's *divinity*.⁸ For a time, therefore, it looked

as if a *coup* were taking place: Christianity was in the ascendant, and soon would gain control. Satan's head had been crushed, and with it the Roman Empire had been wounded to death with the sword (see 13:14) of the Gospel. ⁹

But then the tables were reversed. Although the Gospel had spread everywhere, so had heresy and apostasy; and under persecution by the Jews and the Roman State, great masses of Christians began falling away (1 Tim. 1:3-7, 19-20; 4:1-3; 6:20-21; 2 Tim. 2:16-18; 3:1-9, 13; 4:10, 14-16; Tit. 1:10-16; 1 John 2:18-19).

The New Testament gives the definite impression that *most* of the churches fell apart and abandoned the faith; under Nero's persecution, the Church seemed to have been stamped out entirely. The Beast had received the head-wound, the wound unto death – yet it still lived. The reality, of course, was that Christ had defeated the Dragon and the Beast; but the implications of His victory still had to be worked out; the saints had yet to overcome, and take possession (cf. Dan. 7:21-22; Rev. 12:11).

Chilton, the leading Preterist scholar on the book of Revelation, Preterism being absolutely necessary for the Christian Religion, admits the widespread apostasy that we Protestants have complained about for centuries. This apostasy makes the Christian interpretation of Matthew 16:18, the Magna Carta for Christianity, **impossible**. However, in order to temper his position so he could keep his job as a Christian minister, Chilton claims that the phrase in verse 3, "and all the world wondered after the beast" means only the land of Israel:

And the whole Land wondered after the Beast; and they worshiped the Dragon, because he gave his authority to the Beast; and they worshiped the Beast, saying: Who is like the Beast, and who is able to make war against him? St. John is not speaking of the world (the “earth”) following the Beast; the word he uses here should be translated *Land*, meaning *Israel*. We know this because the context identifies his worshipers as those who dwell on the Land (Rev. 13:8, 12, 14) – a technical phrase used twelve times in Revelation to denote apostate Israel (see above on 3:10). It is true, of course, that Nero was loved all over the Empire as the benevolent provider of welfare and entertainment. But it is *Israel* in particular which is condemned for Emperor-worship. Faced with a choice between Christ and Caesar, they had proclaimed: *We have no king but Caesar!*

the Christians. Consult your histories . . .” (pp. 21f.). A. Cleveland Coxe comments: “Great stress is to be placed on the fact that Tertullian was probably a juriconsult, familiar with the Roman archives, and influenced by them in his own acceptance of Divine Truth. It is not supposable that such a man would have hazarded his bold appeal to the records, in remonstrating with the Senate and in the very faces of the Emperor and his colleagues, had he not known that the evidence was irrefragable” (pp. 57f.).

9. The Biblical head-crushing theme is especially prominent in the Book of Judges; see James B. Jordan, *Judges: God’s War Against Humanism* (Tyler, TX: Geneva Ministries, 1985).

It is impossible for this interpretation to be true as:

1. Verse 3 is directly connected to the international collage of all the great Pagan Empires of the past.
2. In verse 7, the power of the Sea Beast is over “all kindreds, and tongues, and nations.”
3. In verse 8, those not written in the Lamb’s book of life are not confined to the land of Israel.
4. The apostasy in the Churches was not confined to the land of Israel.
5. In verse 12 the Earth beast “exerciseth all the power of the first beast before him.”

Thus, as we see, the leading Preterist scholar, again Preterism being absolutely necessary for the Christian Religion to be true, has made the Christian religion, and its heresies of Christus Victor and immunity from apostasy to be impossible.