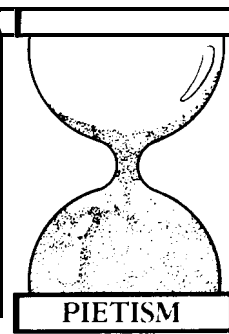


Dispensationalism in Transition

Challenging Traditional Dispensationalism's "Code of Silence"



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THE BEAST AND DOUBLE-FULFILLMENT

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In the course of my work week I get a number of phone calls and letters regarding things prophetic. I sometimes feel like "The Answer Man." Because of this I have gotten an answering machine!

An Earnest Inquiry

One letter that I recently received from a dispensationalist was an earnest concern as to whether double-fulfillment might account for Nero's "similarities" to the end time Beast of Revelation. The writer was impressed with the argument that could be presented for Nero's being the Beast. But he was not persuaded. Perhaps Nero was but an *initial* fulfillment of the ultimate coming eschatological Beast. I have heard this sort of objection from time to time. Probably you have, as well.

Dispensationalists have a number of ploys designed to escape the demands of biblical eschatology. The most absurd ploy is the insertion of convenient gaps into the biblical record. A frustratingly simplistic ploy is the "literal except when I want it to be figurative" maneuver. But the double-fulfillment prospect was not created by dispensationalists with their entirely new system. Others outside of dispensational circles often employ it. Consequently, it deserves more careful scrutiny. I thought, therefore, that my letter of response to the writer might be of interest to readers of *Dispensationalism in Transition*. Below is the text of my response to the gentleman who wrote to me.

My Response

I appreciate your interest in my approach to the understanding of the Beast of Revelation. I also appreciate your thoughtful question, which is evidence of a deep concern to understand Scripture. Hopefully, a few words will prove helpful to you.

Your specific question is regarding the possibility of a double-fulfillment of the Beast, which would allow that he was initially Nero but that in the future he might be some eschatological terror marking the end times. You cite Hosea 11:1 as a type of double-fulfillment. I do not believe that this is at all possible for a great number of reasons.

Hosea 11:1 and Matthew 2:15

In the first place, Hosea 11:1 is not a good parallel example. It is not predictive prophecy at all, as is the Beast prophecy set in Revelation. The use of Hosea 11:1 in Matthew 2:15 finds what is known as *topological fulfillment*.¹ That is, in its original setting Hosea 11:1 was not set forth as prophecy at all. Rather it was an historical event re-

fleeted upon by a prophet for ethical directive, or whatever. No original reader of Hosea 11:1 would suspect that it foreshadowed some future event.

Matthew, inspired of God, makes use of Hosea 11:1 as a typology, not as predictive prophecy. Thus, Matthew 2:15 is a topological fulfillment of a historical pattern, not a predictive fulfillment of a prophetic datum. Consequently, Hosea 11:1 is not an example of a double fulfillment prophecy after all.

Scriptural Control Factors

Secondly, such topological fulfillments must occur in the New Testament era, not in our future. The New Testament time is the "fullness of times" (Gal. 4:4), which received the final and complete revelation of God (Matt. 13:17; Heb. 1:1-2). If the Beast were a topological fulfillment (as with Hosea 11:1), then we would lack any Scriptural controls on discovering its next occurrence, because Scripture has been completed.

The problem here is that any and all prophecy could be taken as involving a double-fulfillment anytime one's theological system required it. Furthermore, what is to stop it from requiring a triple fulfillment? Historicism is an approach to Revelation that attempts to trace the fulfillments of Revelation throughout Church history. One of the problems with the historicist approach to the Book of Revelation is that it lacks any controls and is malleable to any and all environments. This is the same sort of problem with the double-fulfillment view, when it extends beyond biblical days.

Could it be – on the principle of double-fulfillment – that Sun Myung Moon *is* the Second Messiah after all?

Contextual Control Factors

Thirdly, the Beast prophecy is set in a very clear overarching context calling for its *soon* fulfillment. "The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants; things which *must shortly take place*" (Rev. 1:1). "Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for *the time is near*" (Rev. 1:3). "These words are faithful and true. And the Lord God of the holy prophets sent His angel to show His servants the things which *must shortly take place*" (Rev. 22:6). "Do not seal the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is at hand" (Rev. 22:10).

The point is emphasized so frequently and with such perspicuity that to read any fulfillment millennia distant would evacuate its predictive expectation of all meaning and integrity. In this light, we must be aware that there is a parallel and contrast of John's Revelation with Daniel's prophecy. John clearly draws upon Danielic themes to fill

1. For a helpful discussion of this sort of question, see: Curtis Crenshaw and Grover Gunn, *Dispensationalism Today, Yesterday, and Tomorrow* (Memphis: Footstool, 1985), chs. 1-3.

out his prophetic work (even his Beast draws upon the imagery of Daniel's beasts: cp. Rev. 13:1-2 with Dan. 7:2-8). But in Daniel there is a command for Daniel to seal up his prophecy until the time of the "end" (Dan.12:9). John, however, is commanded to act as a prophet actually living in the "end" (the New Testament era initiated the end times: 1 Cor. 10:11; Heb. 1:1-2; 9:26; 1 John 2:18): "And he said to me, 'Do not seal the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is at hand'" (Rev. 22:10). John's prophecy was *unsealed* because its time of fulfillment was "soon" and "at hand."

Interpretive Pandemonium

Fourthly, we would really stretch credibility if we could say that all the many details of the Beast (and why not of ail of Revelation?) would ail be fulfilled in incredible detail at some future time. The Beast himself plays a large and complicated role in Revelation. A careful reading of Revelation shows a whole complex of interrelated, intricately woven themes, patterns, and events all of which would have to find double fulfillment! Revelation is a sophisticated enough book for its own day. How can we expect its intricate fulfillment not once but twice?

This is wholly unnecessary when we view Revelation in light of first century history. The complex of judgment events of Revelation fit easily and relevantly in the first century (as my book, *The Beast of Revelation*, endeavors to demonstrate). Most of the judgment patterns can be easily assigned first century fulfillments. A few are a little more obscure, but still may easily enough be applied to the events of the A.D. 60s. If it's not broken, don't fix it.

The Shoe Fits

Fifthly, the Beast is clearly tied to the first century Roman era in its own right, irrespective of the time qualifiers scattered throughout Revelation. When the angel comes to give John the *interpretation* of the Beast imagery (not new material requiring additional difficult interpretation, Rev. 17:7-10), he expressly ties him to John's era: "Here is the mind which has wisdom [in other words, the angel is interpreting the vision for John (KG)]: "The seven heads [of the

Beast] are seven mountains on which the woman sits. There are also seven kings. Five *have fallen* [prior to the present time when John wrote, KG], one is [presently reigning as John wrote, KG], and the other has not yet come. And when he comes, he must continue a short time" (Rev. 17:9-10). Just as the unified generic Beast has experienced a succession of kings, five of which have fallen and one which now is, so we must expect even the seventh to come immediately upon the demise of the sixth (who was Nero).

The early history of the Roman Empire fits the bill perfectly. Five emperors had died before Nero: Julius, Augustus, Tiberius, Gaius (Caligula), and Claudius. Nero is the present reigning sixth emperor. The emperor that followed him, Galba, reigned only six months – the shortest reigning emperor to that time. The data fit so remarkably well, that there is no necessity of looking elsewhere for a fit.

Concision

i hope you can see why I put no stock in the double-fulfillment theory. It seems to be created for the sole and express purpose of circumventing the obvious interpretation of Revelation, which is demanded by the language of John, as well as the historical events of his era.

i have had scores of letters and phone calls from people who have converted from futurism to preterism regarding the Book of Revelation. I hope that you will see the futility of the futurist approach in light of the perfect fit of the historical events of the first century. if you are interested in further studies on Revelation i can recommend David Chilton's *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of Revelation*.² If you would like a five tape set of a seminar entitled "An Introductory Survey of Revelation," you may write to me.³

2. Order from Institute for Christian Research for \$27.95, which includes postage.

3. The five audio cassette tape series is available through me for \$20.00. If you want the manual to go along with it, please add another \$2.50. Ken Gentry, 46 Main St., Conestee, SC 29636. I also have available a nine tape set entitled 'Postmillennial Eschatology,' a series taught by me at Christ College. It is available for \$30.00.