

Historicism: The Historical Interpretation of Prophecy

Historicism is the historical method for interpreting the outline time-prophecies of Daniel and Revelation, as well as the prophecies of Ezekiel, Christ, and Paul. This method of interpretation was the original, biblical, prophetic operating system that was resurrected by the Sixteenth-Century Reforms, after a thousand years of prophetic darkness in Christendom that resulted from the twin teachings of Saint Augustine (that prophecy had nothing to do with history), and of Origen of Alexandria, who, following the Jewish philosopher Philo, who considered all Scripture to be allegories with three levels of meanings.

What is Historicism in a nutshell? It is a simple concept. It is the belief that the prophecies that purport to describe the divine revelation of specific events in the affairs of nations and empires, generally begin in the time of the prophet and run to the end of the world. Prophecy thus becomes a divine *preview* for what would occur in history. History, in turn, is a *review* of what was foretold in prophecy. Using this method, the Reformers were able to show that the Papacy was the little horn of Daniel seven's fourth empire (the Roman Monarchy), which would rule Christendom for 1,260 years (538 – 1798), specified by Daniel 7:25. What is very significant about Historicism is that it interprets the words of the prophets literally.

False Operating Systems for Interpreting Prophecy

A method that is contrary to Historicism, but is sometimes mingled with it, is the *Spiritualization* of the words and symbols of portions of a historically outlined prophecy. This hybrid is sometimes called Symbolism. An example of this is found in the post-Reformation interpretation of Daniel 11.

Many Christians follow the Historical method when interpreting the history of the two world powers that would follow Babylon, namely, Medo-Persia (Daniel 11:2), and Greece, represented by Alexander the Great in Daniel 11:3, and the four Grecian Asiatic states that arose out of his crumbling empire in 323 B.C. (Daniel 1:4). They may also correctly follow the historical sequences of events depicted in Daniel 11:5-15 in which Gabriel focuses on the territorial disputes and wars between two of these subdivisions of Alexander's Grecian empire, the Egyptian kings south of Palestine, and the Seleucidan/Syrian kings north of Palestine. It is at this point that many of these hybrid historicists *abandon* Historicism in interpreting Daniel 11:16 where Gabriel introduces the fourth world power Rome, in its four phases:

Firstly, pagan Rome which reigns from Daniel 11:16-30;

Secondly, Papal Rome who reigns from Daniel 11:31-35, then receives a deadly wound at the "time of the end" in 1798;

Thirdly, pagan Rome re-emerged during the French atheistic Enlightenment and Revolution in 1789-1798 (Daniel 11: 36-40). The prophecy of Daniel 11:36-40 is parallel to the prophecy of Revelation 11:7-13 which describes the emergence of the French atheistic power in 1789 and its war on the papacy and Christianity.

Fourthly, the final reawakening of the papal power in verse 45, which is further described in Daniel 11:7.

Some of these hybrid historicists follow the pagan Jewish philosopher Porphyry who did not believe in the predictive element of prophecy and projected the existence of a Grecian anti-Semitic figure from verse 16 to the end of the chapter.

Other hybrid-historicists, somewhat more faithful to the principle of historicism, follow pagan Rome from Daniel 11:16 through verse 30, and then correctly follow papal Rome from Daniel 11:31 to verse 35 when it receives a deadly wound inflicted by the resurrected pagan forces insipient in the pagan French Enlightenment and Revolution. But they sometimes confound the interpretation of these prophecies in three significant ways:

First, by failing to recognize that the papal reign which commenced in verse 31 ended in verse 35 when the “time appointed” for its reign of 1,260 years depicted in Daniel 7:25 ended at the “time of the end,” in 1798.

Secondly, they hold that the “king” that ended the papal reign in verse 36 constitutes a recapitulation of the papal reign in verses 36-39. This resurrected pagan divided Roman power is reflected in the atheism and spiritualism of the French Enlightenment and Revolution and is referred to by Daniel as the “king” in verses 36 through 40. But, unfortunately,

Thirdly, from Daniel 11:40 on, these hybrid historicists commence to spiritualize the terms “king of the south” and “king of the north” when they reappear in verse 40. They *spiritualize* the term “king of the north” in verse 40 by incorrectly calling papal Rome “king of the north” by a process of *spiritualization*. They ignore the fact that the titles “king of the south” and “king of the north” are not *symbols*, but *literal, ancient titles* of the ancient powers that ruled south and north of Palestine. We are compelled to follow Gabriel’s interpretation of these titles. There is no Scriptural authority for us to substitute our peculiar definitions of these titles.

Historicism Avoids These Pitfalls

A strict historicist uses the same meaning that Gabriel assigned to the titles “king of the south” and “king of the north in verses 5-15: Egypt, king of the south, and the Seleucid/Syrian king, king of the north. Through a process of spiritualization, the term “king of the south” is used to refer to either Islam or atheism and the term “king of the north” is used to refer to the papacy. Once Daniel 11:40 is spiritualized, these hybrid historicists cease to follow the strict historical sequence of the events from the wars of Napoleon in 1798 against Egypt and the Ottoman Turks in verse 40, to the war of the other European horns constituting divided Rome which dismantled the Ottoman empire between 1798 and WWII, as depicted in Daniel 11: 41-43.

This approach helps to clarify for us the vital prophecies contained in Daniel 1:44 and 45. The “king of the north,” the dismantled Ottoman empire, disappears as a potent force in history in Daniel 11:43. The prophecy of Daniel 11:41-43 runs parallel to the prophecy of Revelation 9:13-15 which describes the progressive demise of the Ottoman Turks after its divinely appointed reign of 541 years and 15 days (July 27, 1299, when the Ottomans first invaded Roman Nicomedia to August 11, 1840, when it surrendered its sovereignty to the major powers of Europe).

Shielding the Papacy

Unwittingly, these hybrid historicists advance the purpose of the Counter-Reformation. To shield the Papacy from this torchlight of prophecy of Daniel 7, the Jesuits were commissioned to resurrect two false, contradictory, and moribund theories of prophetic

interpretation that placed the fulfillment of Daniel and John's prophecies either in the distant past (Preterism), or in the distant future just before the Second Advent (Futurism).

As we approach the end of human affairs, it is important to revitalize the historical interpretation of history so that we can understand the events transpiring around us. Prophetic events are like signposts along the highway of time. They tell us where we are in the stream of history and how close we are to the most climatic event in Earth's history – the Second Coming of Christ. When probation closes for everyone on earth, our characters are fixed and so are our destinies - for eternal life or death. Christ will not return until every living human being is allowed to choose life or eternal death. Did not the Lord say to his servant Amos in 757 B.C. that He would do nothing before he revealed his secrets to his servants the prophets? Amos 3:7.

Historicism is a Lamp and a Light

The Lord told David that prophecy is a lamp to our path and a light to our feet, precisely so that the morally upright believer can walk safely down the highway of time to meet the Lord at his Second Coming. Approximately eight hundred years after Amos, in the last week of Christ's earthly ministry, when he departed the Temple at Jerusalem predicting its destruction, the alarmed disciples asked him 'Show us the future and the end of the world and the signs of your Coming.' Jesus then took them up to the Mount of Olives, and the first words out of his mouth, as he outlined the future to his disciples from AD 31 to his Second Coming, were, '*Let no man deceive you, for there will come false Christs and prophets among you.*' Matthew 24:6. The whole purpose of the "lamp and light" of prophecy is to protect the children of God from the deceptions and pitfalls that the evil one will put in their path as they journey through life and time. Hence, it is vitally important that we correctly interpret these divinely sent prophetic signposts. We will heed Christ's injunction to "Let no man deceive you" about the timing and nature of his Second Coming of Christ, only if we follow his divinely appointed method for interpreting these crucial outline prophecies – Historicism.