

# The Meaning of History

# The World Ages

“ Omnes itaque generationes ab Abraham usque ad David, generationes quattuordecim; et a David usque ad transmigracionem Babylonis, generationes quattuordecim; et a transmigracione Babylonis usque ad Christum, generationes quattuordecim. (Mt 1:17) ”

Omitted: twenty generations from Adam to Abraham (Lc 3).

# Five World Ages

1. Adam to Abraham
2. Abraham to David
3. David to the Babylonian exile
4. Babylon to Christ
5. Christ to Judgement Day

# Six World Ages

1. Adam to Noah
2. Noah to Abraham
3. Abraham to David
4. David to the Babylonian exile
5. Babylon to Christ
6. Christ to Judgement Day

## Augustine, *De catechizandis rudibus*

“

Now, on the subject of this rest Scripture is significant, and refrains not to speak, when it tells us how at the beginning of the world, and at the time when God made heaven and earth and all things which are in them, He worked during six days, and rested on the seventh day. For it was in the power of the Almighty to make all things even in one moment of time. For He had not labored in the view that He might enjoy (a needful) rest, since indeed “He spoke, and they were made; He commanded, and they were created;” but that He might signify how, after six ages of this world, in a seventh age, as on the seventh day, He will rest in His saints; inasmuch as these same saints shall rest also in Him after all the good works in which they have served Him. (*Dcr* 17)

”

## Thousands

“

But the heavens and the earth which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of the ungodly men. But of this one thing be not ignorant, my beloved, that **one day with the Lord is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day**. The Lord delayeth not his promise, as some imagine, but dealeth patiently for your sake, not willing that any should perish, but that all should return to penance. But the day of the Lord shall come as a thief, in which the heavens shall pass away with great violence, and the elements shall be melted with heat, and the earth and the works which are in it, shall be burnt up. (II Pt 3:7-10)

”

## Thousands

six days of Creation



“a day is as a thousand years”



six world ages



six thousand years?

# Thousands

“

And I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit, and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon the old serpent, which is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. And he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should no more seduce the nations, till the thousand years be finished. And after that, he must be loosed a little time. And I saw seats; and they sat upon them; and judgment was given unto them; and the souls of them that were beheaded for the testimony of Jesus, and for the word of God, and who had not adored the beast nor his image, nor received his character on their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. The rest of the dead lived not, till the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. (Apc 20:1-5)

”

## World Ages : Ages of Man : Days of Creation

1. **Infancy:** evening = Flood = the face of the deep: infancy wiped out by a flood of forgetfulness
2. **Childhood:** firmament = ark; evening = confusion of tongues; childhood does not give birth
3. **Adolescence:** land = chosen people; evening = sins of the people, Saul
4. **Youth:** stars = splendour of kingship; youth reigns; evening = sins of kings
5. **Decline:** marine/bird life = chosen people in exile; evening = multiplication of sins among the Jews
6. **Old Age:** Adam = Christ, Eve = Church

(Augustine, *De Genesi ad Manichaeos* 1.23)

## *Daniel: Four Empires*

- ▶ Ch. 2: Statue = Babylon plus three kingdoms, the last divided; then God will establish an eternal kingdom
- ▶ Ch. 5: Writing on the wall = Babylon falls to the Medes
- ▶ Ch. 7: Four beasts = four kingdoms; fourth will conquer all the earth
- ▶ Ch. 8: Goat defeating ram = Greeks defeating Medes and Persians

Thus (Jerome)

1. Babylon (Assyria)
2. Medes and Persians
3. Greece
4. Rome

## *Daniel: Your Days Are Numbered*

- ▶ Ch. 8: 2300 days until the sanctuary will be cleansed
- ▶ Ch. 9: 70 (or 69) “sevens” between the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the coming of the anointed one ( $7 \times 69 = 483$ )
  - ▶ e.g. years until Christ’s baptism
- ▶ Ch. 12: “a time, times, and half a time” or 1290 days (3.5 years) between the end of sacrifice and “the abomination unto desolation”; but “blessed is the one who waits 1335 days”
  - ▶ e.g. years until the Second Coming

# *Translatio imperii*

1. Babylon (Assyria)
2. Medes and Persians
3. Greece
4. Rome
  - 4.1 (Western) Empire (27 BCE–CE 476)
  - 4.2 Eastern Empire (CE 333–1453)
  - 4.3 Carolingians (800–888)
  - 4.4 Holy Roman Empire (962–1806)

# Understanding History

A Christian reading of history relies on

- ▶ **Linear time:** From Creation to Judgement Day
- ▶ **Vertical time:** The understanding that events do not relate to each other causally, but are independently governed by God
- ▶ **Teleology:** The doctrine that history leads up to a goal

“

In der ersten Epoche [d.h. im Alten Testament] erhalten sie [d.h. die geschichtlichen Ereignisse] ihren Sinn nur dadurch, daß sie unaufhaltsam auf die Inkarnation zielen; sie bereiten den Weg der Gnade. In der Epoche des Lichtes [d.h. nach der Inkarnation] weisen die Ereignisse auf die endzeitliche Erlösung hin. (Tristram, *Sex aetates mundi*, p. 13)

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# Bibliography



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