

Preface

Many of the apocalyptic patterns in Revelation can only be discerned with hindsight and even then they can be difficult to determine, mainly because we are looking for something else. For example, the seals look both backwards and forwards from their point of origin. However, if we start with the premise that the seals only look forwards, and that their point of origin is 96 CE then we achieve a completely different reading of the seals.

In psychology and cognitive neuroscience, pattern recognition describes a cognitive process that matches information from stimulus with information retrieved from memory. Wikipedia states that, “The human tendency to see patterns that do not actually exist is called apophenia. Examples of apophenia include the Man in the Moon, faces or figures in shadows, in clouds, and in patterns with no deliberate design, such as the swirls on a baked confection, and the perception of causal relationships between events which are, in fact, unrelated”.¹ In our case we are matching patterns from the Old Testament (retrieved from “historical memory”) with the Apocalypse (and interpreting the application of those old patterns within new historical contexts). Of course, we must guard against the danger of apophenia but intertextual and contextual approaches strictly confine the limits of pattern matching thus preventing the detection of non-existent patterns.

A large portion of the Apocalypse has already found a fulfilment in the history of the Jewish people and in the early first century church. W. Farrar sums up the preterist approach as follows:

“But to me it seems that the founder of the Preterist School is none other than St. John himself. For he records the Christ as saying to him when he was in the Spirit, ‘Write the things which thou sawest, and THE THINGS WHICH ARE, and the things which are about to happen (*ha mellei ginesthai* [ὅ μὲλλει γενέσθαι]) after these things’ [Rev 1.19]. No language surely could more clearly define the bearing of the Apocalypse. It is meant to describe the contemporary state of things in the Church and the world, and the events which were to follow in immediate sequence. If the Historical School can strain the latter words into an indication that we are (contrary to all analogy) to have a symbolic and unintelligible sketch of many centuries, the Preterist School may at any rate apply these words, *ha eisen* [ὅ εἰσὶν], ‘THE THINGS WHICH ARE,’ to vindicate the application of a large part of the Apocalypse to events nearly contemporary, while they also give the natural meaning to the subsequent clause by understanding it of events which were then on the horizon. The Seer emphatically says that the future events which he has to foreshadow will occur *speedily* (*en taxei* [“at hand”]) and the recurrent burden of his whole book is the nearness of the Advent (*ho kairos engus* [“the time is near”]). Language is simply meaningless if it is to be so manipulated by every successive commentator as to make the words “speedily” and “near” imply any number of centuries of delay”.²

If the need is felt to label this commentary using modern categories then please label it correctly as partial preterist as **only some** of the vision was realized in the history of the Jewish people and early church - much of the realization is still future --- it is therefore incorrect to tag the commentary as “preterist”. Suggested descriptive terminology is “pattern-repetition–interpretation” because the same patterns are constantly repeated and foreshadowed in the Old Testament.

What the Apocalypse does so well is reuse Old Testament patterns, allusions and imagery without destroying the meaning of the original context and it reapplies those OT patterns to the first and second centuries and to the future. This approach makes the whole of Scriptures a Revelation of the events leading up to the kingdom and no one would dare label Old Testament prophecies as “preterist” as they clearly (obviously) have dual fulfilments as some are still not yet realized. “Farrar called John the “the founder of the Preterist School” but John is neither a preterist nor, a partial preterist, I would categorize John as a **patternist** (my own fabricated term).

The Apocalypse is not either/or (all past/all future) – it teaches us to recognize repeat patterns of human behaviour and divine intervention and superimposes the past onto the future like the old double negative exposures when cameras used to have film that was not rewound correctly. As Mark Twain said; “History Does Not Repeat Itself, But It Rhymes”, this is certainly a truism for divine history.

Introduction Endnotes

¹ Pattern recognition (psychology). (2016, December 15). In Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Pattern_recognition_\(psychology\)&oldid=755046888](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Pattern_recognition_(psychology)&oldid=755046888) [Retrieved June 2017]

² Frederic W. Farrar, *The Early Days of Christianity* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1882), 432-33