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100-Pound Hailstones

Tom's Perspectives
by Thomas Ice

> *And huge hailstones, about one hundred pounds each, came down from heaven upon men; and men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail, because its plague was extremely severe.* —Revelation 16:21

The plagues, judgments, and disasters in the Book of Revelation and in other biblically prophetic passages are not understood by some as literally descriptive of miraculous events that God will bring one day upon mankind. Instead, non-literal interpreters of these passages say that these descriptions are either symbolic for a non-historical event or they insist on a naturalistic interpretation. Such approaches have a difficult time accepting the fact that God will actually throw 100 pound hailstones at mankind during a future tribulation judgment. What are passages like Revelation 16:21 saying? Is this to be seen as a future supernatural event or is it best understood naturalistically as a past event?

Preterist Sophistry

"It is quite impossible that such gargantuan hailstones can be accounted for under the most aggravated of meteorological conditions," declares Dr. Kenneth Gentry. "Yet Josephus records for us an event so visually and effectually similar that what he records must be the fulfillment of the Revelational prophecy."[1] Dr. Gentry's belief that Revelation 16:21 was fulfilled in the first century, as recorded by Josephus, is further explained in the following:

> Not only is the size mentioned the same (one talent, . . .), but the boulders thrown by the Roman catapults were white colored, as are hailstones. Would not the effect of the catapulting stones be virtually that of a hailstorm of such proportions?
> . . . Revelation's prophecies find an impressive fulfillment in almost literal fashion in the Jewish War.[2]

Scripture Interprets Scripture

Dr. Gentry believes, at least in theory, that, "Scripture interprets Scripture."[3] Yet when it comes to dealing with this particular item, Dr. Gentry prefers Josephus to God's Word. This is true, in spite of the fact that Scripture has a fair amount to say about this subject. However, when one takes into account what Scripture actually says on this matter, it does not support preterism. This is likely the reason why Josephus is to be

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[1] Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *Before Jerusalem Fell: Dating the Book of Revelation* (Atlanta: American Vision, 1998), p. 246.
[2] Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, p. 246.
[3] Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *He Shall Have Dominion: A Postmillennial Eschatology* (Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1992), p. 160.

preferred by Dr. Gentry and so many preterists.

It is interesting to note that Dr. Gentry chops his quote of Josephus and does not include the part where Josephus says that when the Romans left their stones white, the Jews saw them coming and were able to dodge them. It was only after the Romans blackened the stones that they were able to inflict damage on the Jews.[4] Thus, in the later and effective use of the stones by the Romans, they did not actually resemble white hailstones as Dr. Gentry contends. Is this what Dr. Gentry means when he says the prophecies of Revelation were fulfilled "in almost literal fashion in the Jewish War?" Hardly! When biblical prophecy is fulfilled, it is always clearly and evidently fulfilled.

SCRIPTURE AND HAILSTONES

What does the Bible have to say about the Lord fighting with hailstones? First of all, the oldest book in the canon of Scripture says, "Have you entered the storehouses of the snow, or have you seen the storehouses of the hail, which I have reserved for the time of distress, for the day of war and battle?" (Job 38:22-23) This passage clearly teaches that God has a storehouse of hail, specifically for "the time of distress," and "for the day of war and battle." Is this just metaphor or "almost literal" language?

When you start looking at instances in the Bible where God uses hail against Israel's enemies they start to add up. God used hail against Egypt during the seventh plague (Exod. 9:22-26). In this instance it was clearly literal hail and not just a metaphor for bad weather. This plague was not a result of human agency. Only God was involved in fighting for Israel against Egypt. There are a number of Old Testament passages that refer to God's use of hail in a battle context (Psa. 18:12-13; 78:47-48; 105:32; 148:8; Isa. 28:17; 30:30; 32:19; Ezek. 13:11-13; 38:22).

Meteorologist and Bible teacher Charles Clough says, "The proper way to understand prophecies of catastrophes is to follow the apostle Peter's approach and look at the true record of God's past historical judgments (2 Pet. 3:5-7)."[5] The most significant passage for our study is the hailstone incident in Joshua 10. The passage says, "And it came about as they fled from before Israel, while they were at the descent of Beth-horon, that the LORD threw large stones from heaven on them as far as Azekah, and they died; there were more who died from the hailstones than those whom the sons of Israel killed with the sword." (Joshua 10:11) This is a clear example of the implementation of the purpose stated in Job, that the Lord has a storehouse of hail for the very purpose of "the time of distress" and "for the day of war and battle." Here God fights with divinely directed hailstones during a time of distress and on the day of war and battle on behalf of Israel. John Calvin notes:

> In the second slaughter the hand of God appeared more clearly, when the enemy were destroyed by hail. And it is distinctly stated that more were destroyed by hail than were slain by the sword, that there might be no doubt of the victory having been obtained from heaven. Hence again it is gathered

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[4] Flavius Josephus, *The Wars of the Jews*, book V, chapter VI, paragraph 3.

[5] Charles Clough, "God's Pattern of Judgment," in the *Tim LaHaye Prophecy Study Bible*, NKJV (Chattanooga, TN: AMG, 2001), p. 1470.

> that this was not common hail, such as is wont to fall during storms. For, in the first place, more would have been wounded or scattered and dispersed than suddenly destroyed; and secondly, had not God darted it directly, part would have fallen on the heads of the Israelites. Now, when the one army is attacked separately, and the other, kept free from injury, comes forward as it were to join auxiliary troops, it becomes perfectly clear that God is fighting from heaven. To the same effect it is said that God threw down great stones of hail from heaven: for the meaning is that they fell with extraordinary force, and were far above the ordinary size.[6]

A point of similarity between Joshua 10:11 and Revelation 16:21 is found in the fact that both passages describe the hailstones as large in size. They are said to be "large" in Joshua and "huge" in Revelation. Clearly Joshua 10:11 is a supernatural event and I believe that Revelation 8:7 and 16:21 will prove to also be direct miracles from the hand of God.

NATURALISTIC VS. SUPERNATURAL

Preterists like Dr. Gentry, not only mistake what will be in the future to be a past event. They also make what will be supernatural to be the result of a naturalistic cause. When it comes to interpreting the details of Revelation, preterists, more often then not, pull out the equivalence of their first-century newspapers—Josephus—and start reading the headlines to find a correspondence which they say has already fulfilled this passage. Inevitably, such an interpretation is a naturalistic one that does not require God to do anything. In this instance they say that it was the Romans who fulfilled what the Bible says God did.

Such first-century newspaper exegesis is similar in approach to that which preterists criticize some futurists in our own day who attempt to correlate Bible prophecy with current events. Yet they do the very same thing. The only difference between preterists and those they criticize is about 2,000 years in time.

The only similarity between Revelation 16:21 and an event recorded by Josephus in his *Wars of the Jews* is the phrase "one talent." Yet preterists latch onto that similarity, in spite of the fact that there is no contextual correspondence between Josephus and the other words and phrases in the passage. E. W. Bullinger notes that, "Josephus says that stones of a talent's weight were thrown by the Romans against Jerusalem (*Wars* iii. vii. 9). Surely God can send from heaven what man could send on earth."[7] In fact, earlier in Revelation God used hail and fire as a judgment upon mankind. "And the first sounded, and there came hail and fire, mixed with blood, and they were thrown to the earth; and a third of the earth was burned up, and a third of the trees were burned up, and all the green grass was burned up." (Rev. 8:7) Was this also recorded somehow as fulfilled by an event from Josephus?

Both Revelation 8:7 and 16:21 will be real, supernatural events since both correspond to the regional plague of hail in Exodus 9:22-26. As Bullinger reasons, "The

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[6] John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries*, 22 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), vol. iv, p. 151-52.
[7] E. W. Bullinger, *Commentary on Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, [1935] 1984), p. 493.

plague of hail in Egypt was real (Ex. ix. 18-21). So is this. Why not?"[8] Apparently the reason why this event would not be a future supernatural event is because of the preterist assumption.

Revelation 16:21, labels this event a "plague," just like in Exodus. How could the use of catapults by the Romans in A.D. 70 be viewed as a plague from God? Every plague that God sends, either in Exodus or Revelation is something that God does himself. Not one plague in either Exodus or Revelation is said to be mediated through human agency. All are direct, miracles wrought by God Himself. The preterist, naturalist interpretation shifts the glory from God to man. Not a good thing for anyone to do!

Dr. Gentry's naturalism is evident when he said, "It is quite impossible that such gargantuan hailstones can be accounted for under the most aggravated of meteorological conditions."[9] Quite right! These are specially prepared hailstones from the heavenly storehouse in heaven as Job 38:22-23 tells us. Scientist Dr. Henry Morris says of Revelation 16:21, "This hail will not be the usual form of hail—that is, ice produced by violent updrafts in atmospheric storm cells."[10] If anyone has a problem with such a view, then they would likely have a problem with the other miraculous events of the Bible, both past and future.

Dr. Gentry's naturalistic, and thus symbolic interpretation is questionable because of another textual factor. Dr. Robert Thomas notes, "it is doubtful that men would blaspheme God because of something symbolic only. The Egyptian plague of hail was literal, so this one must be too."[11] Preterism totally fails in their interpretation of this text to explain more than one aspect of the passage, let alone the entire verse.

CONCLUSION

We have seen that Revelation 16:21 is an interesting test case of the naturalistic interpretative approach of preterism, verses the supernatural understanding of the text by futurists. By letting Scripture interpret Scripture we must conclude with Dr. Thomas who says, "The Egyptian plague of hail was literal, so this one must be too."[12] That's right! Because the Lord threw down great hailstones from heaven hitting only the Amorites in the days of Joshua provides a precedent that He does such things. The fact that these great hailstones in the battle of Joshua only hit the enemy and not the Israelites is further proof of God's divine intervention. It would also be the envy of modern smart weapons technology.

Charles Clough concludes, "The same fire, smoke, hail, thunder, plague, and earthquake of the Old Testament judgments once again appear in Revelation 6—18. These terms are not exaggerations and metaphors. They point to a final culmination in

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[8] Bullinger, *Revelation*, p. 492.
[9] Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, p. 246.
[10] Henry M. Morris, *The Revelation Record: A scientific and devotional commentary on the prophetic book of the end times* (Wheaton: Tyndale, 1983), p. 322.
[11] Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 8—22: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), p. 277.
[12] Thomas, *Revelation 8—22*, p. 277.

God's program of separating good from evil throughout all creation. God's past judgments thus model His future judgments."[13]

Even if we did not have the Old Testament precedent of Job, the Exodus, Joshua, etc., I believe the passage in Revelation 16:21 is clear enough to take it as a literal, future, supernatural event. With the Old Testament support, it is mere sophistry to attempt any other interpretation. Maranatha!

ENDNOTES

[13] Clough, "God's Pattern of Judgment," p. 1470.