

FORBIDDEN

FRUIT



BY SEAN SUTTON



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FORBIDDEN FRUIT

WHEN OBEYING GOD
BECOMES ILLEGAL





Sean Sutton, 2024
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CHAPTER 1

Beginning of a Cosmic Controversy 4

CHAPTER 2

2 Trees & 2 Kingdoms 12

CHAPTER 3

Reconciliation by Revelation 22

CHAPTER 4

Satan's Sandbox 43

CHAPTER 5

The Masterpiece of Misrepresentation 57

CHAPTER 6

Image of the Beast 86

CHAPTER 7

The Seal of God & Tree of Life 114

CHAPTER 8

The Mark of the Beast & Tree of Good and Evil 139

CHAPTER 9

The Coming Crisis 165

CHAPTER 10

End of the Cosmic Controversy 180

NOTE TO THE READER

Two people were called God’s friends in the Bible: Abraham (Is. 41:8; 2 Chron. 20:7; Jam. 2:23) and Moses (Ex. 33:11). Both of them also honestly questioned God.

When God revealed to Abraham that He was going to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah,¹ Abraham, like a good friend, says, “Surely you wouldn’t do such a thing, destroying the righteous along with the wicked. Why, you would be treating the righteous and the wicked exactly the same! Surely you wouldn’t do that! Should not the Judge of all the earth do what is right?” Genesis 18:25. Instead of rebuking Abraham for daring to question God’s sovereignty, God encourages his honest questioning by allowing Abraham to barter with Him (Gen. 18:16-33)!

In like manner, when God told Moses that He was going to destroy Israel in the wilderness (Though I think this was a test to see Moses’s response), God’s friend replied by saying, “Why let the Egyptians say, ‘Their God rescued them with the evil intention of slaughtering them in the mountains and wiping them from the face of the earth?’ Turn away from your fierce anger. Change your mind about this terrible disaster you have threatened against your people!” Exodus 32:12. Again, instead of smiting down Moses for even thinking to question His ways, God listens to His friend and (apparently) changes His mind (Ex. 32:14)!

In both scenarios, the friends of God are those who *care about God’s reputation*. Likewise, a true friend of God will respectfully and reverently *ask the honest questions*,² and God, as a loving Father, listens to those questions and frequently lets His children in on His plans.

This book is an outgrowth of my spiritual journey, where I have learned to ask God the hard questions—particularly questions about things that, to me, make Him look bad. One of the main questions I had, like many people, was why God had to be so violent and seemingly unfair at times. Like Moses, I’m worried about the fact that God is portrayed as One who slaughters His rebellious children in His fierce anger. I’m concerned that people view God as One who basically says, “Love me, or I’ll torture and kill you.” This is a crass way of saying things, but it also accurately

¹ We’ll look at this story later and dissect some overlooked aspects of it.

² Jesus could also be listed here as the best example. Jesus asked His Father and Friend if He could change His plan (Matt. 26:39) and why He had apparently forsaken Him (Matt. 27:46).

represents many Christians' view of God. Many people have offered plausible explanations to these questions, but few are convincing if I'm honest with myself.

On top of this, what are the implications of worshipping such a God of force and violence? How does this affect the way people think and act? How does it affect a nation if its lawmakers worshipped a God like this? I believe Bible prophecy offers a unique vantage point to interact with these questions.

I used to be obsessed with prophecy. I loved to try my hand at calculating prophetic periods and cracking gematria codes (666). I was fascinated by the prophecies concerning the rise and fall of the world's greatest empires and the accuracy rate of the Bible in this regard. However, as I have been asking questions about God's character, my view of prophecy has changed. Instead of primarily showing records of history and different events to come, I now see the theological underpinning behind many of these events. God isn't just trying to provide us with information, but He is trying to contrast His Kingdom with the world's kingdoms. He is trying to show what happens to kingdoms when they adopt violent views of God.

This book aims to provide answers to difficult questions about what God is like in the context of Bible prophecy. But before we look at future events, we will look at how things started in the very beginning (ch. 1-2) because what happened then will happen worldwide in the end. After this, we will look at what Christ taught us about how His Father's Kingdom operates (ch. 3) and compare His methods to Satan's methods (seen in various world powers throughout history) (ch. 4-5). Then, we will move on to current events and see that God has predicted the current religio-political trend in America, and we will consider the implications of this trend (ch. 6). The rest of the book details the coming crisis prophesied in Revelation. Underpinning all of these discussions will be our picture of God.

In this book I will ask some hard questions and provide unconventional (but Biblical) answers. Don't be alarmed by some of the ideas I present here! Instead, I want to encourage you to think and pray about these ideas and compare everything I'm saying with the life of Christ, who I argue is the complete revelation of God. If you prayerfully consider the questions and evidence in this book, I believe you will walk away with a picture of God that is more beautiful than you could ever imagine! Not only this, but it provides answers to some of the most challenging questions posed by honest Christians and unbelievers alike: Why has God allowed evil to exist? Why didn't God destroy Satan before (or soon after) he rebelled? Why do bad things happen to good people? Why did Christians burn and torture their enemies during the Dark Ages? Why would I want to worship a God who does the same?

This book is intended to be an iconoclast—an image breaker—of preconceived doctrines and assumptions, just like Jesus. As C.S. Lewis wrote, “He is the great iconoclast. Could we not almost say that this shattering is one of the marks of his presence? The Incarnation is the supreme example; it leaves all previous ideas of the Messiah in ruins. And most are ‘offended’ by the iconoclasm; and blessed are those who are not.”³ I pray that you won’t be offended by this book, but rather, that you will be blessed as you read.

³ C.S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed* (Harper & Row, 1989), p. 78.

BEGINNING OF A COSMIC CONTROVERSY

God is love. That is what I was taught in my training as a good Christian soldier in the Bible Belt. But try as I might to convince people of this fact, “outsiders” saw Him in a different light. The unofficial voice of atheism, Richard Dawkins, illustrates this perspective:

“The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving control-freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully.”⁴

What? The God of the Bible isn’t like this... Right? I mean, anyone who has taken a quick look at gentle Jesus could tell you that. Well, I guess the Old Testament was a little violent... There was the stoning and stabbing, fighting and flooding, incinerating and obliterating; oh, and who can forget the whole part about burning people in hell for all eternity? But who are we to question the ways of God? On second thought, I guess some of Dawkins’s remarks *may* have some credence, but probably not, because he’s just a sinner who doesn’t understand the seriousness of sin and the justice of His judgments. Right?

Why is there such a chasm between our camps? Are those who disagree with us simply ignorant and evil? Many Christians assert this, but the Bible reveals another angle. Its last book draws back the curtain of this controversy, showing that it has been raging since the beginning—but the two camps of good and evil are not as clear cut as we think. But let us first get to the origin of all this.

⁴ Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 2006), p. 31.

1.1 WAR IN HEAVEN

Revelation 12:7 Then there was **war in heaven**. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon and his angels.

The word John used for “war” is *pōlēmos*. This is where we get the word “polemic,”⁵ which means:

a: an aggressive **attack on** or refutation of **the opinions or principles of another**

b: the art or practice of disputation or **controversy**...⁶

The war in heaven was not a “war after the flesh” (2 Cor. 10:3), but a *war of ideas*, and this controversy is coming to a head today. Those on God’s side “rest not day and night” praising Him, while those on the other side accuse their opponents “day and night.” Revelation 4:8; 12:10. But what contentions fuel this holy war between Richard Dawkins and Billy Graham, Bill Nye and Kenn Ham?

THE FIRST SMEAR CAMPAIGN

Why is Hitler remembered as a tyrant? Because he implemented tyrannical laws that led to unspeakable atrocities. Abraham Lincoln, on the other hand, is memorialized as a champion of human rights because of his Emancipation Proclamation. In both scenarios, the *laws* of each leader reflected their *character*. In like manner, the way you view God’s laws affects the way you see Him. If you see God’s laws as loving and just you’ll see Him in the same light. If you believe they’re arbitrary and oppressive, then you’ll probably see God as arbitrary and oppressive.

Attacking the character of one’s opponents through the laws they implement is a favorite tool of politicians. Satan, the first Machiavellian politician, is no exception. The apostle John testified of this when he defined sin as “breaking God’s law” and subsequently claimed that the Devil “has been sinning since the beginning,” (1 John 3:4, 8). Satan not only broke God’s laws in the beginning, but he campaigned against them.

⁵ “Polemic,” *Online Etymology Dictionary*, <http://tinyurl.com/4j7ewrz4>.

⁶ “Polemic,” *Merriam-Webster*, <http://tinyurl.com/2rvctnrX>.

Ezekiel describes the fall of Lucifer,⁷ the covering cherub (Ezek. 28:16), in these words:

Ezekiel 28:15–16 ¹⁵“You were blameless in all you did from the day you were created until the day evil^[8] was found in you. ¹⁶**Your rich commerce led you to violence,^[9] and you sinned...**

What was Satan’s “commerce”? Obviously, he wasn’t peddling fake Rolexes in the back alleys of heaven. Even the idea of Satan secretly arming a seditious band of angels is laughable. The war that Satan is waging is a war for the mind (2 Cor. 10:3–6; Eph. 6:11–17); the weapons of his warfare are *ideas*.

The word for “commerce” in the above passage (*rekullāh*) comes from the verb (*rakal*) which means to “**go about, from one to another (for trade or gossip)**.”¹⁰ The noun derivative (*rakīl*) likewise means “**slanderer, tale-bearer**”! Thus Satan is identified as *the* “Devil” (Rev. 12:9)—the *Diabolos* (G1228)—a designation that means “false accuser” (1 Tim. 3:11) and “slanderer” (2 Tim. 3:3; Tit. 2:3).¹¹ This heavenly politician was lobbying against the law of God, selling seditious slanders to his fellow citizens. The Serpent wages war with his words, which is why Revelation symbolizes the power of fallen angels as being “in their *mouth*” (9:19); the Serpent likewise seeks

⁷ Historically, Ezekiel 28 applied to the King of Tyre (v. 12), just as Isaiah 14 applied to the King of Babylon (Is. 14:4). But looking through the lens of a cosmic controversy, where earthly kingdoms are caught in the crossfire of a spiritual battle, we can see that the prideful King of Babylon is a perfect representation for the prideful angel which rebelled against God (Is. 14:13–17 also testifies of this fact). That this is a valid hermeneutical principle is evident from the fact that New Testament authors gave new applications to Old Testament prophecies which had already seen a historical fulfillment. For instance, there is nothing in the Old Testament which says that a being known as “Satan” was behind the serpent in Eden (or behind much of anything for that matter)—only in the last book of the Bible is this fact revealed (Rev. 12:9; 20:2). The same can be said for Isaiah’s prophecy concerning the birth of Immanuel, which was historically a sign for King Ahaz (Isaiah 7:10–14). Matthew seems to take this verse out of its historical and literary context and apply it to Christ’s being born of a virgin (Matt. 1:23). Throughout this work I will be using the same hermeneutical principle when applicable to the topic at hand.

⁸ “Evil” in this passage not only refers to general evil, but also “injustice of speech.” Francis Brown, Samuel Rolles Driver, and Charles Augustus Briggs, *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), p. 732.

⁹ “Violence” [H2555] can mean typical violence, but it can also denote a *false witness* (see Exodus 23:1; Psalm 35:11).

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 940.

¹¹ James Strong, *A Concise Dictionary of the Words in the Greek Testament and The Hebrew Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2009), p. 22; James Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Greek* (New Testament) (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).

to destroy the Church by what spews forth from his *mouth* (12:15); the beast from the sea has “a *mouth*” which speaks slanders against God (13:5-6) on behalf of Satan; and unclean spirits come forth from the *mouths* of the Dragon, Beast, and False Prophet to deceive the world (16:13-14). Satan’s sword is slander, and his bullets are blasphemies.

But if you had happily lived in paradise for eternity past, why would you give Lucifer’s claims the time of day? Well, would you consider what a high-ranking government official had to say about government corruption? We, as loyal citizens, instinctually recoil from the heretical idea that the State has flaws. But then we realize this is coming from someone with top-secret clearance who has seen “behind the curtain of Oz.” The fact of the matter is that Lucifer was a high-ranking “government official” in heaven, who stood in the very presence of God as a covering cherub (Ezek. 28:14) and had a perfect track record (Ezek. 28:15).¹² He was a trusted authority figure who the angels loved to listen to—and remember, they had never heard any lies or mischaracterizations before!

What “intel” did Lucifer bring concerning the heavenly Head of State? Jesus said that “those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart” (Matt. 15:18), and Lucifer had said in his heart, “I will ascend... I will exalt my throne above... I will ascend above...” Isaiah 14:12-14 (KJV). After he said these things, he said that he would “be like the most High.” Isaiah 14:14. This verse not only suggests that he wanted the power and position of God, but in light of a spiritual smear campaign, it can also be seen as a claim that *when* he exalts himself, *then* he is like God. In other words, Lucifer is insinuating that God is a selfish Ruler who exalts Himself at the expense of others.¹³

But how, the angels would inquire, is God exalting Himself at our expense? The same way Hitler and other tyrants restricted the rights of others: by their laws. Lucifer must have told his fellow angels that all those rules about loving God and worshipping Him are simply tools He is using to control you. According to Lucifer,

¹² We hear an echo of Lucifer’s smear campaign in the story of Absalom’s rebellion against David, his father and king. Lucifer was “exquisite in beauty” (Ezek. 28:12), just as Absalom “was flawless from head to foot” and “was praised as the most handsome man in all Israel” (2 Sam. 14:25). As Absalom “stole the hearts of all the people of Israel” (2 Sam. 15:6) by selling the merchandise of disaffection, he was unconsciously walking the same path which led Lucifer right out of heaven. For more information on the parallels between Lucifer’s rebellion against God’s government and Absalom’s rebellion against his father’s government, see Adrian Ebens, ***Cross Examined and Cross Encountered*** (Father of Love, 2019), available for free here: <https://tinyurl.com/cross-encountered>.

¹³ The lies of Satan were (and are) his “tail” (Is. 9:15) which “swept away one-third of the stars [angels, Rev. 1:20] in the sky” and “threw them to the earth.” Revelation 12:4.

God's laws are arbitrary—there is no logic behind them. *They are imposed* on us to control us, keep Him in power, and keep us powerless. In other words, breaking God's laws is like refusing to get one of North Korea's 28 government-approved haircuts. Disobedience, in this scenario, is an act of noble liberation from an oppressive yoke of bondage and opens the door for a higher state of expression and existence. As we will see, this is the same rhetoric used by the Serpent in Eden.

GOD'S RESPONSE TO SATAN'S ACCUSATIONS

If God knew the end from the beginning, then He knew Lucifer's rebellion would cause mass amounts of suffering and death. If God knew this would occur, and He is also all-powerful and all-loving, why didn't He prevent Lucifer from rebelling? As Bill Maher asked, "Why doesn't He [God] just obliterate the devil and therefore get rid of evil in the world?" Good question.

Imagine you're the child of a faithful and godly pastor. Everyone loves his leadership and looks up to him. But one day your devout brother asks if you would pray with him for father. "Why? What's going on?" Your brother goes on to inform you that he saw father taking money out of the homeless outreach fund—you know, the one that he's been telling everyone to donate to? *That would explain Father's shiny new watch and shoes...* Thanks to the church's unparalleled communication system (aka gossip), everyone is caught up on the charges. But what hasn't been published is your brother's hidden motive—he wants his father's position and salary. The father knows that if his son takes over, the result will be worse than Jonestown, but how can he prove this to his church?

Option 1: Destroy the Accuser

If your brother soon wound up dead and your father claimed it was for the church's own good, how would you react? Perhaps brother *underestimated* how bad father actually was. The only reason I'd keep quiet is because I could be the next to wind up dead if I stepped out of line.

If God had destroyed Lucifer when He was accused of tyranny, the angels would always wonder if the charges were accurate. In this scenario, the universe would only *serve God out of fear* rather than love, the modus operandi of classic tyrants. Not only that, but it would show that *God does not honor liberty of conscience*. According to the George Washington Institute for Religious Freedom, liberty of conscience is defined as:

1. Freedom of belief (All individuals are at liberty to choose the religious creed they want to embrace, or to embrace none at all)
2. Freedom of observance (Individuals are at liberty to practice their religion in a lawful manner)
3. Equal status (All religions and their believers deserve equal treatment under the law)¹⁴

If Lucifer didn't want to worship God the way He requested, then the only *just* thing for God to do would be to let him (1) believe what he wants, (2) practice what he wants, and (3) not be persecuted (externally punished) for believing differently. Can there be genuine, mutual love when a husband tells his wife, "Stay with me or I'll kill you"?

Option 2: Banish the Accuser

What if the pastor just expelled the accuser from the church? Again, this would be super suspicious and would lead to further fear and doubts. A leader who honors liberty won't exile everyone who questions him.

Option 3: Get Rid of the Accuser & Erase Witnesses Memories

Option 1 and 2 fall short of complete reconciliation between the pastor and his flock because of the lingering doubts that would remain in their minds like an itch waiting to get scratched. But what if the pastor could erase the memories of his flock (Men in Black style) so there wouldn't be any remnant of distrust or fear? This is an option, but the pastor wouldn't be an honest person if he went this route. This only provides the illusion of choice and not the real thing, thus rendering all potential relationships artificial—genuine love requires genuine choice.

¹⁴ "Liberty of Conscience," *George Washington Institute for Religious Freedom*, <http://tinyurl.com/3chsrpxa>.

Option 4: Allow the Accuser to Share His Arguments and Let the Universe be the Judge

The previous three options, which require the use of force, are wholly inadequate to deal with Satan's slanders. In my estimate, there is only one way this controversy can come to a close. It is not enough for the pastor to claim he is innocent—evidence must be provided by both sides. The pastor should allow auditors and the congregation to come in, examine the records, and let them judge accordingly.

To answer Lucifer's accusations, God must provide His evidence and allow this angel:

1. time to explain and campaign his new ideas
2. time for his ideas and methods to grow to fruition so everyone can judge which way is best

This course is the only just way to go, for it is wrong to condemn someone without hearing them out.

Proverbs 18:13 Spouting off before listening to the facts is both shameful and foolish.

John 7:51 "Is it legal to convict a man before he is given a hearing?"...

What is our role in this great controversy? Our task is described in the legal proceedings of the Old Testament:

Deuteronomy 19:16–18 ¹⁶“**If a malicious witness comes forward and accuses someone of a crime,** ¹⁷**then both the accuser and accused must appear** before the Lord by coming to the priests and judges in office at that time. ¹⁸**The judges must investigate the case thoroughly...**

Satan is accusing God and His government, while (as we will see) Christ's testimony challenges these accusations. Our role is to examine the evidence on both sides. In essence, it is our job to “*judge*” *God* and angels (1 Cor. 6:3):

Revelation 14:6–7 (KJV) ⁶ And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people, ⁷ saying with a loud voice, Fear **God**, and give glory to him; for **the hour of his judgment is come**: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters.

Romans 3:4 ... Even if everyone else is a liar, God is true. **As the Scriptures say about him**, “You will be proved right in what you say, and **you [God] will win your case in court.**”

God has chosen Option 4—He will be transparent and show us “behind the scenes” of His Kingdom (how it operates) and allow Satan time to campaign and implement his ideas until they fully ripen, so we can see “behind the scenes” of Satan’s Kingdom. And the spiritual stage that hosts this ideological battle? Planet Earth.

2 TREES & 2 KINGDOMS

In describing the pre-created earth, we read that it “**was formless [H8414] and empty [H922], and darkness covered the deep waters.**” Genesis 1:2. Here is a description of the physical *and* spiritual darkness which existed before Creation. The physical darkness testified of the spiritual darkness which Satan caused through his lies. Consider the only other place in Scripture that uses “without form, and void” in relation to darkness:

Jeremiah 4:22–23 ²²“**My people are foolish and do not know me,**” says the Lord. “They are stupid children who have no understanding. They are clever enough at doing wrong, but they have no idea how to do right!” ²³**I looked at the earth, and it was empty [H922] and formless [H8414]. I looked at the heavens, and there was no light.**

Once Satan spread his slanders, “the light of the knowledge of the glory¹⁵ of God” (2 Cor. 4:6 KJV) began to be eclipsed in the minds of the angelic beings who gave ear to his lies.

It is in this context that God created man in His image (Gen. 1:27) and “placed the man in the Garden of Eden to tend and watch over it.” Genesis 2:15. The word for “watch over,” *shâmar*, means to “**guard, protect... take heed...**”¹⁶ What did Adam need to watch out for? God draws attention to the danger in the next verse:

Genesis 2:16–17 ¹⁶But the Lord God warned him, “**You may freely eat the fruit of every tree in the garden—¹⁷ except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If you eat its fruit, you are sure to die.**”

It makes sense that Adam had access to the tree of life, but why was this other tree in the garden?

¹⁵ i.e. His character, Exodus 33:18-19.

¹⁶ Strong’s *Dictionary*, p. 118.

2.1 TREES, VOTING BOOTHS, AND LIBERTY

Have you heard how election day in North Korea works? When you show up to vote “you receive a ballot paper with just one name on it. There’s nothing to fill in, no boxes to tick. You take that paper and put it into the ballot box, which is located in the open.”¹⁷ How nice of their leader to make the process so simple. Imagine if someone were to try and run against Kim Jong-un. Do you think he would allow them the freedom to advocate their new ideas? Obviously not. Unlike the North Korean dictator, God is a Leader who loves freedom. Instead of sending the secret police to shut down Satan’s campaign headquarters, He provided a place for him to lobby—the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

A good ruler, however, wouldn’t let the rights of his opponents infringe upon the rights of his citizens, so his opponents are limited to lobbying in a public place and are not permitted to incessantly harass people like an obsessive door-to-door salesman. Thus the tree of knowledge was Satan’s “boundary” that he could “not pass over.” Psalm 104:9 (KJV).

Both the Kingdom of man and the Kingdom of God are symbolized as trees in Scripture (Dan. 4:10-12; Matt. 13:31-32), so *the two trees in the center of the garden represented two views of God’s Kingdom: God’s view and Satan’s view*. If our first parents trusted God, they would obey Him; instead of eating the forbidden fruit, they would eat from the tree of life. If at any point the pair decided their trust was misplaced, they could choose to disobey God and eat the forbidden fruit, thus aligning themselves with Satan.

2.2 ELECTION DAY IN EDEN

Election day had come once again as Eve strolled near the center of the Garden, and today God’s rival was looking for votes.

Genesis 3:1–5 ¹ The serpent was the shrewdest of all the wild animals the Lord God had made. One day he asked the woman, “**Did God really say you must not eat the fruit from any of the trees in the garden?**” ² “Of course we may eat fruit from the trees in the garden,” the woman replied. ³ “It’s only the fruit from the tree in the middle of the garden that we are not

¹⁷ “North Koreans vote in ‘no-choice’ parliamentary elections” (2019), *BBC* <https://tinyurl.com/t886uxad>.

allowed to eat. God said, ‘You must not eat it or even touch it; if you do, you will die.’”⁴ **“You won’t die!” the serpent replied to the woman.** ⁵ **“God knows that your eyes will be opened as soon as you eat it, and you will be like God, knowing both good and evil.”**

This is a masterful piece of propaganda, and as such it deserves a critical analysis.

AN ATTACK ON GOD’S TRUSTWORTHINESS

Firstly, Satan *insinuated doubt concerning the trustworthiness of God’s word* when He asked, “Did God really say...” Secondly, as R.W.L. Moberly points out, the Serpent *misquoted God*, completely inverting what He had said:

“God’s words had emphasized freedom—the man could eat of every tree with **only one prohibited. The serpent makes the prohibition universal.** Instead of ‘You may certainly eat from every tree of the garden’ we have ‘You shall not eat from any tree in the garden’ attributed to God. Why should the serpent say something which, as the woman duly points out, is clearly not the case? Apart from the fact that the serpent thereby engages the woman in debate, the main point lies presumably in **the implication of the serpent’s words.** What matters is not that the serpent’s words are obviously false, but that **they imply that a total prohibition is the sort of unreasonable prohibition that one might expect from God, who is to be seen as more interested in restriction than freedom.** Such an innuendo is not dismissed simply by pointing out the obvious inaccuracy of the serpent’s words.”¹⁸

The way Satan gets our first parents to rebel against God is not by making light of His laws, but by *misrepresenting* them. The Serpent’s goal is to distort Eve’s perception of God through the prohibition of the forbidden fruit. This commandment “was meant for life” (Rom. 7:10, CSB), but the Serpent seized the opportunity of this commandment and deceived Eve by misrepresenting it (Rom. 7:11). This distortion

¹⁸ R.W.L. Moberly, “Did the Serpent Get It Right?,” *Journal of Theological Studies*, vol. 39, (Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 6.

caused Eve to covet what was forbidden (Rom. 7:8),¹⁹ and created distrust towards her heavenly Father through a misperception of His character.

Why did Satan want to change the way Eve sees God? Because he knew that **the way we see things “determines how we think. How we think determines how we feel. And how we feel determines our behavior and attitudes and thus our experience. The problem lies not in our behavior but in our map, our paradigm, the way we see.”**²⁰ To lead mankind to rebel against God, Satan’s goal has been, and will continue to be, to draw us away “from God and the right conception of Him...”²¹

It is evident that Satan’s suggestion that God was restricting their freedom shook Eve significantly, since, in her apparent defense of God, she responded by saying, “we may eat fruit from the trees in the garden...” Genesis 3:2. Did you notice that Eve misquoted God? God had said, “You may freely eat the fruit of every tree in the garden...” Genesis 2:16. Eve omits the “freely” part, suggesting that she is already entertaining the idea that God is restricting freedom.

THESIS: MAN IS NATURALLY IMMORTAL

After Eve’s response to Satan’s insinuations, the serpent introduces the linchpin of his philosophy: if you disobey God, “You won’t die” (Gen. 3:4)—*Mankind is inherently immortal*. God says that a trusting relationship with Him brings life, but Satan says that you don’t need Him to survive; you can take care of yourself. This is the first lie of the Serpent, and every other species of falsehood crawls out of this primordial lie.

¹⁹ Here I reference a portion of Romans 7 to show the misrepresentation of God’s law which led to the fall of Eve. I do this based on the view that 7:7-25 is a dramatized first person recounting of the fall of Eve, who is described as the “I” in this passage, instead of the traditional view of this section as Paul’s personal self-reflection. A number of scholars view this passage in this light based on various evidences. For more information concerning this view, see Nicholas Elder, “Wretch I Am! Eve’s Tragic Speech-in-Character in Romans 7:7–25,” *Journal of Biblical Literature*, vol. 137, no. 3 (2018), p. 743-763; Austin Busch, “The Figure of Eve in Romans 7:5-25,” *Biblical Interpretation: A Journal of Contemporary Approaches*, vol. 12, (2004) p. 1-36; Sigve Tonstad, *The Letter to the Romans: Paul Among the Ecologists*, in “The Earth Bible Commentary” (Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2016), p. 207-220, <http://tinyurl.com/3kzd4mtv>.

²⁰ Herb Montgomery, *Finding the Father* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2009), p. 19.

²¹ Origen, *Contra Celsum*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), bk. 6, sec. 44, p. 362. Though I disagree with many of Origen’s spiritualizations of Scripture and find his role in bringing Platonic philosophies into the Church unfortunate, I have found several of his expositions apt and Biblical, and will therefore reference him occasionally.

What's the logical progression of believing that we are naturally immortal? To put it bluntly, if nobody *really* dies, suicide and murder aren't that big of a deal. Most mass suicides involve people who are simply trying to "exit their vehicles" (Heaven's Gate) in an attempt to free their "immortal souls" from their bodily prison so they can experience a "translation" into eternal bliss (Jonestown) or a "transit" to another planet (Order of the Solar Temple). To these individuals, the body God has placed them in is a restraint that they would be better off without.

This dualistic view of reality prioritizes the spiritual at the expense of the physical. This prioritization, in and of itself, is not necessarily wrong, but if taken to the extreme, this Hellenistic perspective not only leads to tragic suicides, but also a neglect for the physical needs of self, others, and the planet at large.

DEDUCTION: GOD'S LAWS ARE ARBITRARY

If we believe the primordial lie, the implication is that *God's laws are arbitrary*. Think about it. If God said that eating this fruit results in death, but I can't die, then this rule has no purpose. This law has *no inherent consequences*; it is only an arbitrary demonstration of God's power and control over us. What is the *natural* consequence of refusing to get one of the 28 approved haircuts in North Korea? Nothing. If you break this law, you won't (naturally) die. But if the secret police catch you, they will decide your punishment. What is the *natural consequence* of refusing to obey your dentist when he tells you to brush your teeth? Cavities. Your dentist doesn't have to decide how many cavities to put in your mouth arbitrarily—you will simply reap what you sow. Satan says God's laws are like Kim Jong-un's, but God says His laws are like admonitions from a caring dentist.

This is why children ask *why* so much. *Why* can't I have more candy? *Why* can't I stay up late? *Why* can't I touch the stove when you're cooking? *Why* can't I push the flashing red button? If we don't understand *why* something should or shouldn't be done, we'll invariably feel like doing the opposite to break the iron yoke of tyranny.

PARADIGM SHIFT: GOD'S MOTIVES QUESTIONED

When God's command to refrain from the forbidden fruit appeared arbitrary instead of logical, Eve must have questioned why He made the rule at all. What purpose could this restriction serve beyond selfishly denying humans greater freedom? Maybe God is deliberately confining humanity to an inferior state to keep us from becoming gods (Gen. 3:5). *Perhaps it is true that God selfishly exalts Himself at the*

expense of others. If I don't see the wisdom in my parent's rules, then they're probably just a bunch of squares trying to keep me from having a good time, right?

The inverted hermeneutics of the Serpent is the foundation, essence, and worldview of Gnosticism. From a Gnostic viewpoint, the world was created by the evil god Yahweh (Yaldabaoth in the Gnostic tradition), who trapped humanity's immortal souls in the prison of a material reality. This "false god" intentionally kept knowledge and enlightenment from humanity to keep them as his mindless, automaton slaves. In the Gnostic view (which is nothing but Satan's view), the Serpent is the one who liberates humanity from the oppression of Yaldabaoth through his "knowledge" (gnosis). Many cultures reiterate this inverted mythology under various names and stories, but the essence is the same. In Greek mythology, Prometheus stole fire (gnosis) from the gods and gave it to humanity, thus liberating them from the unnecessary restrictions of the gods. In American mythology, Morpheus presents Neo with two pills (symbolizing the two trees in Eden) and convinces him to swallow the "red pill," which symbolizes enlightenment (gnosis), to free him from the all-powerful and malevolent "machine god" (Deus Ex Machina) which had enslaved humanity in ignorance.²²

PUNISHMENT: COERCION OR CONSEQUENCE?

With the Serpent's assurance that death is not the natural result of disobeying God, how does His warning "you are sure to die" look? If this isn't a warning of natural consequences, God's voice takes on a sinister tone. No longer do we hear the voice of a loving Father warning of a life-threatening plant, but we hear a life-threatening dictator prohibiting a life-giving plant. There is no loving admonition, only a threat to compel submission. If this is how one understood God's words, Adam and Eve's *fight or flight* reaction must have been off the charts. Could this be why they hid from God when He showed up later?

Below is the path of alienation from God which has incited the spirit of rebellion in humanity:

²² For an exposé of three movies (The Matrix, The Truman Show, and Pleasantville) with subliminal gnostic themes, please watch "Hollywood's Gnostic Gospel Exposed," available for free (<http://tinyurl.com/2jbsekab>). More recent productions which showcase the Gnostic lies of the Serpent include the apparently innocent Lego Movie (2014-<http://tinyurl.com/yptewnhd>) and Barbie (2023-<http://tinyurl.com/bdd9vej>).

1. **Man is naturally immortal** – God lied when He said you would die if you disobeyed Him. Death is not an intrinsic result of disobedience.
2. **God’s commandments are arbitrary** – God’s laws lack inherent consequences, apart from what He imposes.
3. **God has ulterior motives—selfishness** – God’s laws restrain humans from attaining greater freedom, awareness, and power that would threaten his position.
4. **God’s warning of death is an external threat** – Without intrinsic consequences, God’s warning becomes an external threat demanding submission.

“‘God has lied to you,’ Satan insinuated to the first parents of the human race. ‘How can you trust such a god who doesn’t tell the truth? If you eat the forbidden tree you will not die. Actually, eating the fruit of the tree will make you more like God. How could he selfishly deprive you of something so beneficial? And how could he be so heartless and unforgiving as to threaten you with death on just the first offence? A loving god would at least give a second chance. ‘Obey me, or you’ll die!’ How can you worship someone so vengeful and severe? Such a demanding and arbitrary god is not worthy of your worship and trust.’”²³

Our first parents had trusted God, viewing Him as a loving Father who was the Source of all goodness and life. This trusting relationship was evident when they ate from the tree of life and abstained from the tree of good and evil (as God commanded). But after they believed Satan’s lies about God and His law, they no longer viewed Him as only being good, but they believed He was good *and* evil (but mostly evil). Christ equated life with goodness and evil with killing (Mark 3:4), so the tree of good *and* evil can also represent viewing God as the Source of life *and* death—light *and* darkness—something which Jesus unequivocally taught against (1 John 1:5 + John 8:12; Matt. 4:16). Thus, when Adam and Eve swallowed Satan’s lie that God was the Source of both good *and* evil, they subsequently ate the forbidden fruit of good and evil.

²³ Graham Maxwell, *Servants or Friends?: Another Look at God* (Redlands, CA: Pine Knoll Publications, 1992), p. 62.

2.3 FRUIT OF SATAN'S LIES

IGNORANCE OF GOD'S CHARACTER, THE ROOT

When Adam and Eve accepted the poisonous lies of Satan, they became *ignorant* of God's true character and the result was broken trust and a severed relationship with God (Eph. 4:18). In other words, the way they "saw" God changed. And what happens when we see God differently? Our feelings toward Him change. And when our feelings towards God change, we behave differently towards Him. As will be demonstrated, our first parent's paradigm shift led to the ultimate evil of crucifying the innocent Lamb of God.

"What we don't understand, we fear. What we fear, we judge as evil. What we judge as evil, we attempt to control. And what we cannot control...we attack."

THE FRUIT OF FEAR

I'm not a fan of snakes. If I'm hiking and see something slithering in the grass, I'm gone. For the most part, I am *afraid* of them. Why? Because I don't know which snakes are poisonous and which aren't—I'm ignorant of their character. I *see* them as dangerous and therefore *feel* afraid of them.

In like manner, when our first parents became ignorant of God's character and saw Him as a tyrannical oppressor, they became afraid of Him. And the result of seeing God in this light led to them feeling afraid of God. This feeling led to the behavior of running from God, for "**Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden.**" Genesis 3:8 (KJV). Instead of running to Jesus, they fled from Him.²⁴

Why hide from Jesus? Because they swallowed the forbidden fruit of believing that God is the Source of life and death—they were afraid that He would kill them. We know Adam was afraid of dying since Christ came to "set free all who have lived their lives as slaves to the **fear of dying.**" Hebrews 2:15. The belief that God would externally inflict the punishment of death upon them demonstrates that Satan's lies about God's character took root in their minds and produced the first fruits of fear.

²⁴ They heard the "voice"—the Word—of God walking (Gen. 3:8, KJV), and Jesus is the Word of God (John 1:1).

THE FRUIT OF JUDGMENT AND SELF-PRESERVATION

Since I'm afraid of snakes I don't recognize, I typically *judge* them as dangerous and try to *protect myself* from them by any means necessary. The way I see them leads to feelings of fear and the behavior of self-preservation.

When God asked Adam if he had broken His command, how did Adam respond?

Genesis 3:12 The man replied, "It was **the woman you gave me who gave me the fruit, and I ate it.**"

Adam thought that God would inflict the punishment of death upon him for eating the forbidden fruit, so in an act of *self-preservation* he throws Eve under the bus as a scapegoat. Not only does he blame Eve, who is guilty, but he also subtly shifts the blame onto the innocent Son of God, for he says, "the woman YOU gave me," she made me do it. Instead of judging Christ as trustworthy and asking for forgiveness, Adam *judged* Him as ultimately responsible for his fall and therefore *condemned* Him to death!

Romans 5:16 (KJV) ... for **the judgment was by one [Adam] to condemnation...**

If someone must die for what I did, then You—Jesus—should die because it's really your fault!

THE FRUIT OF VIOLENCE

After judging a snake as dangerous to my existence, I "condemn it to death" in my mind, thinking that I would be better off if it didn't exist. The next step is for me to use violence to neutralize the threat and save myself.

When Adam sinned, his mind became darkened, or carnal, and the Bible says that "**the sinful nature is always hostile to God [it hates God]...**" Romans 8:7. Not only that, but "**Anyone who hates another... is really a murderer at heart.**" 1 John 3:15. Adam would rather kill Jesus instead of be killed by Him—he killed Christ in his mind, thus he "dealt treacherously against" Him. Hosea 6:7 (YLT). Adam had eaten the lies of the Serpent, and he now saw God through the eyes of Satan. At that point, he believed God's rules were arbitrary restraints imposed upon him with the

threat of death. This is the mindset that subconsciously hates God and wants to murder His Son.

Sound like a stretch? The truth is, this enmity in Adam's heart was buried deep within his heart:

Job 31:33 (KJV) If I covered my transgressions as Adam, by hiding mine iniquity in my bosom

This hatred inherited from the father of lies was incredibly deep within Adam's subconscious mind—within his bosom—unrecognized, and therefore unremedied. If Christ had asked Adam “**Why go ye about to kill me?**” (John 7:19 KJV), he would probably tell Jesus, “**You're demon possessed! Who's trying to kill you?**” John 7:20.

Thus we have seen how one's perception of God's character can have dire consequences. If we see God as against us, our natural behavior will always be violent rebellion against Him and His laws.

RECONCILIATION BY REVELATION

How can God reconcile Adam (man) to Himself? Mere external changes are not enough—God must go to the root of the problem: man’s fallen perception of Him. The only way for us to replace our selfish behaviors with loving ones is by replacing a wrong view of God with a correct one—“make the tree good and its fruit will be good.” Matthew 12:33 (CSB).

God can tell Adam to stop believing Satan’s lies, but that won’t change His mind, and He can’t force Adam to think differently. Love and trust cannot be commanded—it can only be won. The only way for God to change Adam’s perception of His character and win his trust (and ours) is by revealing what He is really like.

When God manifests His true character to man, it not only reveals what God is like, but our reaction to His character likewise shows what we are like. This is crucial, because if we don’t know we’re sick, we’ll never go to a physician. We could break down the process of reconciliation, or at-one-ment, as follows:

1. *Reveal* the lies of Satan as poisonous to our souls
2. *Reveal* the unconscious enmity (sickness) in our hearts so we realize our need for saving (healing)
3. *Reveal* the trustworthiness of God so we can receive His Spirit of love (remedy)

How could these things be accomplished? One word: *revelation*. Particularly, the Revelation of Jesus Christ.

3.1 THE REVELATION OF THE TRUE WITNESS

Satan accused God of being a tyrannical, power-hungry overlord, and if that is true, we would expect God to keep us in the dark concerning his dealings with humanity. However, in the book of *Revelation* God takes the initiative in transparency; He wants to be open with us! This is why we see an open door (3:8), an open heaven (4:1; 19:11), an open book (5:5; 10:2), and an open temple (11:19)—all of which point to an open and transparent God (even the street and walls of the New Jerusalem are transparent! [Rev. 21:18, 21]). This openness on God’s part is the key to loosing the spiritual chains of darkness, as it exposes Satan’s lies about God.

As we saw earlier, the only honest thing God could do when Satan challenged Him was to give Satan time to work out his system of independence. Before his rebellion, all the heavenly hosts could easily sing of God’s worthiness to be worshipped (Rev. 4:11), but after Satan bore his (false) testimony, God’s worthiness was questioned (Rev. 5:2).²⁵ And since God had subsequently allowed evil to enter our world, another question emerged in the minds of the universe: why has God permitted these tragedies to occur? *Can such a God be trusted?* Would a righteous God allow the scroll of human history to be filled with “lamentations, and mourning, and woe” (Ezek. 2:10 KJV)—so full that every square inch, front and back (Rev. 5:1), contains these words? We can read the contents of this scroll, but our understanding is sealed.²⁶ Like the symbolic martyrs under the altar, we may ask, “**how long before you judge the people who belong to this world and **avenge our blood for what they have done to us?****” Revelation 6:10. Yes, the crisis is not only over the fact that Satan has rebelled, but more so over the fact that “God appears not to take the requisite measures against evil. Indeed, the way God has chosen to address Satan’s rebellion is even more disconcerting than the rebellion itself... Why did God permit evil? Why has God allowed evil to operate on such a long leash?”²⁷ Habakkuk wondered the same thing when he voiced his concerns to God:

²⁵ It is at this point that God holds the scroll with seven seals and the question is asked, “Who is worthy to break the seals on this scroll and open it?” Revelation 5:2. Apparently it was not obvious that God was *worthy*, or capable, of opening this scroll, for if it was this question wouldn’t be asked.

²⁶ Scripture sometimes describes things as “sealed,” not when the contents are unknown, but when the contents are not *understood*. See Isaiah 29:11-12; Daniel 12:4, 9-10. Evidently the Qumran sectarians viewed sealed scrolls in this light. Ranko Stefanovic, “The Sealing of the Scrolls in Revelation” in *Christ, Salvation and Eschaton: Essays in Honor of Hans K. LaRondelle* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2009), p. 367-376.

²⁷ Sigve Tonstad, *The Lost Meaning of the Seventh Day* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2009), p. 466.

Habakkuk 1:2, 13 ² **How long, O Lord, must I call for help? But you do not listen! “Violence is everywhere!” I cry, but you do not come to save... ¹³ Should you be silent while the wicked swallow up people more righteous than they?**

How could God show what He is really like and explain why bad things happen, and thus vindicate His trustworthiness? God responded to Habakkuk’s desperate inquiry by declaring that humanity must wait for something to happen which will effectively prove that He is trustworthy and faithful: “For the vision is yet for a time, and it shall shoot forth at the end, and not in vain: **though he should tarry, wait for him; for he will surely come, and will not tarry...**” Habakkuk 2:3 (LXX²⁸). Who is the “he” that would “surely come” to reclaim God’s trustworthiness? The only One qualified (Rev. 5:3) for such a task was, and is, “the Lion of the tribe of Judah” (Rev. 5:5).²⁹ Yes, “The Revelation” and “testimony of” the “True Witness,” Jesus Christ (Rev. 1:1, 2; 3:14), is the key to understanding God’s character along with the cause of all suffering. Unfortunately, many get so caught up in decoding the numbers, time periods, and symbols in the book of Revelation that they miss the forest from the trees—they miss the main thing God is trying to reveal! What then, is the essence of the “Revelation” and “Testimony of Jesus,” the key to unlocking the greatest mysteries man has ever asked?

²⁸ Lancelot Charles Lee Brenton, *The Septuagint Version of the Old Testament: English Translation* (London: Samuel Bagster and Sons, 1870). It seems the author of Hebrews quoted the Greek Old Testament (LXX) translation of this passage in his writing (Heb. 10:37-38). In other translations of Habakkuk, the “He” is replaced with the “it”—referring to the vision which would answer Habakkuk’s questions concerning God’s faithfulness. Both the “He” and the “vision” have the same goal in mind: to reveal the faithfulness of God, and the ultimate revelation of this was the life and death of Christ.

²⁹ “He hears that **‘the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered’**. The two messianic titles evoke a strongly militaristic and nationalistic image of the Messiah of David as conqueror of the nations, destroying the enemies of God’s people (cf. e.g., ¹QSb 5:20-9). But this image is reinterpreted by what John sees: the Lamb whose sacrificial death (5:6) has redeemed people from all nations (5:9-10). By juxtaposing the two contrasting images, John has forged a new symbol of conquest by sacrificial death... The Messiah has certainly won a victory, but he has done so by sacrifice and for the benefit of people from all nations (5:9).” Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 74 (cf. p. 67-68).

THE SELFLESS SLAUGHTERED LAMB

Revelation 5:6 (KJV) And I beheld, and lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a **Lamb as *it had been slain***...

When John looked behind the curtain of God's Kingdom, he saw a Lamb that was violently slain³⁰—the ultimate revelation of His character. The cross shows us a God who forgives his tormenters before they ask for pardon (Luke 23:34)—no one had to beg Him to do so. It shows a God who, while suffering indescribable pain, still thinks of His earthly mother, asking his beloved disciple to “protect and provide for her” (John 19:27 AMP) when He is gone. It was on the cross that the character of the Father was plainly seen (John 16:25), and *that* was the testimony Christ bore concerning His Father: God does not exalt Himself at the expense of others, but He allows Himself to be dragged to the lowest depths of hell to reach His fallen children. All of this is why the slaughtered Lamb is seen “in the midst of” God's throne in heaven—because “Christ's sacrificial death *belongs to the way God rules the world?*”³¹

John 18:37 (KJV) ... **To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth...**

What great news! Satan had smeared God's name in the beginning, but on the cross we see the Gospel, the Good News *of God* (Rom. 1:1; 15:8). The Good News is that “God is not the kind of person his enemies have made him out to be—arbitrary, unforgiving, and severe. God is just as loving and trustworthy as his Son, just as willing to forgive and heal. Though infinite in majesty and power, our Creator is an equally gracious Person who values nothing higher than freedom, dignity, and individuality of his intelligent creatures—that their love, their faith, their willingness to listen and obey, may be freely given. He even prefers to regard us not as servants but as friends.”³² At the cross “God showed him [Jesus] publicly dying as a means of reconciliation... This was to demonstrate God's own righteousness...” Romans 3:25.³³

³⁰ *The Lexham Analytical Lexicon to the Greek New Testament* (Logos Bible Software, 2011).

³¹ Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, p. 64.

³² Maxwell, *Servant or Friend?*, p. 186-187.

³³ Trans. Maxwell, *Servant or Friend?*, p. 128.

Yes, one of the reasons Christ was allowed to die was to convince us that our Father truly loves us, just as the fatted calf was allowed to die to convince the prodigal son that his father loved and welcomed him home—not as a servant, but as a son (Luke 15:11-24)! Thus Paul “was not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth... For therein is the righteousness of God revealed...” Romans 1:16–17 (KJV). The cross demonstrates the truth about God’s character, and this revelation is the foundation for love and trust—the things that reconcile us to God, the Source of life, and bring us into a relationship with Him.

While the cross of Calvary was the climax of Christ’s ministry, it was also “the summary of his whole life.”³⁴ Christ taught that the definition of the cross is self-denial (Matt. 16:24), and His whole life was a manifestation of this cross. We see the cross in the incarnation, for He who was equal with God denied Himself when He “gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being.” Philippians 2:7. The cross was revealed when Christ denied Himself of the seat of honor He deserved, and instead ate with the social outcasts of society: tax collectors, drunks, and prostitutes. We see the cross at the Last Supper, where Christ, the omnipotent Power of God (1 Cor. 1:24; Matt. 28:18), shows us how God uses His power: by washing the dirty feet of those who would betray Him! Christ was showing, in other words, that “He would not rule by a sword, but by a towel.”³⁵ All throughout Christ’s life we see Him denying Himself for the sake of uplifting and transforming the hearts of others, and this is the power of the cross. As Boyd says, “When God flexes his omnipotent muscle, it doesn’t look like Rambo or the Terminator—it looks like Calvary.”³⁶

This Good News concerning God’s character—as revealed in the life and death of Christ—has the power to change our lives *if* we trust that the testimony of Jesus concerning His Father is true. If we believe God is trustworthy (through the revelation of Jesus) then we will be enabled to trust (have faith) in Him, for we will see that He is trustworthy! As we walk with Jesus, we will gain deeper revelations of God’s love and trustworthiness, and we will grow from one degree of faith to another. Thus God’s “**Unfailing love and faithfulness**” reconciles us to God and makes us at-one with Him again. Proverbs 16:6.

³⁴ Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), p. 76.

³⁵ Lee Camp, *Mere Discipleship: Radical Christianity in a Rebellious World* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2003), p. 94.

³⁶ Greg Boyd, *The Myth of a Christian Nation: How the Quest for Political Power is Destroying the Church* (Zondervan, 2005), p. 32.

Romans 5:10–11 (GNT) ¹⁰We were God’s enemies, but **he made us his friends through the death of his Son**. Now that we are God’s friends, how much more will we be saved by Christ’s life! ¹¹But that is not all; we rejoice because of what God has done through our Lord **Jesus Christ, who has now made us God’s friends.**³⁷

THE SELFISH SLAUGHTERERS

The cross not only reveals that God’s thoughts towards us are “thoughts of peace, and not of evil” (Jer. 29:11) (not good *and* evil like the Serpent had said), but it also reveals “the thoughts of many hearts.” Luke 2:35. While the cross reveals the character of the Victim, it simultaneously reveals the character of the murderers and oppressors.³⁸

The cross reveals our unconscious enmity towards the Son of God, for there we see the result of our selfishness. Why did the religious and political leaders violently kill Jesus? Because they thought it was better “that one man should die for the people than for the whole nation to be destroyed.” John 11:50. In other words, they killed Him because they were afraid of being killed; it was an act of nationalistic self-preservation. And the fruit of violence, self-preservation, and fear all stemmed from a misunderstanding of the character of God. Likewise, whenever we sin, we are not only hurting ourselves, but we are crucifying the Son of God afresh (Heb. 6:6).

Our selfish thoughts and actions also hurt others, but we are typically unconscious of this fact.³⁹ But when this suffering is revealed to us up close and

³⁷ Instead of saying that Christ has made us “friends with God” through the cross, the King James Version says that through the cross, “we have now received the atonement.” This is the only instance of the word “atonement” in the King James Bible, as it is elsewhere translated as “reconciliation” (Rom. 5:10; 11:15; 2 Cor. 5:18, 19). Maxwell informs us that “back in the thirteenth century the word ‘atonement’ was used to mean ‘being at one,’ ‘being in harmony,’ the opposite of ‘being at odds.’ And the verb ‘to atone’ meant in those days ‘to set at one,’ ‘to unite.’... As time passed, the word ‘atonement’ came to be used more and more to denote ‘appeasement, making amends, paying a penalty to satisfy legal demands.’” Maxwell, *Servants or Friends?*, p. 161.

³⁸ If our view of the atonement simply consisted of the idea of God expressing His love, then we would indeed be teaching the Moral Influence Theory of the atonement. However, what is discussed in the following sections under the umbrella of the “at-one-ment” accomplishes more than Abelard’s theory and addresses issues Abelard never dealt with.

³⁹ Many Scriptures either indicate or allude to the fact that our sin problem is usually something which we are unconscious of (Job 34:32; Ps. 19:12; Luke 23:34; Rev. 3:17). It is the work of Christ as our High Priest (Physician) to examine us of our unconscious sins (disease) and reveal them to us so we can surrender them to Him and allow Him to heal us.

personal, we are finally made aware of the wages of our sins. Whenever we see the misery we are causing others, we are beholding the cross of Christ, for Christ suffers with all who suffer and are oppressed (Matt. 12:45; Is. 63:9). In this sense Christ has been on the cross since the fall of Lucifer.⁴⁰ It is only through the revelation of the cross that we can begin to realize the depth of our spiritual sickness so we will be led to trust in God for the Remedy—a new heart and a new mind, a spiritual rebirth (we will dive deeper into what this means in the chapter on the Seal of God).

Christ was crucified at the hands of wicked men (Acts 2:23), who were actuated by Satan (John 13:2), and was tortured so badly that “His face was so disfigured he seemed hardly human, and from his appearance, one would scarcely know he was a man.” (Is. 52:14). As the heavenly hosts watched this horror play out there was “silence in heaven” (Rev. 8:1); they “shut their mouths because of him; for that which has not been told them they shall see, and that which they have not heard they shall understand” (Is. 52:15 RSV).

Satan had tried to persuade men and angels that he has their best interests at heart, but the cross reveals that he’s actually a bloodthirsty and power-hungry murderer who is willing to torture an innocent child of God to get what he wants. Thus God, through the cross of Christ, crushed the head of the Serpent’s philosophy and “reconciled everything to himself. He made peace with everything in heaven and on earth by means of Christ’s blood on the cross.” Colossians 1:20. The cross not only answers the questions of humanity, but it also clears up any question in the minds of the angelic beings (1 Pet. 1:12).

God did not kill His Son on the cross (this fact will be proved in the following pages), but He *permitted* Him to suffer and die (Matt. 27:46; Rom. 8:32; Luke 24:7). And since Christ suffers with all oppressed humanity, it is evident that God does not cause human suffering, but He permits it. God is not the source of deception, war, famine, and death (The Four Horsemen⁴¹)—all of these are the result of the Satanic spirit of self-exaltation at the expense of others. The Lamb that was violently slain shows that the violent slayer is the source of humanity’s tragedies—not God.

⁴⁰ For more information on the reality of Christ’s ever-present cross, see Adrian Ebens, ***Cross Examined and Cross Encountered*** (Father of Love, 2019), <https://tinyurl.com/cross-encountered>) and Kevin J. Mullins, ***Jesus Christ and Him Crucified*** (Father of Love, 2024) <https://tinyurl.com/JesusChristCrucified>.

⁴¹ In Matthew 24 Jesus describes the fact that deceivers will arise who shall act as counterfeit christs (24:4-5), subsequently pointing out wars (24:6), famines (24:7), and death (24:9). This corresponds to the first four horsemen, or seals, of Revelation 6: deception/false messiahs (6:2); war (6:4), famine (6:5-6), and death (6:8). We will briefly discuss the 7 Seals in ch. 10.

So why does God allow this suffering? For the same reason He allowed Christ to suffer: to expose the lies of Satan’s philosophy of selfishness (which is manifested in violence) and bring us into the Kingdom of selflessness (which is manifested in an innocent sufferer).

When we see the Innocent Lamb violently slain on the cross, it should inspire us to seek to alleviate His sufferings. Christ asked His disciples (and us) to be partakers of His sufferings (Matt. 16:24; 26:38-40), and since He suffers with everyone, it is the duty of Christians to enter into solidarity with those who suffer: the oppressed and downtrodden, the exploited and marginalized. Not only are we to suffer with those who suffer, but we should actively seek to relieve their suffering by manifesting the active spirit of other-centered love (Matt. 25:34-46; Jam. 1:27), just as living a life of love helps relieve the sufferings of Christ (Heb. 6:6).

OBSCURING THE CROSS

Since the cross exposes Satan’s lies by revealing God’s true character, he is always trying to obscure and distort the cross of Christ. As such, he has led many theologians to trade the picture of God as an innocent slain Lamb with the rhetoric of God as a violent political Sovereign—God is Caesar, His angels are soldiers, His laws are imperial decrees, and His justice is violent retribution. One of the biggest leaps in this type of thinking occurred when Constantine sought to Christianize Rome. Eusebius, Constantine’s loyal propagandist, declared that during this time “**the Roman Empire monarchy had come on earth as the image of the monarchy in heaven.**”⁴²

Christ, however, did not teach along this line of reasoning. When He looked for something to compare the Kingdom of Heaven to, He saw nothing in civil society that would be a suitable comparison.

Mark 4:30 (KJV) And he said, **Whereunto shall we liken the kingdom of God? or with what comparison shall we compare it?**

John 18:36 Jesus answered, “**My Kingdom is not an earthly kingdom...**”

⁴² S.L. Greenslade, *Church & State from Constantine to Theodosius* (Bloomsbury Academic, 1981), p. 10.

To understand the nature of God's government, we must begin with Him. Satan said that God is a selfish tyrant, but what did Jesus compare God's leadership role to?

3.2 WHO IS GOD: FRIENDLY FATHER OR FORCEFUL FUHRER?

Luke 23:46 Then Jesus shouted, **“Father, I entrust my spirit into your hands!”** And with those words he breathed his last.

These were some of the last words Christ uttered as He suffered the cruelty of sin upon the cross. In the face of utter darkness and despair, when it appeared to those watching that God was smiting Him with divine wrath for breaking His laws, Christ declared that God was His faithful Father.

The paternal character of His Father was one of the main themes of Christ's teachings. Instead of teaching His disciples to address God in terms of might or intellect, He taught them to address Him as “Our Father” (Matt. 6:9) who “loves you dearly” (John 16:27). Why did He do this? Though God has within Him the sum of all wisdom, knowledge, and power, He is first and foremost a loving Father. Our view of God's primary characteristics is important, for it determines our response to such a Being.

If our focus is on God's power and strength instead of His love and character, we run the risk of worshipping and obeying Him because He can hurt us if we disobey. However, if we see God as a Father, we will worship and obey Him because we know that our all-knowing Father has our best interest at heart and His laws are for our well-being (as we will soon verify). We don't need to worry about God hurting us if we disobey, but we need to worry about hurting ourselves if we disregard His guidance. In the former scenario, fealty is based on fear, force, and violence, while in the latter loyalty is based on love and trust. God wants us to see Him as a Father and Friend, not as a Fuhrer and Taskmaster.

Slaves obey their master (even if they don't understand the commands) because they're afraid of punishment. They don't understand their master's business (because they haven't been given that privilege), but the slave master requires perfect, blind obedience—no questions asked. If strict obedience isn't rendered, their master has the means of overpowering and punishing them. This is Satan's preferred method of running things—not God's.

Friends, on the other hand, obey because they trust their Friend, and the Friend explains why they do what they do and say what they say. And when a friend doesn't understand something, they ask questions. This is God's way. God wants a trusting relationship based on love and understanding—not fear. In fact, some of the only people explicitly called God's friends in the Bible were those who asked Him the hard, honest questions! (See introduction). This shows that God wants intelligent and honest service, not groveling fear. All in all, God's Kingdom runs like a family of friends, and He is the wise Father, beloved Husband, and the best of Friends.

Hosea 2:16 When that day comes,” says the Lord, **“you will call me ‘my husband’ instead of ‘my master.’**

John 15:15 **I no longer call you slaves, because a master doesn't confide in his slaves. Now you are my friends, since I have told you everything the Father told me.**

John 16:27 (KNOX) ... **the Father himself is your friend...**

3.3 GOD'S LAWS: SENSIBLE OR SUPERFICIAL?

If God's Kingdom is relational, then His laws must be as well, and this is exactly what Jesus taught:

Matthew 22:37–40 ³⁷ Jesus replied, “You must **love the Lord your God** with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.’ ³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹ A second is equally important: **‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’** ⁴⁰ **The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments.**”

According to Jesus, God's laws concern relationships with Him and our fellow man. Thus, the first four commandments concern our relation to God, while the last six concern our neighbor.

When Christ came, He made it clear that God's laws are not arbitrary mandates imposed from above. His law is the definitive issue of “Love for Dummies,” which specifies *how* to protect and enrich relationships. Obedience to these laws allows us to nurture meaningful relationships, avoid inflicting harm, and live in harmony as one family. This stands in stark contrast to the world's edicts that seem as cold as steel.

But what of Satan’s accusation, that God’s laws are superficial—that there are no intrinsic consequences for breaking them? The answer is again, the cross.

Christ suffered the wages of sin on our behalf (Heb. 9:28). Does this mean that God killed His Son so He wouldn’t have to kill us? If we choose to not be in a relationship with God, will He smite us? If the “wages” of leaving God is Him killing us, then His laws are as arbitrary as an abusive husband striking his wife because she doesn’t love him.

This reminds me of that verse that says, “Surely he hath borne our griefs, And carried our sorrows: Yet **we did esteem him stricken, Smitten of God, and afflicted.**” Isaiah 53:4 (KJV). Doesn’t much of Christendom teach that God strikes the sinner down just like He did to Jesus? But the next verse shows the truth of the matter, and keep in mind that the word “for” can be translated as “**by**.”⁴³

Isaiah 53:5 **But he was pierced for [BY] our rebellion, crushed for [BY] our sins...**

What a powerful contrast! Verse four said that we believed God smote Jesus, but the next verse says that He was really killed for, or BY, our sins!

Isaiah 59:2 **It’s your sins that have cut you off from God...**

Scripture teaches that *God is the Source, the Fountain, of life* (Ps. 36:9), for “He himself gives life and breath to everything... For in him we live and move and exist...” Acts 17:25, 28.⁴⁴ If we break the law of love, we are choosing to be independent from the Source of life; we are refusing to eat the fruit of life. If you violate the law of respiration by placing a bag over your head, no one must punish you for breaking this law; your choice carries natural consequences. As it is in the physical, so it is in the spiritual.

Proverbs 8:36 (KJV) But **he that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul:** All they that hate me love death.

Hosea 13:9 (KJV) O Israel, **thou hast destroyed thyself;** but in me *is* thine help.

⁴³ Strong’s *Dictionary*, p. 68.

⁴⁴ Also see Heb. 1:3; Col. 1:17; Acts 3:15; Job 12:9–10; Ps. 145:15, 16; Jer. 17:13; Rev. 22:1; etc.

Hosea 14:1 (KJV) O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God; For **thou hast fallen by thine iniquity.**

Romans 6:23 For **the wages of sin is death**, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord.

James 1:15 These desires give birth to sinful actions. And **when sin is allowed to grow, it gives birth to death.**

As Elbert Hubbard (the philosopher, not the founder of Scientology) put it, “*Men are not punished for our sins, but by them.*”⁴⁵

When Christ was on the cross, He didn’t ask God why He was killing Him for bearing our sins. Instead, His humanity cried out, “Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, **My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?**” Matthew 27:46 (KJV). Christ was suffering what the wicked will suffer on the last day: the wages of sin—complete separation from the Source of life. The cross shows that God’s laws have inherent consequences, and as such, are eternal.⁴⁶ Can you imagine a group of scientists casting a vote to change the law of respiration, saying it’s okay not to breathe on Thursdays? We may laugh at this idea (and rightly so), but how many councils have decided to “change” the law of God like a Roman Senate amending municipal codes for aqueducts and amphitheaters?

“... every attribute of God is simply the attribute of love. And love includes the all in all of our Father. **His laws are simply the laws of a kind Father, intended to promote the happiness of his children. They are not arbitrary. It is not that God, sitting up on some high throne, said to mankind, You do thus and so, and I will let you live; but you do otherwise, and I will kill you. God does not kill. He is the Fountain of life.** His laws are not so simply because he said so, but even so because they were so. In infinite wisdom **he foreknew the underlying principles of happiness and life, and in infinite love he foretold these principles,** saying, This way, my child; here is the joy and peace and life forevermore.

⁴⁵ Elbert Hubbard, *The Note Book of Elbert Hubbard* (New York: W.H. Wise & Co., 1927), p. 160.

⁴⁶ For a deeper study into the truth of Christ’s sacrifice on the cross, please see the book *Did God Kill Jesus Instead of Killing Us?* (Father of Love, 2023), available for free at <https://tinyurl.com/DidGodKillJesus>.

Don't go that way. That way is misery and death. Every precept of the decalogue, which is the epitome of his law, directly speaks from this principle."⁴⁷

How does this help us understand why people suffer? People suffer the wages of their bad, unloving choices—*cause is followed by effect*. But why does God allow this suffering? For the same reason there are built-in consequences for touching a hot stove. If we didn't naturally feel pain when we make bad choices, we would never learn from our mistakes and would continue to unconsciously destroy ourselves. Our Father wants us to learn that breaking His rules have terrible consequences that affect ourselves, each other, the environment, and ultimately God Himself. He wants us to learn this so we will have the sense to come to Him, ask for forgiveness, and allow Him to teach us the way of life and love, “for your own well-being” (Deut. 10:12-13, NRSV).

This explains why the guilty suffer, but why does God allow the *innocent* to suffer? For the same reason Christ suffered—to expose the injustice that is caused by living according to Satan's creed of sin and selfishness. When the result of this self-serving lifestyle is revealed in the person of the afflicted, we have a choice to make: will we continue perpetuating systems of injustice, violence, and oppression by our sinful choices which cause the innocent to suffer? Or will we choose to repent of our previously unconscious sins and change our ways to relieve their suffering?⁴⁸

Unfortunately, various groups throughout history have attempted to take up the role of punishing children who are guilty of touching the hot stove. This has been done to establish a utopia of love, paradoxically, by force and violence—by administering “justice” “on behalf of God.” But this begs the question: what does God's justice *really* look like?

⁴⁷ G.E. Fifield, *General Conference Daily Bulletin*, February 19, 1897, p. 89, 90.

⁴⁸ Much more could be said on the question of human suffering and why God allows it, but space restrains me from delving into a more nuanced discussion. A wonderful book which does discuss this subject in detail is *God of Sense and Traditions of Non-Sense* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2016), by Sigve Tonstad.

3.4 GOD'S JUSTICE SYSTEM: RESTORATION OR RETRIBUTION? FREEDOM OR FORCE?

Traditionally, rulers like Caesar externally imposed penalties and judgments against lawbreakers to uphold justice. But is God like Caesar? If we break God's laws, there are inherent consequences, unlike North Korea's hairstyle laws. As we shall see, "the justice, which, it is declared, demands the judgment of God, is in reality a juridical concept issuing from the interpretation of Roman law. That has nothing to do with what the Old Testament calls justice, nor with what Jesus shows us as being the justice of the Father..."⁴⁹ As our understanding of God's law and the wages of sin evolves from a legal, Roman mindset to a healing, Hebrew mindset, so too must our view of God's judgments and justice change.

Psalm 82:3-4 ³“**Give justice to the poor and the orphan; uphold the rights of the oppressed and the destitute.** ⁴**Rescue the poor and helpless; deliver them from the grasp of evil people.**

Ezekiel 45:9 (KJV) Thus saith the Lord God; Let it suffice you, O princes of Israel: **remove violence and spoil [oppression], and execute judgment and justice**, take away your exactions from my people, saith the Lord God.

In the above verses we see that justice is something which we should want to be a part of! Justice, according to God, is to do what is right, and this is why “Often, in the Hebrew Bible, ‘righteousness’ (*sedeqah*) and ‘justice’ (*mishpat*) occur as a word-pair with virtually identical meanings: [Amos 5:24; Is. 32:1; Ps. 72:1-2]”⁵⁰ “Doing justice” means treating people in a loving, or righteous, manner; it is *restorative*, not *retributive*.

What does Biblical justice look like in a practical sense? How can we “give justice to the poor and the orphan” (Ps. 82:3)? Is divine justice appeased by killing those who oppress the poor and those who abandon their children? Or are the claims of divine justice satisfied when we show mercy and love to these people?—by seeking to lift the poor out of poverty by giving them fair work opportunities (Deut. 24:14-15; Jer. 22:13-16); by giving hungry orphans food (Deut. 24:17-22; 26:12-14) and

⁴⁹ Jacques Ellul, *Apocalypse: the book of Revelation* (New York: Seabury Press, 1977), p. 88.

⁵⁰ Chris Marshall, *The Little Book of Biblical Justice: A Fresh Approach to the Bible's Teachings on Justice* (New York, NY: Good Books, 2005), p. 12.

loving families (Jam. 1:27; Ps. 68:5-6). This is what true justice looks like for the victims of sin and oppression.

On the other hand, the modern criminal justice system, based on the Roman legal system, views “justice” through the lens of retribution. Whereas the Biblical paradigm of justice focuses on extending love and mercy to victims in order to “set things right,” the Roman paradigm is hyper-focused on questions like: “what laws were broken?” and “what penalties need to be imposed?” The former is concerned with restoration, the latter with retribution.

But does the compassionate view of God’s justice mean there are no penalties for those who do wrong? Of course not. The question isn’t whether or not God executes judgment on law-breakers, but it is *how* He does this.

Obadiah 15 “The day is near when I, the Lord, will **judge** all godless nations! **As you have done** to Israel, **so it will be done to you. All your evil deeds will fall back on your own heads.**

Psalms 9:16 (KJV) The Lord is known *by* **the judgment which he executeth: The wicked is snared in the work of his own hands.** Higgsaion. Selah.

God executes judgments against sinners by allowing them the freedom to reap what they sow; they experience the natural outworking of the principle of *cause and effect*. As Old Testament scholar Terrence Fretheim put it:

“Divine judgment is properly understood as the effect of human sin... In judgment, God works in the world through means, including human beings (within and without the community of faith) and, potentially, all nonhuman creatures... **The most common agent of divine judgment is the created moral order. That is, God has created the world in such a way that deeds (whether good or evil) will have consequences.** Generally speaking, the relationship between deed and consequence is conceived in **intrinsic rather than extrinsic** terms. That is to say, the consequences grow out of the deed itself; they are not a penalty (or reward) introduced by God into the situation. That good deeds have consequences may be called blessing; that sins have consequences may be called judgment.”⁵¹

⁵¹ Terrence E. Fretheim, *God and World in the Old Testament: A Relational Theology of Creation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005), p. 160, 161, 163.

The word for judgment in Psalm 9:16 [*sedeqah*] is also defined as justice,⁵² and this idea is reflected in several translations:

Psalm 9:16 The LORD is known for **his justice. The wicked are trapped by their own deeds...** (also see NIV, BSB, CSB, etc.)

This same principle is exemplified in Galatians:

Galatians 6:7 Don't be misled—you **cannot mock the justice of God. You will always harvest what you plant.**

Jesus, the definitive revelation of God's justice (Is. 9:2-7; Jer. 23:5; Luke 4:17-18), gave two parables that show us what justice looks like. In the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37), Jesus taught that showing mercy through acts of selfless love is what it means to do justice to the *victims* of selfishness. In the story of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32), Jesus showed us how to do justice to the *perpetrator* of selfishness: give them the freedom to walk the destructive path they choose, let them suffer the natural consequences of their actions, freely forgive them when they repent, and show them mercy by selflessly loving them.

But why does God allow us to reap the painful results from the sinful actions we sow? He does this for two reasons.

Firstly, God, like the father of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32), allows His rebellious children to suffer the negative consequences of their actions to help them realize they're going down the wrong path. He does this in the hopes that they will come to their senses and be reconciled to God, the Source of all life and joy.

Secondly, God allows us to reap what we sow for the same reason it's wrong to steal crops from a farmer. It would be *unjust* to deprive them of the *liberty* to reap what they sow. True love and justice require that God allow us to walk our own path, crooked or straight. "Justice" does not "demand" that you euthanize someone on life support, but it does demand that you give them the choice to pull the plug or not.

No doctor can ethically force a treatment plan on you if you refuse it, regardless of how effective it is. All he can do is plead with you and warn you of the consequences of distrusting him. But, if you admit (confess) the error of your ways, believe the doctor has your best interest at heart, and ask the doctor to save you, mercy joins hands with justice as the physician imparts his remedy to save you.

⁵² Strong's *Dictionary*, p. 74.

However, if you persist in rejecting the physician's aid, justice requires he withdraw and allow the inevitable results to occur. It is up to you to judge the character of the Great Physician.

“... The highest possible enjoyment is found in the most perfect **freedom**; and this God has given to man, in giving him the utmost **liberty** to choose whatever he will. In this choice there is absolutely no restriction put upon man by the Lord. **His strict justice is shown in His not interfering with man's personal right of choice as to what he will have.** God knows that only in Him can man find his highest good, and therefore He places Himself before man in the most attractive light, and pleads with him to accept Him; but He will not intrude His presence where it is not wanted. **He will not coerce the will of man.** He has in making man guaranteed to him perfect liberty, and **He Himself respects the rights which He has bestowed on man. To attempt to compel men to accept His ways, perfect though they be, would be to deprive him of that liberty** which is inseparable from God; and so it would be to defeat His own purpose...

“God's mercies endure for ever, even though there are some who will have none of it. In His mercy He bears long with them, but God could not tolerate rebellion for ever in His dominions and be just to His loyal subjects. **So in justice no less than mercy** to those who willingly yield to His control, **He must let the wicked suffer the punishment which they have worked for.** Indeed, **it would be doing the wicked an injustice not to give them that for which they have so long and diligently laboured.** They have taken counsel together against the Lord and against His Anointed, saying, ‘Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us.’ **All their desire has been to be left to themselves and now God gives them their desire. But as there is no place in the universe where God is not, the only thing for them is extinction.** So we read, ‘For evildoers shall be cut off; but those that wait upon the Lord, they shall inherit the earth. For yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be; yea, thou shalt diligently consider his place, and it shall not be.’” Psalm 37:9, 10.⁵³

True love requires freedom of choice—it can't be forced, coerced, or compelled. When any of this enters a relationship, suffering is the inevitable result. Suffering

⁵³ E.J. Waggoner, *Present Truth* UK, February 23, 1893, p. 53, 55.

continues because it would be unjust for God to withhold the fruit of our labor from us, and because others seek to externally force and compel the consciences of others “in the name of God.” For these reasons, God places an incredibly high estimate on our freedom, and this is evident when we look at (1) how God “recruits” followers and (2) how He responds to rejection.

HOW GOD MAKES FOLLOWERS

Diognetus 7.3–5 ³Was He [Jesus] sent, think you, as any man might suppose, to establish a sovereignty, to inspire fear and terror? ⁴ Not so. But in gentleness [and] meekness has ⁵ He [God] sent Him [Christ], as a king might send his son who is a king. He sent Him, as sending God; He sent Him, as [a man] unto men; **He sent Him, as Saviour, as using persuasion, not force: for force is no attribute of God...**⁵⁴

We can sum up the ministry of Christ in two words: teaching and healing. He always went about doing good; healing, feeding, and blessing all who would receive Him. Through His words and actions (e.g. the cross) He presented truth and love to *persuade* all to accept Him. In God’s Kingdom people are converted by persuasion—by presentations of truth and love—not force:

Isaiah 1:18 (KJV) Come now, and **let us reason together**, saith the Lord...

Acts 18:4 Each Sabbath found Paul at the synagogue, **trying to convince** the Jews and Greeks alike.

Romans 14:5 (KJV) One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day *alike*. **Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind.**

Christ will never force you to eat from the tree of life, for that is *unjust*. But what does He do when He is rejected?

⁵⁴ Joseph Barber Lightfoot and J. R. Harmer, *The Apostolic Fathers* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1891), p. 507. This epistle is said to have been by “a disciple [*mathetes*] of the apostles” and “teacher of the Gentiles” (11:1). Some think this apology was written around 130 A.D., though the apologetic nature and some Hellenistic themes suggest a composition between the 2nd-3rd century.

HOW GOD RESPONDS TO REJECTION

When people rejected Jesus, did He get angry at them, condemn them, and threaten to rain down fire from heaven to consume them?

Luke 9:53–56 (KJV) ⁵³ And they did not receive him, because his face was *as though he would go to Jerusalem.* ⁵⁴ And **when his disciples James and John saw *this*, they said, Lord, wilt thou *that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did?*** ⁵⁵ **But he turned, and rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of.** ⁵⁶ For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save *them*. And they went to another village.

Christ never sought to destroy those who rejected Him, for He knows that all who reject the Fountain of life—Himself—will die of thirst.

If Jesus does not destroy those who reject Him, what does He do?

Matthew 8:34–9:1 ³⁴ Then the entire town came out to meet Jesus, but **they begged him to go away and leave them alone.** ^{9:1} Jesus climbed into a boat and went back across the lake to his own town [**he departed**].

John 8:58–59 (KJV) ⁵⁸ Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am. ⁵⁹ **Then took they up stones to cast at him:** but **Jesus hid himself, and went out** of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by.

When rejected, Christ withdrew, and this is what He taught His disciples to do:

Matthew 10:14 If any household or town **refuses to welcome you or listen to your message**, shake its dust from your feet as you **leave**.

Acts 21:14 **When it was clear that we couldn't persuade him, we gave up** and said, "The Lord's will be done."

This isn't simply the way Jesus worked in the New Testament, for God has always been consistent with His dealings with humanity (Mal. 3:6), and is "**the same**

yesterday, today, and forever.” Hebrews 13:8. With this in mind, when people rejected Jesus in the Old Testament, did He respond the same way He did in the New?

Numbers 12:9 The Lord was very angry with them, and **he departed**.

Hosea 4:17 **Leave Israel alone**, because she is married to idolatry.

Deuteronomy 31:16–17 ¹⁶The Lord said to Moses, “You are about to die and join your ancestors. After you are gone, these people will begin to worship foreign gods, the gods of the land where they are going. **They will abandon me** and break my covenant that I have made with them. ¹⁷Then my anger will blaze forth against them. **I will abandon them, hiding my face from them, and they will be devoured. Terrible trouble will come down on them, and on that day they will say, ‘These disasters have come down on us because God is no longer among us!’** (Also see Ezek. 39:17–24; Is. 57:17, Ps. 60:1; etc.)

Jesus “hid himself” (John 8:58–59 KJV) when He was rejected by men, and God has *always* dealt with rejection this way (even though it doesn’t always *appear* that way): He withdraws Himself and allows the rejectors of His mercy reap what they sowed. And the natural result of being disconnected from the Source of life is degradation and death.

If we accept the life of Christ as the complete and full revelation of God (which I believe is imperative), then we must re-examine all of the Old Testament in light of this—particularly areas that seem to contradict this revelation. As David Dockery put it, “For Jesus, the key to understanding the Old Testament was located in his own life and work, for everything pointed to himself.”⁵⁵ Stories such as the flood, Sodom and Gomorrah, the plagues of Egypt, etc., are all invitations from our loving Father to reconsider our Father’s character in light of Christ. Is it possible that we have believed some of the same lies about God’s character that deceived our spiritual ancestors?

⁵⁵ David Dockery, *Biblical Interpretation Then and Now: Contemporary Hermeneutics in the Light of the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), p. 26.

2 Corinthians 3:14 (KJV) ... **until this day remaineth the same veil untaken away in the reading of the old testament; which *vail* is done away in Christ.**

We will examine some of these stories along the way in this book, but it is outside the scope of this work to look at all apparent contradictions and arguments. Thankfully, many wonderful resources are available at lastmessageofmercy.com. We will, however, look at Satan's kingdoms throughout history, which will show a clear contrast between the Kingdom of Light and the Kingdom of Darkness.

The testimony of Christ and Him crucified reveals the essence of God's Kingdom, which is why He is pictured as the slain Lamb "in the midst of the throne" in heaven (Rev. 5:6). This testimony of Christ reveals the trustworthiness of God, showing that He is not the cause of human suffering; He allows these things in order to reveal the wages of sin, the lies of Satan, and the truth that God's way is the only path of life, joy, and peace.

Christ's testimony is the tree of life. God is a Father—not a Fuhrer; fidelity to Him is based on Familial love and trust—not fear; His laws are Sensible—not Senseless; and His Justice is demonstrated by His bestowal of Freedom—not Force. Satan said that God is an oppressive tyrant with arbitrary rules that are enforced through violence. These lies and the subsequent suffering caused the universe to question God's trustworthiness, but the cross of Christ vindicates God's character, laws, and trustworthiness. But the question remains: shall we believe the testimony of the Serpent, or shall we accept the testimony of the True Witness? I submit that we should accept the trustworthiness of Jesus's revelation of His Father's character (Rev. 14:12).

	TREE OF LIFE KINGDOM OF GOD TESTIMONY OF JESUS	TREE OF KNOWLEDGE KINGDOM OF SATAN TESTIMONY OF SATAN
GOD'S WAY IS...	<i>SELF-SACRIFICE</i>	<i>SELF-PRESERVATION</i>
GOD IS A...	<i>FATHER</i>	<i>FUHRER</i>
GOD'S SYSTEM IS...	<i>FAMILY</i>	<i>FEAR</i>
GOD'S LAWS ARE...	<i>SENSIBLE</i>	<i>SENSELESS</i>
GOD'S JUSTICE IS	<i>FREEDOM</i>	<i>FORCE</i>

CHAPTER 4

SATAN'S SANDBOX

Christ has provided ample evidence supporting His claims that God's ways are righteous and trustworthy, but that is not enough. No, to settle things once and for all, the Accuser needs a chance to share his evidence—what do his “reforms” look like in practice? How does his system compare to God's? Does it tend to life and liberty or death and dictatorship? To answer these questions, God must allow Satan:

1. Time to explain and campaign his new ideas.
2. Time to develop his ideas and methods.

Once both systems have been identified and revealed, everyone must decide (judge) whose system they want to be a part of and who they want to rule them.

Satan campaigned his ideas on earth, and our first parents ended up casting their vote for his view of God and his system at the forbidden tree. The principles behind Satan's government were planted in the minds of humanity and have been steadily growing like a poisonous plant: “First a leaf blade pushes through, then the heads of wheat are formed, and finally the grain ripens.” Mark 4:28. Our role is to judge between the fruit of the tree of life—Christ's Kingdom—and the fruit of the tree of knowledge—Satan's Kingdom.

Where can we see the principles of Satan's Kingdom developing? We get a hint when we hear Satan's offer to Jesus during His temptation in the wilderness:

Luke 4:5–7 ⁵Then the devil took him up and revealed to him **all the kingdoms of the world** in a moment of time. ⁶“I will give you the glory of these kingdoms and authority over them,” the devil said, “because **they are mine to give** to anyone I please. ⁷I will give it all to you if you will worship me.”

Every Christian knows that Jesus refused this offer, but many Christians miss the other thing Jesus didn't do: He didn't dispute Satan's claim of owning the kingdoms of the world. Not only that, but three times Jesus referred to Satan as the “ruler of this world” (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11). In essence, Jesus is saying that Satan is heavily involved in the affairs of worldly kingdoms and governments.

This is not to say that governments are completely evil, for “the powers that be are ordained of God” (Rom. 13:1 KJV); “They are God’s servants, sent for the very purpose of punishing those who do what is wrong.” Romans 13:4. In other words, “God uses governments as he finds them, in all their ungodly, rebellious ways, to serve his own providential purposes. As Paul describes in Romans 13, this general purpose is to preserve as much law and order as is possible. Insofar as governments do this, they are properly exercising the authority God grants them and are, to that extent, good.”⁵⁶ God allows worldly kingdoms to rule others because they externally restrain their ungodly subjects from harming their fellow citizens.⁵⁷

Though God has a purpose in allowing the kings of the earth to rule the masses, this doesn’t nullify the fact that Satan is heavily involved in how these kingdoms operate. Thus, if we want to see examples of the methods and patterns of Satan’s government in contrast to Christ’s, all we need to do is study some history.

But where on earth should we start searching in the haystack of history? Thankfully God has pointed out a few cases that are worthy of our attention. These kingdoms were outlined about 4,500 years ago when God gave the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar a dream concerning the rise and fall of the world’s “greatest” powers.

BABYLON

In Daniel chapter 2 we read of Nebuchadnezzar’s prophetic dream, which is the foundational timeline of prophecy. Like many of us today, the king forgot his dream shortly after waking up (Dan. 2:1-5). Unlike many of us today, God revealed the contents of his dream through a prophet. Daniel revealed the following to the king:

Daniel 2:31–33 ³¹ “In your vision, Your Majesty, you saw standing before you a huge, shining **statue of a man**. It was a frightening sight. ³² The head of the statue was made of fine **gold**. Its chest and arms were **silver**, its belly and

⁵⁶ Boyd, *The Myth of a Christian Nation*, p. 20.

⁵⁷ This was also the purpose behind the civil laws of the Old Testament. Israel was first exposed to the **system of stoning** in Egypt (Ex. 8:25-26) and wanted to implement this system before God ever commanded it (Ex. 17:3-4). Just like Israel demanded God to give them a king like the other nations, even though God knew this wasn’t a good idea, so did they evidently want the system of stoning, so God “gave them up to statutes *that were* not good, and judgments by which they could not live” Ezekiel 20:25 (NKJV). Though God hates the death penalty for His children, He also sees that these civil laws are good for externally restraining unconverted people from doing things that would lead to widespread suffering.

thighs were **bronze**,³³ its legs were **iron**, and its feet were a combination of **iron and baked clay**.

We don't need to speculate concerning the meaning of this dream, because Daniel said that he "will tell the king what it means." Daniel 2:36. He goes on to explain that the head of gold symbolizes Nebuchadnezzar and his kingdom of Babylon (v. 38); the chest and arms of silver represent the kingdom which would conquer them (v. 39), namely the Medes and the Persians (Dan. 5:28, 31); and the belly and thighs of brass is the kingdom which conquered Medo-Persia, namely Greece (Dan. 8:3-7, 20-21; 11:2-3). The legs of iron are described as the fourth kingdom that would conquer Greece—Rome.⁵⁸ Later God gave Daniel more details about these kingdoms through a dream, describing them as four vicious beasts (**Lion, Bear, Leopard, & Terrible beast**—Dan. 7), which corresponded to the four metals.

The kingdoms from Babylon to Rome have been like Satan's sandbox where he has been refining the principles of his government, and their history is recorded for us to examine his methods and the fruit thereof. When we look at the history of these empires, we find a few common threads that constitute the "DNA" of each beastly power:

- The ruler is a **representative of the gods**⁵⁹
- who wields both **political and spiritual authority**
- while exercising **word-wide influence**.
- **Religious laws are created by the religious power**
- and **enforced by the State**
- through **force or coercion** (usually through threat of death).

According to Félix Guirand, ancient Babylon was ruled by a "divine priest-king," where "**Earthly kings, then, were only the representatives or vicars of Enlil (or Bêl)**."⁶⁰ Nebuchadnezzar was this "vicar" during the beginning of Daniel's captivity and as such he created religious laws and enforced them through the arm of the State on pain of death. We see this in the story of Daniel's friends and the fiery furnace,

⁵⁸ This is the standard exposition of Daniel's four kingdoms, which was held by much of the early church, as is evident from Hippolytus of Rome's (170-235 AD) *Commentary on Daniel* (2.12.1-6).

⁵⁹ The Medo-Persian, or Achaemenid, Empire is the exception of this point. Their rulers did not claim to be gods, but were servants of the gods.

⁶⁰ Félix Guirand, *Larousse Encyclopedia of Mythology*, 53.

where Nebuchadnezzar made laws to compel men into a *false system of worship* (bowing to an image of the king).

“Nebuchadnezzar saw nothing inappropriate in commanding worship under threat of such fiery destruction. Did not the gods themselves threaten similar retribution on those who incurred their displeasure?

“Twenty-five centuries later, many of us find the king’s call to worship incredibly cruel and uncivilized. But was he any more cruel than the apostle Paul—before his experience on the Damascus road—when, ‘breathing out threats and murder,’ he tried to force people to submit to his fearsome god? And are there not millions in this modern age who believe in a god who demands not only their submission, but even their love and trust—all under threat, not just of death in a blazing furnace, but of eternal torture in the flames?”⁶¹

God urged Nebuchadnezzar’s men (as He speaks to all men) not to kill the three Hebrews, but they rejected this impression from the Spirit, seeking instead to save themselves from the king’s wrath. The Hebrew boys were staying loyal to God—something which is only possible if the Spirit of Christ is in you. So, when they went to kill Daniel’s friends, they were, in reality, crucifying Christ through them. They rejected Christ, the Tree of Life, and we know what the natural result of such a decision is.

Daniel 3:22 And because the king, in his anger, had demanded such a hot fire in the furnace, **the flames killed the soldiers as they threw the three men in.**

God did not have to externally inflict destruction upon those who sought to kill Him in His people, for this was the natural result that they reaped! Thus we see the justice of God executed against those who persecuted his people in Babylon.

Psalm 9:16 **The LORD is known for his justice. The wicked are trapped by their own deeds...**

⁶¹ Maxwell, *Servants or Friends?*, p. 45-46.

Jeremiah 17:10 (KJV) I the Lord search the heart, *I* try the reins, even **to give every man according to his ways, *and* according to the fruit of his doings.**

MEDIA

Darius the Mede, the general under the Persian King Cyrus, helped conquer Babylon, and temporarily reigned there as a vassal king.⁶² During this time, some of the princes in the kingdom didn't like Daniel because he was "preferred above the presidents and princes..." Daniel 6:3. Afraid that Daniel would outperform them, they came up with a plan to get rid of him and preserve their status and salary. They did this by influencing the King to make a religious law that compelled everyone to participate in a false system of worship or be thrown into the lion's den (Dan. 6:5-7).

Of course, Daniel didn't stop praying to His God (even though it was illegal), for He knew that His relationship with his Father was his Source of life, peace, and joy. Just as God honored the fidelity of Daniel's three friends by supernaturally showing that He was with them in their fiery trial, so too did He honor Daniel by supernaturally protecting him in the lion's den (Dan. 6:20-22). Because Daniel, like his friends, lived in harmony with the law of love by having Christ dwell in their hearts by faith, his heavenly Father protected him from the evil inventions of his enemies. And how did God punish those who sought to destroy His people? Just as Christ responded to Israel when they rejected Him, He departed (Matt. 12:14-15; John 8:58-59; 12:36) and let them reap what they sowed (Matt. 23:37-39).

Daniel 6:24 **Then the king gave orders to arrest the men who had maliciously accused Daniel. He had them thrown into the lions' den, along with their wives and children. The lions leaped on them and tore them apart before they even hit the floor of the den.**

God was not the One who threw these people into the lion's den, but their sins had separated them from God so that He could not protect them from the wrath of the king. Since they would not allow Christ to protect them as a hen guards her chicks (Matt. 23:37), they were given over to and destroyed by their enemies.

⁶² Several scholars identify Darius the Mede as the historical Ugbaru. See William H. Shea's "The Search for Darius the Mede (Concluded), or, The Time of the Answer to Daniel's Prayer and the Date of the Death of Darius the Mede," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*, vol. 12, is. 1, art. 9 (2001), <https://tinyurl.com/5pk72phn>.

Ezekiel 39:21, 23 (GNT) ²¹ The Lord said, “I will let the nations see my glory and show them **how I use my power to carry out my just decisions [judgment/justice]**... ²³ the Israelites went into exile because of the sins which they committed against me. **I turned away from them and let their enemies defeat them and kill them in battle.**

Psalm 7:14–16 ¹⁴ The wicked conceive evil; they are pregnant with trouble and give birth to lies. ¹⁵ **They dig a deep pit to trap others, then fall into it themselves.** ¹⁶ **The trouble they make for others backfires on them. The violence they plan falls on their own heads.**⁶³

Ecclesiastes 10:8 (KJV) **He that diggeth a pit shall fall into it; and whoso breaketh a hedge, a serpent shall bite him.**

PERSIA

In the Persian arm of the kingdom, we find the story of Esther, a young Hebrew who marries King Xerxes (aka Ahasuerus). About five years later, Xerxes’s Prime Minister, Haman (Esther 3:1), came on the scene. Haman, like the Antichrist power, pompously tried to exalt “himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped...” (2 Thes. 2:4 KJV). Haman got what he wanted when the King passed a law requiring everyone to bow before him (Esther 3:2), just as Nebuchadnezzar commanded that all should bow before his image. However, just as God had loyal children in Babylon, He had others in Persia. One servant who **refused to “worship the beast”** was Mordecai. This caused Haman to be **“filled with rage [wrath]...** it was not enough to lay hands on Mordecai alone. Instead, he looked for a way to destroy all the Jews.” Esther 3:5-6.

Here we see the spirit of the Great Dragon. When God’s people allow Christ to live in and through them, thereby manifesting His character, Satan is full of “great wrath” (Rev. 12:12 KJV) and seeks to destroy Christ in the person of His people, just like he did through Cain. The enmity Satan has for the Church, symbolized by a pure virgin,⁶⁴ shall be especially manifested in the end, just as it was in the beginning:

⁶³ In the context, this is what happens after God prepares His “sword” and “his deadly weapons” to “shoot his flaming arrows.” Psalm 7:12–13.

⁶⁴ Jer. 6:2 + Is. 51:16; Matt. 25:1; Eph. 5:23–32; 2 Cor. 11:2.

Revelation 12:17 And **the dragon was angry at the woman [Church] and declared war against the rest of her children—all who keep God’s commandments and maintain their testimony for Jesus** [have the testimony of Jesus].

How will Satan seek to destroy God’s commandment keeping people in the end days? The same way he tried to annihilate God’s children in Babylon and Medo-Persia—through religious laws enforced by the State. However, the same God that intervened on behalf of Mordecai (Esther 6:1–3), is the same God that will look after His children when the Mark of the Beast is enforced (Rev. 7:1-3; 9:3-4).

After remembering that Mordecai had previously preserved his life (such is the nature of the salt of the earth), the King wanted to reward him for his goodness, so he went to Haman and asked what he should do for such a noble man.

Esther 6:4–10 (AMPC) ⁴ The king said, Who is in the court? Now **Haman had just come into the outer court of the king’s palace to ask the king to hang Mordecai on the gallows he had prepared for him.** ⁵ And the king’s servants said to him, Behold, Haman is standing in the court. And the king said, Let him come in. ⁶ So Haman came in. **And the king said to him, What shall be done to the man whom the king delights to honor? Now Haman said to himself, To whom would the king delight to do honor more than to me?** ⁷ And Haman said to the king, For the man whom the king delights to honor, ⁸ Let royal apparel be brought which the king has worn and the horse which the king has ridden, and a royal crown be set on his head. ⁹ And let the apparel and the horse be delivered to the hand of one of the king’s most noble princes. Let him array the man whom the king delights to honor, and conduct him on horseback through the open square of the city, and proclaim before him, Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delights to honor. ¹⁰ **Then the king said to Haman, Make haste and take the apparel and the horse, as you have said, and do so to Mordecai the Jew,** who sits at the king’s gate. Leave out nothing that you have spoken.

Haman wanted to exalt himself and hang Mordecai, but in the end the words of Jesus rang true: “**But those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.**” Matthew 23:12. This is God’s justice in action: if we bake self-exaltation, we’ll eat humble pie.

Esther 7:9–10 (AMPC) ⁹ Then said Harbonah, one of the attendants serving the king, Behold, the gallows fifty cubits high, which Haman has made for Mordecai, whose warning saved the king, stands at the house of Haman. And the king said, Hang him on it! ¹⁰ **So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. Then the king's wrath was pacified [appeased, H7918].**

When God leaves the wicked to reap what they sow, we see a manifestation of His wrath (Is. 54:7-8; 57:17). The wrath of God is not anything like Satan's wrath, for Satan's wrath is only pacified by executing his form of justice without mercy—by killing those who go against his will.

Which path shall we trod? Which tree shall we eat from? Will we view the methods of Satan and God as the same, and partake of the Tree of Knowledge? Or shall we accept Christ, the Tree of Life, who never wrathfully killed anyone when He was rejected?

GREECE

After Alexander the Great conquered the Medo-Persian Empire, the Macedonians rose to prominence. As the Babylonian kings were said to be “vicars,” or representatives, of Enlil, so too did Alexander deify himself as the son of Zeus.⁶⁵ After this “god” died the death of an alcoholic (or by malaria, historians aren't too sure of the exact cause), his kingdom was divided between his four generals, thus fulfilling the prophecy of the four-headed leopard (Dan. 7:6) and the four horns of the goat (Dan. 8:8, 22; also see Dan. 11:3-4).

The history of the Grecian kingdom reveals many insights into the cosmic conflict between Christ and Satan. Unfortunately, there is no record of their interaction with the Israelites in the canon of Scripture. However, we do have the record of 1 Maccabees (written between 103-76 B.C.), which makes for an interesting and accurate record of history (but not necessarily theology).

After Greece was divided, Seleucid took over the territory of Israel. Later, Antiochus IV Epiphanes, who had previously been a hostage at Rome (1 Mac. 1:10), became the ruler of the Seleucid Empire (175 B.C.) and reigned as a tyrant. He plundered and burned Jerusalem and took many Jews captive (1 Mac. 1:20-38). Not

⁶⁵ Samuel Angus, *The Mystery-Religions and Christianity: A Study in the Religious Background of Early Christianity* (New York, NY: Carol Publishing Group, 1989), p. 20.

only that, but he—like Nebuchadnezzar, Darius, and Xerxes—issued religious decrees outlawing religious freedom and obedience to God’s laws.

1 Maccabees 1:41–49 (KJV) ⁴¹ Moreover **king Antiochus wrote to his whole kingdom**, that all should be one people, ⁴² and **every one should leave his laws**: so all the heathen agreed according to **the commandment of the king**. ⁴³ Yea, many *also* of the Israelites consented to his religion, and sacrificed unto idols, and profaned the sabbath. ⁴⁴ For the king had sent letters by messengers unto Jerusalem and the cities of Juda, **that they should follow the strange laws of the land**, ⁴⁵ and forbid burnt offerings, and sacrifice, and drink offerings, in the temple; and **that they should profane the sabbaths and festival days...** ⁴⁹ **to the end they might forget the law, and change all the ordinances**. ⁵⁰ And **whosoever would not do according to the commandment of the king, he said, he should die.**⁶⁶

When Antiochus rejected the still small voice of God (1 Kings 19:12) and did these things, he was effectively cutting himself off from the Source of all peace, knowledge, and wisdom. The result? An insanity reminiscent of Nebuchadnezzar’s Boanthropy.⁶⁷ Eventually Antiochus, like a number of his spiritual ancestors, claimed to be a manifestation of the gods and demanded worship as such—thus he added *Epiphanes*, meaning “God Manifest,” to his name. But, because of his cognitive decline some of his contemporaries called him Antiochus *Epimanes*—Antiochus “The Insane”—a wordplay on *Epiphanes*. The character of Antiochus further displays the satanic principles of self-exaltation and coercion that breed only misery and abasement when fostered.

⁶⁶ Some people see Antiochus’ defiling of the temple and the subsequent cleansing and rededication of the temple about 3 years after as a fulfillment of Daniel 8:14, but the math does not add up. Many reasons could be given as to why the application of Antiochus as the little horn of Daniel 8 unfavorable, but here we will just look at the math. The prophecy states that at some point the temple will be cleansed after 2300 evening and mornings. A few interpreters view this as denoting 2300 evening and morning sacrifices, or 1150 days. However, Antiochus defiled the temple on the 15th day of the month Chislew in the 145th year (1 Mac. 1:54) and cleansed and rededicated it on the 25th of Chislew in the 148th year (1 Mac. 4:52). The time in between these two events come out to either 1080 days (360 day year) or 1095 days (365 day year). Obviously neither of these periods meet the qualifications for 1,150 days or 2300 days. For an alternative, spiritual, interpretation which has a practical application for you today, please see *Atonement* (Father of Love, 2021), by Adrian Ebens, available for free at fatheroflove.info.

⁶⁷ “Boanthropy is a psychological disorder in which the sufferer believes he or she is a cow or ox.” “Nebuchadnezzar and boanthropy” (March 17, 2021), *The Pharmaceutical Journal*, <http://tinyurl.com/3w8z98zm>.

Satan's modus operandi doesn't change much. It only adapts according to time and place. Time and time again he sets up rulers who claim to represent divinity, imposes laws on his subjects that are contrary to God's laws, and uses force and threats of death to compel frightened submission. Could it be that Satan was projecting his own attributes onto God when he accused Him of being selfish, arbitrary, and tyrannical?

Eventually the Hebrews overthrew the yoke of Greek oppression with the help of Judas Maccabeus. Instead of trusting in God to save them from this tyranny, Judas forged a league that united them with Rome in 161 B.C. (1 Mac. 8:1; Dan. 11:23). This fateful compromise marked the beginning of Israel's illicit relationship with Rome, which soon turned sour.

ROME

As the Grecian Empire was declining, the Roman Empire was rising to dominance. Daniel foretold that this kingdom would be "as strong as iron" — for "iron smashes and crushes everything it strikes." (Daniel 2:40). Rome indeed lived up to this reputation, devouring all surrounding nations with its iron teeth (Dan. 7:19) until it encircled the Mediterranean. Edward Gibbon described Rome's iron grip, echoing the prophetic words of Daniel:

"... the images of gold, or silver, or brass, that might serve to represent the nations and their kings were successively broken by **the iron monarchy of Rome.**"⁶⁸

The kingdoms of Babylon, Medo-Persia, and Greece each made unique contributions to civilization—but they also furthered the satanic principles of religious intolerance and state supremacy. Now it was the Roman's turn to leave their mark on history. As Satan continued crafting his masterpiece of deception, Rome would prove an effective vehicle for uniting spiritual and temporal power under the banner of spiritual Babylon. It was during Rome's iron reign that the Son of God revealed the principles of His Father's Kingdom in stark contrast to this Satanic system.

⁶⁸ Edward Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, (New York: The Modern Library), vol. 2, ch. 38, p. 437-438, <https://tinyurl.com/2kytp5wd>.

Satan's greatest kingdoms had combined their false religions with the state, and Rome was no exception. The same year Pompey conquered Judea in 63 B.C., another important event occurred—Julius Caesar was elected to the office of Pontifex Maximus, *the head chair of the Roman College of Pontiffs*.⁶⁹ Thus, as he retained this position until his assassination, Caesar was not only the head of the State as a perpetual dictator, but he was simultaneously the head of the “Church.” This imperial cult matured when Caesar was posthumously deified by the Senate, a belief that was utilized by his adopted son to secure political and spiritual control. According to Augustus, if his father was a god, then he must be the son of god! Thus the blasphemous reign of Rome (in all of its stages) fulfilled prophecy:

Daniel 8:25 (KJV) And through his policy also he shall cause craft to prosper in his hand; and **he shall magnify *himself* in his heart**, and by peace shall destroy many: he shall also **stand up against the Prince of princes**; but he shall be broken without hand.

The Roman emperors not only magnified themselves in this fashion, but they also stood up against the Prince of Princes by crucifying the *true* Son of God!

Christ was crucified in the person of his people (Matt. 25:40) from Babylon to Greece, but He was crucified in His own body by Rome. The cross of Christ occurs every time someone harms one who does good, for all the good people do is simply a manifestation of God's Spirit working through them (Matt. 19:17; Phil. 2:13; John 10:38; 14:10). But what system persecuted Christ in Jerusalem? The same system that systematically persecuted His children throughout history—the *union of church and state*.

Though paganism and the State were closely entwined in the Roman Empire, the persecution of Christ was not incited by heathens, but by the self-proclaimed children of the true God. Tragically, the very people who should have recognized their Messiah became Satan's agents, demanding the death of the Son of God.

The main reason the Jews sought to crucify the Son of God is because He manifested the character of God in the clearest way possible, and this revelation was a far cry from their ideas. The Jews saw God as a “man of war”⁷⁰ who would utterly

⁶⁹ “Pontifex Maximus,” *Livius*, <http://tinyurl.com/yc8e63xd>.

⁷⁰ Though Moses described God as a man of war in Exodus 15:3, God told David that he was not allowed to build the temple, because he “hast been a man of war, and hast shed blood.” 1 Chronicles 28:3. Instead of describing God as a man of war in Exodus 15:3, the Greek Old Testament (LXX), which the New Testament authors often quoted from, describes God as “bringing wars to nought...” Isaiah 42:13 likewise calls God a man of war, but the Greek translation describes Him as the One who “shall go forth, and crush the war...”

crush His enemies if they crossed Him, which is why they expected the Messiah to be a violent political radical (like Judas Maccabeus or Barabbas) who would lead a revolution against the Romans. But Jesus, the original Iconoclast, shattered their preconceived ideas when He taught an enemy-loving, violence-shunning, religion of grace and peace. Christ's life was a light that exposed the religious hypocrisy of His time, and to shut out this light the "Church" urged her abusive lover (Rome) to put the Son of God to death—just as Eve (a symbol of the Church) went to Adam (a symbol of the State) with the forbidden fruit (a distorted view of God's character).

Just as the "wise men" of Babylon, Medo-Persia, and Greece sought to have their religious dogmas enforced through the arm of the State, the Jewish "wise men" (the Sanhedrin) likewise used the Roman State to enforce their laws. But what was their justification for this?

John 11:47–50 ⁴⁷Then the leading priests and Pharisees called the high council together. "What are we going to do?" they asked each other. "This man certainly performs many miraculous signs. ⁴⁸If we allow him to go on like this, soon everyone will believe in him. Then the Roman army will come and destroy both our Temple and our nation." ⁴⁹Caiaphas, who was high priest at that time, said, "You don't know what you're talking about! ⁵⁰You don't realize that **it's better for you that one man should die for the people than for the whole nation to be destroyed.**"

The leader of the Jewish Church said that Jesus needed to die for the "*common good*" of the nation. They were afraid of being destroyed by Rome, so to save themselves, they thought Rome had to kill Jesus instead of them! Is it not interesting that many people are afraid of being destroyed by God, so to save themselves, they think God had to kill Jesus instead of us? This is known as *penal substitution*, and it is utterly reprehensible to my mind.⁷¹

If only Israel had a proper understanding of God's justice, they could have been saved from the consequences of their actions. God's justice is seen in allowing us to choose our own path and reap what we sow. What was the path Israel chose? Who was the ruler they requested?

⁷¹ For more information concerning the doctrine of penal substitution and its shortcomings, please see Kevin J. Mullins, *Did God Kill Jesus Instead of Killing Us?*, <https://tinyurl.com/DidGodKillJesus>, and Adrian Ebens, *At-One-Ment*, <https://tinyurl.com/At-One-Ment>.

John 19:15 “Away with him,” they yelled. “Away with him! Crucify him!” “What? Crucify your king?” Pilate asked. “**We have no king but Caesar,**” the leading priests shouted back.

Israel said that they had no husband but Caesar, so Caesar, instead of Christ, was their protector. How did this relationship with Caesar end for Israel when she tried to file for divorce? Like an abusive husband, Rome didn’t tolerate her rebellion, so he utterly destroyed her in 70 A.D. It was then that the Roman general Vespasian was tasked by Nero with crushing the Jewish rebellion, which resulted in the complete obliteration of Jerusalem by fire.

Just as those who threw Daniel’s friends into the fiery furnace were consumed with the flames they kindled, just as those who dug the lion’s den for Daniel fell into it, just as Haman was hung on the gallows he built for Mordecai, so too did the Jews suffer the same method of execution they imposed on the Son of God. Israel killed Christ through the power of Rome, so they were crushed by Rome. And since they utilized a cross to kill Jesus, during the siege of Jerusalem “500 Jews were crucified each day for several months” by the Romans.⁷²

Proverbs 1:30–31 ³⁰They rejected my advice and paid no attention when I corrected them. ³¹**Therefore, they must eat the bitter fruit of living their own way, choking on their own schemes.**

They reaped what they sowed, and God’s justice was thus satisfied. Yes, the Jews were judged out of their own mouth (Luke 19:22) when they said, “**His blood be on us, and on our children.**” Matthew 27:25 (KJV).

God did not satisfy His justice by killing those who rejected Him (this is Satan’s method); He simply allowed Israel to reject the Source of life and protection, leaving them to reap the consequences of their decision.

Matthew 23:37 “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones God’s messengers! **How often I have wanted to gather your children together as a hen protects her chicks beneath her wings, but you wouldn’t let me.**

⁷² Peter Colón, “Crucifixion: The Exhumed Evidence” (1995), *Israel My Glory*, <http://tinyurl.com/mrtbba34>.

The way Satan treats his subjects (as seen in the fate of Jerusalem) is incredibly cruel. Many sincere Christians, however, have a blind spot in their estimation of God, for many teach that God’s laws—like the religious decrees of Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome—have no inherent consequences. Either we hear from the pulpit that there’s no need for obedience since God changed His moral code, the 10 Commandments,⁷³ or that we must obey God lest He burn us alive in a “fiery furnace” which would put Nebuchadnezzar to shame (or both).

Is it possible we have a conception of God that looks very unlike Jesus? The question we must prayerfully ask ourselves is whether or not God is like Jesus or Nebuchadnezzar? Did Jesus reveal God’s love while Nebuchadnezzar and Xerxes revealed His wrath and justice? Or is it true that God really does look just like Jesus? Was His life the *full* revelation of what God is like? Even the way He gets angry and exercises His wrath and justice? Was Christ’s testimony that “he that hath seen me hath seen the Father...” (John 14:9) all-encompassing, or not? We have to be careful how we answer, because our answer is the difference between eating from the Tree of Life (Christ’s revelation of His Father), or the Tree of the Knowledge of good AND evil (Satan’s claims about God).

	<i>Religious Laws</i>	<i>Made By</i>	<i>In Order To</i>	<i>Enforced By</i>	<i>Penalty</i>
<i>Babylon</i>	Worship Image	King	Exalt Self	State	Fiery Furnace
<i>Media</i>	Pray to King	Wise Men	Preserve Power	State	Lion’s Den
<i>Persia</i>	Bow to Haman	King	Exalt Self	State	Gallows
<i>Greece</i>	Violate Sabbath, etc.	King	Preserve Power	State	Death
<i>Rome</i>	Violate Sabbath	Church	Preserve Self	State	Crucifixion

⁷³ Thinking that God’s law can be changed shows that we see them as arbitrary. It makes no sense to change a law that has intrinsic consequences, for how would we know the way of safety without it? This would be akin to a group voting to change the “law” of hydration. If we stopped believing that drinking water is essential for our well-being, many people would suffer because of their ignorance.

CHAPTER 5

THE MASTERPIECE OF MISREPRESENTATION

As we traced the succession of nations portrayed in prophecy, a pattern emerged. In each kingdom, consistent strands of DNA were found in each “beast”:

- The ruler is a **representative of the gods**
- who wields both **political and spiritual authority**
- while exercising **word-wide influence**.
- **Religious laws created by the Church** (wise men)
- and **enforced through the arm of the State**
- through **force or coercion**.

Just as *10 toes* came forth from the *4th metal of iron* (symbolizing Rome), so too did *10 horns* come from the *4th beast with iron teeth* (also Rome). Therefore, many look for a revived Roman Empire (or other kingdom) to rule the world through ten leaders, with the Antichrist leading them all to enforce a global, anti-Christian religion—and understandably so. This Antichrist is known as the “Little Horn” which Daniel sees come out of the ten horns:

Daniel 7:8 As I was looking at the horns, suddenly another small horn appeared among them. Three of the first horns were torn out by the roots to make room for it. This little horn had eyes like human eyes and a mouth that was boasting arrogantly.

Daniel 7:23–25 ²³Then he said to me, “This fourth beast is the fourth world power that will rule the earth. It will be different from all the others. It will devour the whole world, trampling and crushing everything in its path. ²⁴Its ten horns are ten kings... Then another king will arise, different from the other ten, who will subdue three of them. ²⁵He will defy the Most High and oppress the holy people of the Most High. He will try to change their sacred

festivals and laws, and they will be placed under his control for a time, times, and half a time.

I used to try to figure out who this Little Horn could be, and (thanks to my steady consumption of popular Evangelical media) I knew to look for a charismatic ruler like Nicolae Carpathia⁷⁴ to arrive, outlaw Christianity, and establish a “New World Order.” I wasn’t alone in my speculations, since just about every studious Evangelical had theories for every significant person under the sun. We were *sure* that Hitler was *the Antichrist*. And then we were positive it was Ronald (6) Wilson (6) Reagan (6). But now it’s either Henry Kissinger, Mikhail Gorbachev, Prince Charles, or Obama.

There’s just one small hole in these theories. Well, more like a 1,500-year-sized hole, sitting right between the fall of Rome and the future kingdom of the Antichrist we have been looking for. We placed this “gap” in the statue of Daniel 2, right between the legs of iron and the 10 toes, even though the rise and fall of the previous world powers had no gaps at all—each kingdom was immediately followed by the next. So what if, instead of skipping the history after the decline of the Roman Empire, we looked around this period to see if anything matches what prophecy says happens next? Can we find anything resembling the description of the Little Horn Antichrist sometime after the fall of Rome? And since the previous kingdoms all had the same “DNA,” are there any kingdoms following the fall of Rome that corresponds with their spiritual ancestry?

5.1 THE TEN HORNS

What could the 10 toes and horns attached to the Roman Empire be symbolic of? Scripture often uses numbers in symbolic ways. Concerning the number 10, it can represent *the divided whole of something*. Consider the ten virgins—a symbol of *the whole Church* (Matt. 25:1), which is *divided* into many denominations—and the 10 commandments—a summary of *man’s whole duty*, which is *divided* into 10 specifics defining how to love God and man. Thus the 10 toes and horns could be a description of the division of the once unified Iron Monarchy. After the fall of Rome in 476 A.D.,⁷⁵ the Roman Empire no longer appears to Daniel as a unified whole, instead, it is symbolized as a fractured kingdom, “a multiplicity of states in contrast to the one

⁷⁴ Nicolae Carpathia is the Antichrist figure in Tim LaHaye’s *Left Behind* series.

⁷⁵ This is the traditional year which marked the downfall of the Western Roman Empire.

empire of Rome.”⁷⁶ The number of tribal kingdoms that took over Rome fluctuated throughout history but averaged around 10.⁷⁷ The Irish preacher, Henry Grattan Guinness, described the situation as follows:

“... the one empire of Rome was to become multiple, tenfold—a commonwealth of kingdoms, yet a Roman world still. It was to break up, not into two, nor into four, but into ten independent co-existing kingdoms, which were to last for over twelve centuries; varying continually in number, extent, and mutual relation; never again coalescing into one, never subdividing into forty or fifty fragments, never forming into one great federation like the United States, but continuing in isolated independence, to average ten in number right on the end, owning all the time a voluntary submission to Rome under a new aspect.”⁷⁸

But what of the “Little Horn Antichrist” which was to arise among the 10?

When we look at history after the decline of Rome, we indeed find a little power growing out from the Iron Empire which grew to blasphemous heights and inherited the same “DNA” as her predecessors. What kingdom **came out of the Roman Empire** (the Little Horn grew out of the fourth beast) that had a ruler who claimed to be a **representative of divinity** with both **political and spiritual authority**? What system had a man that made these claims and likewise had **word-wide influence** to create **religious laws** and used the “kings of the earth” (Rev. 17:18), or the **State, to enforce them with force and coercion**?

Anyone well acquainted with history will immediately recognize that the power I’m describing is *the Roman Church-State system*. Is it possible that these parallels could indicate that the *medieval Papacy* is the antichristian power described in prophecy? Before we continue, I must stress the fact that I *love* my Catholic brothers and sisters

⁷⁶ Gerhard Pfandl, *Daniel the Seer of Babylon*, (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2004), p. 63. For more information concerning the nature of the 10 horns and why we have taken the position we have concerning the 10 horns as it relates to history, please consult Heidi Heiks’ *AD 538 Source Book*, (TEACH Services, 2010), chapter 2. Others interpret the ten horns as being specific kingdoms which comprised divided Rome after its fall. If this is the case, the most likely candidates include the following based on the criteria of the text: the (1) Britons, (2) Anglo-Saxons, (3) Franks, (4) Burgundians, (5) Suevi, (6) Ostrogoths, (7) Lombards, (8) Visigoths, (9) Vandals, (10) Byzantium. For more information on the criteria involved in creating this list, please see Dojčin Živadinović, “Historical-Biblical Re-Analysis of the ‘Ten Horns’ in Daniel 7.”

⁷⁷ 10 is often used in the Scriptures as a round number (Gen. 31:7; Num. 14:22; 1 Sam. 1:8; etc.) and should be taken as such here.

⁷⁸ Henry Grattan Guinness, *Light for the Last Days: A Study Historic and Prophetic* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1888), p. 275.

out there. It's not my job to judge and condemn anyone, but to point out the striking parallels between the prophetic records and the testimony of history. If you, after studying these things, disagree with my views, that's fine. However, I would, at the very least, keep this perspective in mind, because what if it's right and the things discussed begin to come to pass? So before dismissing this as anti-Catholic rhetoric, let's look at the evidence, for "He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, It is folly and shame unto him." Proverbs 18:13 (KJV).

5.2 DISSECTING THE DNA OF THE ANTICHRIST

Each of the beastly powers described by Daniel absorbed the tendencies of those they conquered—like animals higher up on the food chain—each assimilating the energy and nutrients of the smaller animals. The lion (Babylon) is eaten by the bear (Medo-Persia), which is beaten by a leopard (Greece), which is "devoured" (Dan. 7:7) by the terrible **beast which rose out of the sea** (Dan. 7:3) and had **ten horns** (Dan. 7:7)—aka Rome. With this in mind, consider the remarkable description of the Sea Beast in Revelation:

Revelation 13:1–2 ¹ Then I saw **a beast rising up out of the sea. It had seven heads and ten horns**, with ten crowns on its horns. And written on each head were names that blasphemed God. ² This beast looked like a **leopard**, but it had the feet of a **bear** and the mouth of a **lion**! And the dragon gave the beast his own power and throne and great authority.

What a striking callback to Daniel's prophetic vision! This is an amalgamated beast which, like the 1958 "Blob" or Star Trek's "Borg," assimilates the characteristics of her predecessors—just like Rome! This beast has seven heads because the four previous beasts had a total of 7 heads.⁷⁹ And like the Roman beast of Daniel 7, this beast also comes out of the sea and has ten horns (7:3, 7)! But this beast power is not

⁷⁹ Lion (1 head) + Bear (1 head) + Greece (4 heads) + Rome (1 head) = 7 heads.

simply Imperial Rome as many scholars and preterists conclude.⁸⁰ Rather, this beast is Rome in *all* of its phases—both Imperial and “Christian.”⁸¹

Scripture also informs us that the seven heads “are seven mountains, on which the woman sitteth.” Revelation 17:9. Incredibly, Rome is famously known as “the City on Seven Hills.” Some argue that St. Peter’s Basilica is actually on the West side of the Tiber River, while the seven hills are on the East side, and they are correct. However, many who make this claim are incorrect in claiming Rome is not the city on seven hills for this reason, as the official seat, or *kathedra*, of the Pope is not in St. Peter’s Basilica, but is in the Archbasilica of Saint John Lateran, which indeed sits upon one of the seven mountains. Whether the mountains are literal or symbolic of governments⁸² (or both), Rome still fits the bill.

When we look at the description of the Little Horn power and compare it to the beast of Revelation 13, we see the following parallels:

- Both arise in a highly populated area (Dan. 7:8, 24; Rev. 13:1; 17:15).
- Both speak great words (blasphemies) against God (Dan. 7:8, 25; Rev. 13:1, 5-6).
- Both persecute the saints for 1,260 prophetic days (Dan. 7:25;⁸³ Rev. 13:5⁸⁴).
- Both persecute the saints and overcome them during this time (Dan. 7:21; Rev. 13:7).

This beast is a new and enlarged symbol describing the “Little Horn” Antichrist of Daniel 7.

What are the identifying factors of this power?

⁸⁰ I say that this beast is “*not simply*” Imperial Rome, for it is very likely that John’s original audience saw “the symbolism of chapter 13 as outworkings of a system that was familiar to them. They may well have seen satanic forces behind the might of imperial Rome... But while we grant that the first readers of the book may well have applied this chapter to Imperial Rome and its systems of worship, the text itself points us to a later time and a more Christian entity as the true and complete fulfillment of this text.” Jon Paulien, *Facebook Commentary on Revelation Chapter 13*, p. 20, <https://tinyurl.com/PaulienRev13>.

⁸¹ Daniel 8 likewise symbolizes the “little horn” as Rome in both its Pagan and Papal stages.

⁸² A “mountain” can symbolize a nation or power in opposition to God. For example, see Jeremiah 51:25; Psalm 68:15-16; Isaiah 57:7. Thus the 7 heads could symbolize 7 kingdoms manipulated by the Dragon (Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, Pagan Rome, Papal Rome) or 7 phases of Roman government (Kingly, Consular, Decemvirate, Dictatorship, Military Tribunes, Imperial, and Papal). Lists vary for each theory.

⁸³ Time (1 year), times (2 years), and half a time ($\frac{1}{2}$ year) = 3.5 years x 360 days per year = 1,260 days

⁸⁴ 42 months x 30 days per month = 1,260 days

- a) It is a “beast” (Rev. 13:1), which represents **a kingdom** (Daniel 7:23).
- b) It has a **man as a figurehead** (Dan. 7:8).
- c) It comes **from the densely populated sea of people** (Rev. 17:15) **in the Old World** (Dan. 7:8, 24).
- d) It would “speak great words against the Most High,” or **blaspheme God** (Dan. 7:25).

While blasphemy has a broad range of meanings, what are some clear examples of blasphemy in Scripture?

John 10:33 They replied, “We’re stoning you not for any good work, but for **blasphemy! You, a mere man, claim to be God.**”

According to the Bible, one way to commit blasphemy is by falsely claiming equality with God. The accusations of the Jews give us another definition:

Luke 5:21 But the Pharisees and teachers of religious law said to themselves, “Who does he think he is? **That’s blasphemy! Only God can forgive sins!**”

Another definition of blasphemy is to claim the prerogative of God by, for example, claiming the ability to forgive sins. Thus, the man at the head of this kingdom should claim to be God on the earth and also claim to have the power to forgive our sins. This leads us to our next point:

- e) It is not only a political power but also **a religious power**. It demands worship and gets it (Rev. 13:8).
- f) It is a **worldwide power** (Rev. 13:3).⁸⁵

What power arose in the Old World, requires worship, is a worldwide power, and has a man as a figurehead who claims to be the representative of God on earth and forgive sins? If you guessed the Roman Papacy, you’re spot on.

⁸⁵ I’m using the phrase “world-wide” in the Biblical sense. This power is “world-wide” *in its influence*—in the same way the previous kingdoms were “world-wide” in their influence.

What are the other identifying factors of the Antichrist power?

- g) Is an **extension** of the 4th beast of Daniel 7, which symbolized **Rome** (Dan. 7:7-8).
- h) It would **uproot 3 of the horns** [tribal kingdoms] (Dan. 7:8).
- i) It would **persecute the saints for 1,260 prophetic days** (Dan. 7:25; Rev. 13:5).

Let's consider each of these factors and see if the Roman Catholic system fits these characteristics.

(A) A BEASTLY POWER WITH (B) A FIGUREHEAD

The beast from the sea is portrayed as a “beast,” which, according to Daniel’s vision in chapter 7, is symbolic of a kingdom (Dan. 7:23). However, a kingdom always has a ruler who is identified as the head, or representative, of the empire. For instance, Daniel declared that Nebuchadnezzar was the “head of gold” (Dan. 2:38), which symbolized Babylon. The next kingdom would conquer the head of gold, but Nebuchadnezzar was not conquered by Medo-Persia, one of his successors was. Thus we can see that *a “beast” primarily refers to a kingdom, and secondarily to the head of that kingdom*. This reveals that the Antichrist is a system, a political entity, with a man at the head of it—the man may pass away, but the “beast” remains.

Unfortunately, most don’t realize that the Papacy isn’t just a religious entity, but also a political power. It is a “kingdom,” and therefore a beast. For centuries, the Pope functioned as both the spiritual leader of Western Christendom and the political sovereign of the Papal States. As head of State, the Pope could raise armies, impose taxes, decree laws, sign treaties, and interact with other nations. Additionally, the popes “ruled over” the “kings of the Earth” (Rev. 17:18), crowning and deposing European monarchs for over a millennium. Indeed, the Papacy easily fits the description of a “beast,” and the Pope is the figurehead of this religio-political system.

(C) AROSE IN THE HIGHLY POPULATED AREA OF THE OLD WORLD

We saw that this kingdom would “rise up out of the sea” (Rev. 13:1), which represents “peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues” (Rev.17:15; cf. Is. 17:12-13; 8:7-8; Jer. 46:7-8) —this power would arise from a densely populated area.

More specifically, this power would come up among the little horns of Daniel’s fourth beast—or the divided Roman Empire, also known as Europe. The Roman Church grew up in the heart of the divided Roman Empire which was highly populated—something which cannot be said for Islam which arose in the Arabian Peninsula.

(D) BLASPHEMED GOD

Has the Papacy blasphemed God by (D1) claiming to be God on earth and (D2) forgive sins? Let’s hear it from the horse’s mouth. Pope Leo XIII (1810-1903) declared in his papal encyclical, *Praclara Gratulationis Publicae*, that “We hold upon this earth the place of God Almighty...”⁸⁶ What does he mean? Let’s allow some Popes and esteemed Catholic authorities to shed some light on this question:

- In the Decretals of Pope Gregory IX (?-1241), which constitutes canon law, we read:

“... **the Roman Pontiff does not exercise the office of a man, but of the true God on earth** [*Romanus Pontifex (qui non puri hominis, sed veri Dei vicem gerit in terris)]...*”⁸⁷

- Francesco Albertini (1469-1510), canon of the Basilica of San Lorenzo in Florence and a chaplain of Cardinal Fazio Santoro in Rome, wrote concerning the Pope:

“By the oracle of the voice of **the world you will rule, and you will be rightly merit to be called a god in the earth** [*habenas et merito in terris diceris esse deus*].”⁸⁸

- Christopher Marcellus, Archbishop of Carfū:

⁸⁶ Leo XIII, *Praclara Gratulationis Publicae*, encyclical letter, Vatican website, 1894, <https://tinyurl.com/bdddmevr>.

⁸⁷ *Decretales D. Gregorij Papae IX* (Venetiis, Apud Socios Aquilæ Renouantis 1605), p. 156, <https://tinyurl.com/yvx8xkdv>.

⁸⁸ Francesco Albertini, *Mirabilia Rome. Opusculu[m] de mirabilibus noue et ueteris urbis Rome* (1510), p. 53, <https://tinyurl.com/3e9sbrsv>.

“For thou [Pope Julius II] art our shepherd [John 10:11], thou art our physician [Matt. 9:12], thou art our governor [Matt. 2:6], thou art our husband man [John 15:1], **thou art finally another God on earth** [*alter Deus in terris*].”⁸⁹

- Seimon Begnius, Bishop of Modrusch in the sixth session of fifth Lateran, in the year 1513:

“But weep not daughter of Zion, for behold ‘The Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David’ [Rev. 5:5] comes; behold God has raised up for thee a saviour, who shall save you from the hands of the spoilers. We have expected thee, **O most blessed Leo, as the saviour that was to come** [*Te Leo beatissime, salvatorem venturum speravimus*].”⁹⁰

- Lucius Ferraris (1687-1763), Italian Franciscan canonist:

“The Pope is of such great dignity and exaltation, that **he is not a simple man, but as God, and the Vicar of God** [*Papa tantæ dignitatis & celsitudinis, ut non sit simplex homo, sed quasi Deus, and Vicarius Dei*]... As to papal authority, **the Pope is as it were God on earth** [*Papa est quasi Deus in Terra*], Sole sovereign of all the faithful of Christ, chief king of kings, having a plentitude of unbroken power, entrusted by the omnipotent God **to govern the earthly and heavenly kingdoms.**”⁹¹

- Pope Pius X (1835-1914):

“**The Pope** is not simply the representative of Jesus Christ, but he **is Jesus Christ Himself, hidden under the veil of the flesh. Is the Pope speaking? It is Jesus Christ who is speaks.**”⁹²

⁸⁹ Giovan Domenico Mansi, *Sacrorum Conciliorum* (Parisii: Expensis H. Welter, 1902), p. 761, <https://tinyurl.com/mtk6nmzx>.

⁹⁰ *Acta Conciliorum et Epistolae Decretales... Summorum Pontificum* (Parisii: Ex Typographia Regia, 1714), p. 1687, <https://tinyurl.com/yw836kdz>.

⁹¹ Lucius Ferraris, *Prompta Bibliotheca Canonica* (Venetiis: Apud Gasparem Storti, 1782), p. 26, 27, <https://tinyurl.com/ys3y4wwn>.

⁹² “Le pape n’est pas seulement le représentant de J.-C., mais il est J.-C. lui-même, caché sous le voile de la chair. Le pape parle-t-il? c’est J.-C. qui parle. Le pape accorde-t-il une grâce ou prononce-t-il un anathème? c’est J.-C. qui prononce l’anathème ou qui accorde la grâce.” From *Le Catholique National: organe des catholiques-*

- Pope John Paul II (1920-2005):

“**Have no fear when people call me the ‘Vicar of Christ,’ when they say to me ‘Holy Father,’ or ‘Your Holiness,’ or use titles similar to these, which seem even inimical [i.e. contrary] to the Gospel. Christ himself declared: ‘Call no one on earth your father; you have but one Father in heaven. Do not be called ‘Master’; you have but one master, the Messiah’ (Mt 23:9-10). These expressions, nevertheless, have evolved out of a long tradition, becoming part of common usage. **One must not be afraid of these words either.**”⁹³**

Just as the leaders of Babylon, Greece, and Rome claimed to be representatives of divinity, so too did the Roman Pontiff claim the same for himself.⁹⁴

(D2) CLAIMS TO FORGIVE SINS

It is a well-known fact that the priests of the Catholic Church claim to have the authority to forgive sins, and this is what Jesuit Priest, Joseph Deharbe (1800-1871), declared in his Catechism:

“2. What is the Sacrament of Penance?”

“It is a Sacrament in which **the Priest, in the place of God, forgives sins...**

“3. Does the Priest truly forgive the sins, or does he only declare that they are remitted?”

chrétiennes de la Suisse romande, July 13, 1895 (Berne: Imprimerie Jent et Reinert, 1891), p. 74-75, <https://tinyurl.com/4sarpfne> [University of Bern source] and <https://tinyurl.com/3rhy3mba> [source file]. Also see *Evangelical Christendom*, January 1, 1895 (London: J.S. Phillips), p. 15, <https://tinyurl.com/2h4bvfu7>.

⁹³ John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994), p. 6. Also see John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata*, encyclical letter, Vatican website, 1996, 46, <https://tinyurl.com/yc2b68j4>.

⁹⁴ Not only did Catholic authorities claim this for centuries, but this belief was disseminated among many faithful Catholics, such as François Ravaillac, the assassin of King Henry IV. *Procès, examen, confessions et négations du meschant & execrable parricide François Ravaillac sur la mort de Henry le Grand, & ce qui l'a fait entreprendre le malheureux acte* (A Paris: Chez Iean Richer, 1611), p. 39, <https://tinyurl.com/mu5zk7pn>.

“**The Priest does really and truly forgive the sins** in virtue of the power given to him by Christ.”⁹⁵

(E & F) WORLD-WIDE POLITICAL AND RELIGIOUS POWER

The end-time Antichristian Beast from the Sea is not only politically orientated, but it also has a religious dimension to it, for the seer on Patmos prophesied that “all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.” Revelation 13:8. The word “worship” is defined as follows:

4352. προσκυνέω *prōskunēō*, *pros-keo-neh'-o*; from 4314 and a prob. der. of 2965 (mean. **to kiss, like a dog licking his master's hand**); to *fawn* or *crouch to*, i.e. (lit. or fig.) **prostrate oneself in homage (do reverence to, adore)**:—worship.⁹⁶

The definition of worship implies veneration and adoration, which is seen in the act of kissing, a dog licking his master's hand, or bowing down in reverence. In antiquity, this word was frequently “used to designate the custom of prostrating oneself before persons and **kissing their feet** or the hem of their garment, the ground, etc.; **the Persians did this in the presence of their deified king, and the Greeks before a divinity** or someth[ing] holy.”⁹⁷ This sounds like a visual description of the medieval Papacy, as “**kissing the pope's foot was a regular part of the coronation ritual of the emperors...**”⁹⁸

Unfortunately, Scripture declares that “all the world wondered after the beast.” Revelation 13:3. The Papacy not only has prestige among Catholics in Italy, but the majority of the world adores Pope Francis and the humanitarian efforts of his Church. Indeed, the Papacy has representation with essentially every government on earth today and has a status as Permanent Observer at the United Nations.

⁹⁵ Joseph Deharbe, S.J., *A Full Catechism Of The Catholic Religion*, 6th ed. (New York: Schwartz, Kirwin & Fauss, 1912), p. 279, <https://tinyurl.com/bddmjtpz>.

⁹⁶ Strong's *Dictionary*, p. 61.

⁹⁷ William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), BDAG p. 882, προσκυνέω.

⁹⁸ Jack Hartnell, “The Middle Ages' Ultimate Sign of Loyalty” (November 12, 2019), *The Atlantic*, <http://tinyurl.com/5b3pec5u>.

“The pope is an utterly unique actor in international relations (IR). Acting in some ways like a state, **Pope Francis currently enjoys formal diplomatic relations with over 180 individual countries** across the globe, from Albania to Zimbabwe. At the same time, the pope is the spiritual leader of the Catholic Church, a religious community numbering **more than a billion souls**. As a result of that institutional status, the pope is also **a major global celebrity**, the ‘first citizen of global civil society,’ and a widely recognized participant in public debates surrounding a broad spectrum of global political issues.”⁹⁹

The Roman Church is, and has been, a worldwide political and religious power, just as Revelation declares.

(G) EXTENSION OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE

Though the Roman Church today has such prestige, few stop and consider the fact that this entity is arguably *the world’s oldest institution*, dating back to the time of the Roman Empire. Daniel prophesied that the Little Horn power would grow out of the 4th beast, which is Rome (Dan. 7:7-8). History records the fact that:

“The mighty Catholic Church was little more than the Roman Empire baptised... The very capital of the old Roman Empire became the capital of the Christian empire. The office of Pontifex Maximus was continued in that of the pope.”¹⁰⁰

Pontifex Maximus was the title used by the “divine priest-king” of Rome and was eventually bestowed upon the “divine priest-king” of the Roman Church—the Pope. This occurred when Emperor Gratian, for Christian reasons, refused this historically pagan title, and the Bishop of Rome, Damasus, of all people, accepted this pagan designation. The emperor, as Pontifex Maximus, had overseen the College of Pontiffs; now the Bishop of Rome oversees the College of Cardinals. Likewise, both

⁹⁹ Timothy Byrnes, “The Enduring Power of the Papacy: Pope Francis and International Relations” (November 26, 2019), *Berkeley Center for Religion, Peace & World Affairs*, <http://tinyurl.com/mwn33emz>.

¹⁰⁰ Alexander Flick, *The Rise Of The Mediaeval Church And Its Influence On The Civilization Of Western Europe From The First To The Thirteenth Century* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s sons, 1909), p. 148-149.

the Roman Empire and Church divided their territory into “diocese” with representatives (governors and archbishops respectively) governing their regions.

The Catholic Church not only inherited Rome’s structural system, but it also inherited Rome’s tendency to welcome the gods of the kingdoms they conquered into their pantheon. This is evident from the fact that Pope Boniface IV converted the Pantheon in Rome into a Christian church, which was subsequently dedicated to Mary and the Martyrs.¹⁰¹ Not only that, but they also assimilated the external forms of paganism to “convert” the heathens—though one could argue that the Church was converted to paganism instead of the other way around.

“We are told in various ways by Eusebius, that **Constantine, in order to recommend the new religion to the heathen, transferred into it [the Roman Church] the outward ornaments to which they had been accustomed in their own [pagan religions]...** The use of temples, and these dedicated to particular saints, and ornamented on occasions with branches of trees; incense, lamps, and candles; votive offerings on recovery from illness; holy water; asylums; holydays and seasons, use of calendars, processions, blessings on the fields; sacerdotal vestments, the tonsure, the ring in marriage, turning to the East, images at a later date, perhaps the ecclesiastical chant, and the Kyrie Eleison, **are all of pagan origin, and sanctified by their adoption into the Church.**”¹⁰²

The late professor of Religion at Harvard University, Dr. Erwin R. Goodenough, confirmed the above when he stated that “The [Catholic] Church did everything it could to stamp out such ‘pagan’ rites, but had to capitulate and allow the rites to continue with only the name of the local deity changed to some Christian saint’s name.”¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ Charles George Herbermann, *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, (New York: The Encyclopedia Press, 1907), vol. 2, p. 661, <https://tinyurl.com/bdcutwex>.

¹⁰² John H. Newman, *An Essay On The Development Of Christian Doctrine*, (London: Basil Montagu Pickering, 1878), p. 373, <https://tinyurl.com/yc7mhxfv>.

¹⁰³ Erwin Ramsdell Goodenough, *Religious Tradition And Myth* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1937), p. 56-57. Also see Henry Grattan Guinness, *Romanism And The Reformation From the Standpoint of Prophecy* (Toronto: S.R. Briggs, 1888), , p. 322-324, <https://tinyurl.com/4tfj8ppf>.

(H) UPROOTED 3 KINGDOMS

The next identifying factor is that the Antichrist would uproot three horns.

Daniel 7:8 As I was looking at the horns, suddenly **another small horn appeared among them. Three of the first horns were torn out by the roots to make room for it.** This little horn had eyes like human eyes and a mouth that was boasting arrogantly.

The ten horns that came out of the fourth beast—Rome—are symbolic of the general fracturing of the Roman Empire after its “fall” in 476 A.D. This was when the Germanic leader Odoacer defeated the last Roman Emperor, Romulus Augustus, and took control of Italy. Invaders continued to attack Rome from all sides until it was eventually divided into the “ten horns,” which, according to Dojčin Živadinović, included the Britons, Anglo-Saxons, Franks, Burgundians, Suevi, Ostrogoths, Lombards, Visigoths, Vandals, and Byzantium. However, Emperor Justinian came onto the scene in the 500’s and sought to restore the glory and territory of the old Roman Empire in the West, and was successful. With this in mind, we shall consider the time during his reign to see if we can find a connection between the Roman Church and the subversion of three of these “horns.”

The uprooting of a kingdom occurs when its legislative branch and means of enforcing laws are dismantled or made non-operational. In other words, when a power loses its independent laws, it can be said to have been “uprooted.” Examples of this type of “uprooting” include events such as the partitioning and end of independent Polish rule in the late 18th century, the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, and regime changes after the Arab Spring revolts in the early 2010s. With this in mind, the uprooting of a kingdom by the Little Horn would occur when Roman Catholic religious legislation supplants the “laws of the land” in territories that previously had religious liberty. In a letter from Pope Hormisdas to Emperor Justinian, dated February of 519 A.D., the Papacy seems to single herself out as the power behind the curtain that was responsible for the rooting out of her enemies:

“The way to unity of the church is clear, the prescriptions for it are known; the priests who love the Catholic peace must not reject the Catholic confession. For **it is necessary that the falsehood not be just partly improved but torn out by the root** [*radicitus amputari*]... Therefore go forth as you [Justinian] have begun... Your sentiments as they appear in your

writings to us are of the kind such that not much exhortation is required for **the execution of your good intentions.**"¹⁰⁴

The three kingdoms the Papacy sought to uproot were the Visigoths, Vandals, and Ostrogoths.¹⁰⁵ Why did she want to subvert these horns?—Because they all rejected the primacy of the Pope, rejected the God of the Pope, and upheld the principle of liberty of conscience.¹⁰⁶ According to Gregory of Tours, the Gallo-Roman historian, these kingdoms, "... **do not differ in anything else at all... they use the same laws and practice a common religion. For they are all of the Arian faith...**"¹⁰⁷ The "Arian faith" mentioned here is a reference to the fact that these kingdoms were predominately non-Trinitarian. It is difficult to determine exactly what these groups believed concerning the relationship between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, for most of their primary sources were destroyed by their enemies who likely misrepresented them and their teachings for political reasons. However, it seems that they believed Jesus was the literal Son of God who was begotten, or came forth (John 16:28), from the Father at some point in eternity past (Micah 5:2).

Regardless of one's view of the Trinity, we assert, like Paul, that we should "Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind." Romans 14:5. It is not our duty to compel anyone to think or believe exactly as we do—we should live according to Christ's method of expanding the Kingdom, by presenting truth, love, and mercy. This view of religious liberty was upheld by these three kingdoms when the Papacy sought to root them out. Agilan the Visigoth testified of this when he said "*It is no crime for one set of people to believe in one doctrine and another set of people to believe in*

¹⁰⁴ Otto Günther, *Epistulae Imperatorum Pontificum Aliorum...* (Vindobonae: F. Tempsky, 1895), p. 602, <https://tinyurl.com/mr3vjaww>.

¹⁰⁵ There is some debate as to the identity of each uprooted horn. For a detailed explanation of why these have been selected, please refer to Heiks' *AD 538 Source Book*. These would be the correct identities of the three uprooted horns if they were to be uprooted *before* the Papacy gained secular power in 538 (a date which will be established as we progress). However, if the three horns were to be uprooted *after* this event, as Dojčin Živadinović argues, then the identity of the three horns would be "the *Ostrogoths*, defeated by the Catholic-supporting Byzantines in 552/53 AD, the *Lombards* (conquered by the Catholic Franks) in 774 AD, and the *Britons* gradually subdued by the Anglo-Saxons (converted to Roman Catholicism) between the 7th-9th centuries." Živadinović, "Historical-Biblical Re-Analysis of the 'Ten Horns' in Daniel 7."

¹⁰⁶ If the two horns with the Ostrogoths include the Lombards and Britons instead of the Visigoths and Vandals, little changes, for these kingdoms were uprooted by the Papacy's agents for the same reasons.

¹⁰⁷ Procopius, *History of the Wars*, trans. H.B. Dewing (Harvard University Press, 1916), vol. 2, bk.3, ch. 2, p. 11, <https://tinyurl.com/2n6jhjea>.

another...”¹⁰⁸ Consider also the words of the Ostrogothic King Theodoric concerning liberty of conscience:

“To pretend to a domination over the conscience, is to usurp the prerogative of God; by the nature of things the power of sovereigns is confined to political government; they have no right of punishment but over those who disturb the public peace; the most dangerous heresy is that of a sovereign who separates himself from part of his subjects, because they believe not according to his belief.”¹⁰⁹

What wonderful words that eloquently delineate the separation of church and state.

The Roman Church, on the other hand, has never been a fan of religious liberty. Consider, for instance, the beliefs Pope Pius IX (1792-1878) condemned in his *Syllabus of Errors*. This Syllabus contains beliefs that are contrary to Papal doctrine, so you can invert these items (as I have done below) and find the Vatican’s socio-political beliefs:

“15. No man is free to choose his own religion according to his conscience... 24. **The Church has the power of using force** and she has direct and indirect political power... 55. **The Church ought to not be separated from the State**, and the State from the Church. 77. **Catholicism should be the only religion of the State, with all others outlawed.**”¹¹⁰

Pope Leo XIII (1810-1903) likewise said in plain words that **“... the unrestrained freedom of thinking and of openly making known one’s thoughts is not inherent in the rights of citizens, and is by no means to be reckoned worthy of favour and support.”**¹¹¹

The Papacy desired to enforce her dogmas throughout the world, but this could not be accomplished as long as these Arian “heretics” occupied their territories. But alas, the Church had no military at her disposal to rid herself of this menace. But this

¹⁰⁸ Yitzhak Hen, *Culture and Religion in Merovingian Gaul, A.D. 481-751* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 1995), p. 14, quoting Gregory of Tours, *The History of the Franks*, trans. Lewis Thorpe (Harmondsworth, 1974), p. 309-310.

¹⁰⁹ Milman, *History of Latin Christianity*, vol. I, bk. III, chap. 3, p. 409.

¹¹⁰ Pius IX, *The Syllabus Of Errors*, encyclical letter, Vatican website, 1864, <https://tinyurl.com/4re3vwkr>.

¹¹¹ Leo XIII, *Immortale Dei*, encyclical letter, Vatican website, November 1, 1885, <https://tinyurl.com/dk9wchj3>.

all changed when they found their sword in Clovis I, King of the Franks (later known as France). History records that Clovis, the first pagan King to convert to Catholicism, “was inspired by his newly founded religious zeal”¹¹² to wage “a religious war”¹¹³ against the Arian Visigoths on behalf of the Catholic faith.

Of course, the religion without the backing of a vast army was destined to be defeated, and this is what happened to the Arian Visigoths at the Battle of Vouillé. Once the Roman Church, through the sword of the State, conquered the Visigoths, the Frankish King “conferred the former Arian chapels upon the Catholic Church, doubtless along with the Arian church’s possessions.”¹¹⁴ Previously, the Visigoths had religious liberty, but once the Catholic King Clovis subverted their kingdom, new legislation applied to them. Thus they were effectively “uprooted” by the Roman Church through the State.

The next Arian kingdom that Satan sought to destroy was the Vandals in Africa. As usual, the Catholic Church worked for the demise of this kingdom from behind the scenes. The fall of the Vandals occurred during the reign of Justinian, who “**dreamt about a universal empire,**”¹¹⁵ where “**One state, one law, one church should rule the world,**” and he reasoned that “**this could only be achieved through battle and violence...**”¹¹⁶ The eager Justinian was advised by John the Cappadocian not to wage war against the Vandals, and was temporarily pacified. However, the Little Horn whispered in the ear of the bloodthirsty Emperor through a Catholic priest, claiming that God declared through a dream that He would “**join him [Justinian] in waging war and make him lord of Libya.’ When the emperor heard this, he was no longer able to restrain his purpose...**”¹¹⁷ These words led to the Battle of Ad Decimum, or the Battle of Carthage, which began on September 13, 533 A.D., where Justinian’s general, Belisarius, defeated the Vandal King Gelimer.

The result of this battle? Not only a win for Justinian, but also for the Papacy, since “**the exercise of all heretic cults was carefully proscribed [banned]; the Arian temples, the synagogues were transformed into Catholic churches;**

¹¹² Donald L. Wasson, “Clovis I,” *World History Encyclopedia*.

¹¹³ Walter C. Perry, *The Franks, from their first appearance in history to the death of King Pepin* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longman’s and Roberts, 1857), p. 85.

¹¹⁴ Albert Hauck, *Kirchengeschichte Deutschlands* (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs’sche, Buchhandlung, 1904), vol. 1, p. 136.

¹¹⁵ Charles Diehl, *Justinien et la Civilisation Byzantine au Vie Siècle* (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1901), p. 22, <https://tinyurl.com/42bre4c3>.

¹¹⁶ August Knecht, *Die Religions-Politik: Kaiser Justinians I: Eine kirchengeschicht-liche Studie* (Dissert: Würzburg, 1896), p. 8, 12-13, <https://tinyurl.com/h9bsht9>.

¹¹⁷ Procopius, *History of the Wars*, ch. 10, p. 99.

secret meetings were even forbidden.¹¹⁸ Just as Clovis claimed legal jurisdiction over the Visigoths for the Roman Church, Justinian did the same against the Vandals for the Pope— thus the second horn was “torn out by the roots” (Dan. 7:8).

The Emperor, in his quest to establish his universal (Catholic) empire and religion, had to desolate the final sanctuary of religious liberty: the Ostrogoths. The Papal power likewise wanted them out of the way, as “Even the **religious toleration** which Theodoric had the glory of introducing into the Christian world **was painful and offensive to the orthodox zeal of the Italians.**”¹¹⁹ Thus the battle between the Ostrogoth nation and the Little Horn began. When was the judicial authority of the Ostrogoths supplanted by Justinian? History records that the deciding factor for this would be the outcome of the first siege of Rome (February 21, 537-March, 538). Though the Ostrogoths regrouped after this siege numerous times until 553, the end of the siege in 538 was the year when they lost their jurisdiction in Italy:

“So ended the long siege of Rome by Witigis [new king of the Ostrogoths], a siege in which the numbers and prowess of the Goths were rendered useless by the utter incapacity of their commander... **He suffered the flower of the Gothic nation to perish...** With heavy hearts the barbarians... must have suspected **the melancholy truth that they had dug one grave, deeper and wider than all, the grave of the Gothic monarchy in Italy.**”¹²⁰

“**The whole nation of the Ostrogoths** had been assembled for the attack, and **was almost entirely consumed in the siege of Rome.**”¹²¹

This newfound judicial authority in the West is evident from the fact that in 538 Justinian replaced the Ostrogoth Praetorian prefect governor, Cassiodorus, with his own, Fidelis, to oversee the country.¹²² This date is confirmed in Justinian’s Novel

¹¹⁸ Charles Diehl, *L’Afrique Byzantine: Histoire de la Domination Byzantine en Afrique (533-709)*, (Paris, Leroux: 1896), p. 39, <https://tinyurl.com/tz9899nr>.

¹¹⁹ Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, vol. 2, ch. 39, p. 467, <https://tinyurl.com/5ae7b8kc>.

¹²⁰ Thomas Hodgkin, *Italy and Her Invaders* (London: Oxford University Press, 1885), vol. 4, p. 285.

¹²¹ Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (London: W. Clowes and Sons, 1867), vol. 4, p. 421, <https://tinyurl.com/ytvjthw7>.

¹²² Hodgkin, *The Letters of Cassiodorus, being a condensed translation of the Variae epistolae of Magnus Aurelius Cassiodorus Senator* (London: Henry Frowde, 1886), p. 50-51. For more details as to why the year 538 is correct instead of 537 A.D., please see Heidi Heiks, *A Reply to the Allegations Concerning the AD 508 and AD 538 Source Books* (2014), p. 14-30, <https://tinyurl.com/ydryv6pz>.

69, issued on June 1, 538, which proves that 538 A.D. was the first time in 62 years that an emperor held legal jurisdiction in Italy.¹²³

Though the Gothic Wars continued until the Ostrogoths were finally driven out in 553, “these later battles and sieges did not nullify the papal-centered legal system that had been put into place in 538. Even after Rome fell again to the Goths, they did not control the Papacy, as at that time it was operating outside Rome... The papal system, placed at the head of Christendom and given the power of life and death over heretics by the Justinian Code, endured in the West for more than 1,000 years...”¹²⁴

Once the oppressive union of Church and State was cemented, they could then implement their religious laws found in Justinian’s *Corpus Juris Civilis*. Roman emperors had made various decrees against paganism since the time of Constantine I, but none, save Justinian, dared take the steps to actually enforce these decrees.

“Justinian wanted to lead a final, deciding battle against the remains of paganism. He began an attack with this goal from two angles. He applied himself at the same time against the popular, practical paganism on the one and against the intellectual, theoretical form on the other side. His battle concerned idolatry and pagan philosophy...

“An absolute commandment to accept Christianity and receive the holy baptism was unheard of until the 6th century; such a decree was reserved for Justinian. Through this law, he overrode the competency of a prince on the whole and that of a Christian regent specifically. **This precept of forced religion**, expressed at the beginning of his reign, provided direction for his coming religious and ecclesiastical politics.

“Justinian differed from the preceding Christian emperors, as mentioned above, also in that **he brought the decreed laws against paganism into fulfillment**. Between theory and practice, among his predecessors, a contradiction had prevailed. A part of the legal decrees, says Schulze, was only applied intermittently. Word and deed did not match one another in all cases—a proceeding as has analogues in the political and religious-political history of all peoples. **The tendency toward threat of punishment was, as the repetition of the law reveals, just intimidation, not enforced;**

¹²³ David J.D. Miller and Peter Sarris, *The Novels of Justinian: A Complete Annotated English Translation* (Cambridge University Press, 2018), Novel 69, p. 502, <https://tinyurl.com/4m6df3ub>. Also see Diehl, *Justinien et la Civilisation Byzantine au Vie Siècle*, p. 186.

¹²⁴ Nicholas P. Miller, “Understanding the 1,260-year Prophecy” *Adventist World* (January 1, 2019).

brutal violence was far from the general direction of this politics. It was otherwise with Justinian.”¹²⁵

The Church and State likewise outlawed any form of Christianity that was not based on the Nicene creed of the Catholics—especially non-Trinitarian Christianity. Procopius confirms this by apparently quoting Novel 67, which was issued on May 1, 538 A.D.

“He [Justinian] seized the best and most fertile estates, and prohibited the Arians from exercising the rites of their religion.”¹²⁶

This was the year the State enforced her universal religious laws throughout all of Christendom by integrating the Church’s religious dogmas into their civil laws. This is confirmed in Codex I.3.44 of Justinian’s law codes, which was *legislated* in 530 A.D., and finally *enforced* universally in 538 A.D.:

“Whatever the holy canons prohibit, these we also by our own laws forbid.”¹²⁷

Thus, the primary sources demonstrate that the Papacy (with the help of the State) “rooted out” all “heretics” that stood in her road to supremacy, just as the Lord had declared through Daniel.

(D) PERSECUTE FOR 1,260 PROPHETIC DAYS

After the union of Church and State wiped out their competition and enforced their religious laws on all of Christendom in 538, everyone could then see the fruit of Satan’s Kingdom more clearly. But why did God allow this evil to last for so long? Why did He not sweep away the whole corrupt system that was tainting His name? If God interposed, couldn’t He have saved millions of souls, physically and spiritually? All of this is true, but we must remember the context in which we are living spiritually—we are at the epicenter of a cosmic controversy between the

¹²⁵ Knecht, *Die Religions-Politik*, p. 31-32.

¹²⁶ Procopius, *The Secret History of the Court of Justinian*, in *Procopius, Literally and Completely Translated from the Greek for the First Time* (Athens: Athenian Society, 1896), p. 151.

¹²⁷ Fred H. Blume, *The Codex Of Justinian: a new annotated translation with parallel Latin and Greek text compressed* (Cambridge University Press, 2016), bk. 1, 3.44, vol. 1, p. 119, <https://tinyurl.com/52t64xfw>.

Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Satan. Both claim their form of government and system of laws (or lawlessness in one case) is the best. As discussed earlier, God knew, in His infinite wisdom, that the best way to answer the claims of the Accuser was not to destroy or banish him, but to give him time:

1. Time to explain and campaign his new ideas.
2. Time to develop his ideas and methods so everyone can judge whose way is better.

Yes, God has given, or allowed, Satan to have a particular amount of time to develop his principles so all the universe and heavenly intelligences can make an honest judgment as to which Kingdom they think is best. Are there any clues about the amount of time God would give for this system to rule?

Daniel 7:25 (KJV) And he shall speak *great* words against the most High, and shall wear out the saints of the most High, and think to change times and laws: and they shall be **given into his hand until a time and times and the dividing of time.**

The allotted amount of time God gave Satan for the development of his system of coercion was a “time” (1 year), “times” (2 years), and half a time (6 months)—3.5 years, or 42 months:

Revelation 13:5 Then the beast was allowed to speak great blasphemies against God. And **he was given authority to do whatever he wanted for forty-two months.**

Both of these periods come out to 1,260 days.¹²⁸ This same timeframe is mentioned in several other places in Scripture, giving us more insight into this time period:

Revelation 12:14 But she [**the woman—Church**] was given two wings like those of a great eagle so she could fly to the place prepared for her **in the wilderness**. There she would be cared for and **protected from the dragon for a time, times, and half a time.**

¹²⁸ 3.5 years x 360 days per year = 1,260 days = 42 months x 30 days per month.

Revelation 12:6 And **the woman fled into the wilderness**, where God had prepared a place to care for her **for 1,260 days**.

These two passages are explaining the same event, showing that the time, times, and half a time equates to 1,260 days. Not only that, but this passage informs us that during this time of oppression the Church, symbolized as a woman (Jer. 6:2 + Is. 51:16; Matt. 25:1; Eph. 5:23–32; 2 Cor. 11:2), is nourished and protected during this time to some extent.

Knowing the duration of this period, we can now apply it to the prophecy at hand, which says the Roman Church-State system would reign for 1,260 days. But the Papacy reigned much longer than this, so does this mean it doesn't apply to them? The answer, like usual, is found in Scripture:

Numbers 14:34 “Because your men explored the land for forty days, you must wander in the wilderness for **forty years—a year for each day**, suffering the consequences of your sins...’

In this verse, a day is symbolic of one year. The same principle was used in Ezekiel:

Ezekiel 4:4–6 ⁴“Now lie on your left side and place the sins of Israel on yourself. You are to bear their sins for the number of days you lie there on your side. ⁵I am requiring you to bear Israel’s sins for **390 days—one day for each year of their sin**. ⁶After that, turn over and lie on your right side for **40 days—one day for each year of Judah’s sin**.

If we add the 390 days, for the iniquity of Israel, with the 40 days, for the iniquity of Judah, we get 430 prophetic days. Israel was to bear their iniquity for 430 years, which is exactly how long they were in Egypt:

Exodus 12:41 (KJV) And it came to pass **at the end of the four hundred and thirty years**, even the selfsame day it came to pass, *that* **all the hosts of the Lord went out from the land of Egypt**.

Could this “day for a year principle”¹²⁹ unlock the 1,260 days of the Roman Church’s time of tyranny?

¹²⁹ This principle is the only way to make sense of the 490 year prophecy concerning the Messiah (Daniel 9:24-27), and was held by most Protestant Reformers, including men such as

If we add 1,260 years to 538 A.D.—the year the Papacy received her secular power and enforced her dogmas throughout all Christendom—we come to the year 1798. Did anything significant relating to the Papacy occur this year?

The students of history may recognize 1798 as the year when Napoleon’s General Berthier abolished, or “uprooted,” the Vatican’s political power—just as she had done to the Ostrogoths 1,260 years before. From the personal diary of eyewitness Cardinal Giuseppe Antonio Sala, a priest in Rome when General Berthier entered that city, we read:

“... In the afternoon General Cervoni went to the Pope and said to him that the Roman People had implored the generosity of the French Nation to be freed from the oppression of the Pontific Government; that the French had granted to them their assistance; and that having become free, there remained to the Pope only concern for the spiritual.”¹³⁰

How were the people of Rome “freed from the oppression of the Pontific Government”? The legal basis of this is observed in the following record:

“The little band of Roman republicans took their chance. **General Berthier had a secret instruction to make a republic without letting it appear that the French made the republic.** On 15 February 1798, five days after the French arrived, republican leaders held a meeting in the pasture which we know as the Roman Forum, climbed the Capitol, celebrated a political ritual round the equestrian statue of Marcus Aurelius, erected a tree of liberty, and banners: ‘Religion and Liberty,’ ‘Sovereignty of the People,’ ‘Liberty and Equality,’ ‘Equality and the Rule of Law.’ A clergyman kissed the trunk of the tree of liberty, Duke Braschi the Pope’s nephew laid a garland at its feet, someone handed out tricolors. **The People were solemnly proclaimed Sovereign of Rome. On the document there signed, in the**

John Wycliffe, John Knox, William Tyndale, Martin Luther, John Calvin, Ulrich Zwingli, Philip Melancthon, Isaac Newton, Jan Hus, John Foxe, John Wesley, Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield, Charles Finney, C.H. Spurgeon, Matthew Henry, Adam Clarke, Albert Barnes, etc. For more on the validity of the day for a year principle, please see Gerhard Pfandl’s “In Defense of the Year-day Principle,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*, vol. 23, no. 1, (2012), p. 3-17, <http://tinyurl.com/ye2yr99t>.

¹³⁰ Giuseppe Antonio Sala, *Diario Romano, Miscellanea della Società Romana di Storia Patria* (Rome: presso la Società, 1882), vol. 1, p. 28, 32, <https://tinyurl.com/2ajfnpej>.

presence of a crowd, large indeed but without the knowledge of most of Rome, was founded the legal basis of the Roman republic. The meeting sent a deputation to General **Berthier**, asking for his protection. He came to the Capitol, and declared to the crowd, in the name of France, that he **recognized the provisional government as the government of all the Papal States, and would secure its independence. To the Directory he sent a message: ‘Rome is free.’**¹³¹

Yes, after the citizens of Rome had declared their sovereignty and independence from the Roman Church, the French power aided them with judicial power to ensure this end. General Berthier likewise published a proclamation in which France officially declared the Romans free and independent of the Vatican:

“The general-in-chief of the French army in Italy declares, in the name of the French republic that **he acknowledges the Roman republic independent, and that the same is under the special protection of the French army.** The general-in-chief of the army acknowledges, in the name of the French republic, the provisional government which has been proposed by the sovereign people.

“In consequence, **every other temporal authority emanating from the old government of the Pope is suppressed, and he shall no more exercise any function.**”¹³²

The religious-centric Justinian Code which was enforced beyond the walls of Rome for the first time in 538 was replaced by the secular Napoleonic Code *exactly* 1,260 years later in 1798. Not only that, but in 537 Pope Silverius was exiled and replaced with Pope Vigilus who was loyal to Justinian and his new code. 1,260 years later Pope Pius VII was exiled by Napoleon. As professor of church history, Nicholas Miller, points out, “There is a clear and parallel symmetry in the 1,260-year period *starting* with a pope being exiled and replaced with one hand-picked by the emperor under the auspices of a new legal code (the Justinian Code—one that elevates the Roman church to official, legal priority), and *ending* with a pope being exiled by an

¹³¹ Owen Chadwick, *The Popes and European Revolution* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), p. 463.

¹³² Richard Duppa, *A Brief Account of the Subversion of the Papal Government 1798*, 2nd ed. (London: 1799), p. 39-42, <https://tinyurl.com/4zccczze>.

emperor and a religious code being replaced by a secular rule (the Napoleonic Code, a secular system that rejects the idea of a special place for the church).¹³³

Revelation 13:10 (KJV) He that leadeth into captivity *shall* go into captivity: **he that killeth with the sword must be killed with the sword.** Here is the patience and the faith of the saints.

One of the definitions for “sword” in this passage is “*judicial punishment*.”¹³⁴ The Papacy had used the “sword” of judicial punishment through the arm of the State, to “kill” all “heretics.” What sword did they use? Clovis, King of the Franks. France, “the eldest child of the Papacy,” was the first State-sword they wielded. However, in divine justice, the sins of the Papacy returned upon her own head, for the very power she employed to “uproot”—dismantle the legislative and judicial authority of—her opponents was that which uprooted herself! As Christ said, “Those who use the sword will die by the sword.” Matthew 26:15. Thus the medieval Church received her deadly wound.¹³⁵

Is this not a recurring theme we have seen in every instance where Satan ushers in his Kingdom of force and violence? Each apostate religious power in Satan’s Kingdoms which tried to compel the conscience of God’s people through religious laws and force, suffered the death they sought to impose on God’s people. The Babylonians who threw Daniel’s friends in the fiery furnace were consumed by the fire they kindled; the Persians who threw Daniel in the lion’s den were thrown in it themselves; Haman was hung on the gallows he had built for Mordecai; Antiochus

¹³³ Miller, “Understanding the 1,260-year Prophecy” *Adventist World* (January 1, 2019).

Just as the coinage of Justinian changed in 538, so too did the coinage of Rome change in 1798. Rome’s 2 baiocchi coin from 1797 had the Papal court of arms with the name of the current pope, “PIVS SEXT.” [Pius VI], while the 2 baiocchi coin of 1798 bears the Revolutionary fasces and Phrygian cap with the words “REPVBLICA ROMANA,” showcasing the transition from theocracy to republic.

¹³⁴ Strong’s *Dictionary*, p. 46.

¹³⁵ This passage about the beast’s deadly head wound seems to parallel the passage about being killed with the sword, if the chiasmic structure of Revelation 13:3-10 is accurate:

Head wounded (3)

Worship (4a)

Make war (4b)

Blasphemies (5a)

42 months (5b)

Blasphemies (6)

Make war (7)

Worship (8)

Death by sword (10)

tried cutting the Hebrews off from God and was subsequently cut off from God; the Jews that crucified Christ via Rome were subsequently crucified by the same power. In all of these scenarios, the sins of the wicked boomeranged back on their own heads. The case is the same with the Papacy—they sought to use the French State to kill their enemies and were therefore killed by the French State!

With this in mind, it is evident that the Roman Church has fulfilled the last identifying characteristic of the Little Horn Antichrist: they exercised political power for 1,260 years, from 538 to 1798, carrying on “holy” wars, inquisitions, assassinations, etc.—all in the name of God.¹³⁶ Thus the union of Church and State wore “out the saints of the most High” and were “given into his hand” for “a time and times and the dividing of time” (Dan. 7:25).

A perfect parallel for this time period is seen in the history of Ahab and Jezebel. Ahab was the King of Israel who “did what was evil in the Lord’s sight, even more than any of the kings before him.” 1 Kings 16:30. He started down the wrong path when he “he married Jezebel... and he began to bow down in worship of Baal.” 1 Kings 16:31. Ahab “did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the LORD, **whom Jezebel his wife stirred up.**” 1 Kings 21:25 (KJV). Yes, Jezebel (the Church) stirred up Ahab (the State) to “**kill all the Lord’s prophets**” (1 Kings 18:4), just like the Papacy stirred up the kings of the earth during the Dark Ages against the Protestants.¹³⁷ And how long did Ahab and Jezebel trample over God’s people? For *1,260 literal days* (James 5:17)!

As mentioned earlier, many look to the future in search of this Little Horn power, assuming someone like Nicolae Carpathia will arrive on the scene to:

- outlaw Christianity,
- ban the Bible,
- and enforce a “universal” religion which all will be compelled to accept,
- in order to establish a “New World Order.”

¹³⁶ Though their time of persecution and power was shortened “for the elect’s sake” (Matt. 24:22).

¹³⁷ Consider, for instance, the Albigensian Crusades (1208-1226), the Waldensian Crusades (1540-1570), the Mérindol massacre (1545), the Edict of 1550 (1550-1560), the work of Queen Mary I (aka Bloody Mary) (1553-1558), St. Bartholomew’s Massacre (1572), the Spanish Armada (1588), the Thirty Years’ War (1618-1648), the Irish Rebellion (1641), the Piedmontese Easter Massacre (1655), the revocation of the Edict of Nantes (1685), and the more recent Croatian Holocaust led by the Roman Catholic Ustaše (1940’s).

However, we have seen that this has essentially already happened. Indeed, during the Dark Ages the Roman Church:

- utilized the arm of the State to persecute all “heretics,” many of whom were true, Bible-believing Christians,
- suppressed the reading of the Bible,
- enforced a “universal” religion (the definition of Catholic is universal¹³⁸) which all were compelled to accept,
- in order to establish the “Old World Order” of the Dark Ages.

5.3 A SATANIC IMPERSONATION

What’s the point of going through all of this? Of course it’s important to identify the “beast from the sea” and the “Little Horn” Antichrist, but there is more. John informs us that “the dragon gave the beast,” the Papacy, “his own power and throne and great authority.” Revelation 13:2. Why did Satan, “the Ancient Serpent” (Rev. 12:9) do this? So he can do what he has done since the beginning: deceive.

THE ROMAN REVELATION OF THE FATHER

In Revelation 12 the Serpent is pictured as persecuting the Church (Rev. 12:13), but in the next chapter we see him change strategies. Instead of simply persecuting the Church, he seeks to deceive the Church. In Genesis, the Serpent misrepresented God’s character by his *words* (Gen. 3), but in Revelation, we see the Serpent misrepresent God’s character by *impersonation* (Rev. 13). Once Christ came on the scene and represented His Father’s character and government, Satan had to change his strategy. The way he would seek to destroy the testimony of Christ’s life was to have his own “representatives” give a different testimony in the name of Christ. This was first accomplished by fusing Imperial Rome with Christianity. Yes, Satan has sought to replace Christ with a system of *alter Christus*, “another christ.”¹³⁹ Just as Jesus was a representation of His Father, so was the Papacy a representation of its

¹³⁸ Allan R. Bomhard, *The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology* (Oxford: 1966), p. 154, <https://tinyurl.com/25c2xpz6>.

¹³⁹ “Alter Christus” is a Latin phrase which means “another Christ → used as an epithet for Catholic priests.” “Alter Christus.” *Merriam-Webster*, <http://tinyurl.com/3c7fnrkr>.

father, the Devil—all the while claiming their system was a true revelation of God’s character.

PARALLELS	THE PAPAL BEAST	THE SON OF GOD
<i>Described as an animal</i>	Rev. 13:1	Rev. 5:6
<i>Came up out of water</i>	Rev. 13:1	Matt 3:16
<i>Looks like one before</i>	Rev.12:3+13:1	John 14:9
<i>Has horns</i>	Rev. 13:1	Rev. 5:6
<i>Has crowns</i>	Rev. 13:1	Rev. 19:12
<i>Had a name written on him</i>	Rev. 13:1	Rev. 19:16
<i>Leopard, bear, and lion</i>	Rev. 13:2	Hos 13:4-8
<i>Power, throne, & authority</i>	Rev. 13:2	Matt 28:18, Rev. 3:21
<i>Was wounded to death</i>	Rev. 13:3	Phil 2:8
<i>His deadly wound was healed</i>	Rev. 13:3	Matt 28:5-6
<i>All world wonders after them</i>	Rev. 13:3	John 12:19
<i>Was worshipped</i>	Rev. 13:4	Matt. 28:16-17
<i>3.5 year ministry</i>	Rev. 13:5	John 2:13, 5:1, 6:4, 13:1
<i>Worldwide authority</i>	Rev. 13:7	Rev. 14:6
<i>Wielded a sword</i>	Rev. 13:10	Rev. 1:6
<i>Followers have name on head</i>	Rev. 13:16-17	Rev. 7:1-3; 14:1

The Papacy adopted the methods of *worldly kingdoms* (State) while simultaneously claiming to be the revelation of the *Kingdom of God* (Church). The Popes of the Middle Ages adopted the role of their imperial predecessors, who ruled “by decree, not by persuasion; he governs by command, not by consent; he relies on force, not on consensus or popular acclaim. The relationship between the emperor and his subjects is that of master and subject, the former issuing orders and the latter obeying them... The imperial model came to be reflected in **society’s perception of God**. By inference God was the ultimate despot, the One whose decrees must be obeyed without questioning, and the ruler who was accountable to none... **God was perceived as the ultimate *imperator* [emperor]**. If consent and accountability were missing in human society, it is justified because these elements were also absent in the heavenly government on which the earthly was modeled. When the constellation of Church and state resorted to legislation, coercion, and persecution, it justified it as God’s method. A church that issued dogmas, laws, and anathemas in God’s name obeyed a god that was thought to rule by imperial decree. If the earthly

representative seemed dictatorial, the Christian state was merely conforming to the ways of its own imperious master.”¹⁴⁰ The Roman Church fused the Kingdom of the Cross with the Kingdom of the Sword, the holy with the profane, the clean with the unclean.

Christ had testified that God was like a loving Father, not Caesar. His subjects are like family, not fealty. His laws are for our well-being and carry intrinsic consequences—they are not arbitrary demonstrations of sovereignty. He enforces His laws and executes justice and judgments through cause and effect in conjunction with freedom—He never resorts to force. He makes followers by revealing His self-sacrificial character to them, not by threats and coercion.

Instead of loving her enemies and being a bastion of religious liberty, the Roman Church massacred innumerable men, women, and children because they did not submit to her dogmas. How many people have refused to even consider Christianity because of the Crusades, Inquisitions, Holy Wars, Witch Trials, etc., etc., etc.? The Papacy presented before the masses a picture of God as One who won’t forgive you unless you “pay the price” (only then can you get out of purgatory), who demands a blood sacrifice to appease His anger (penal substitution), who won’t think twice about uprooting you for disobeying Him. Not only that, but because the medieval Papacy worshipped a god who tortures “heretics” for all eternity, they ended up doing the same to “heretics” on earth in the most brutal ways imaginable—and this picture of God is held by most Christians today. This is the only view of God many people have ever had, and I don’t blame them for rejecting such a picture.

Thus John describes the Papacy as a beast that has “a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies.” Revelation 13:5 (KJV). Not only does this beast speak words of blasphemy by claiming to be a representative of God on earth with the ability to forgive sins, but the word for blasphemy also means “A contemptuous, irreverent, deliberate and insolent utterance of **defamation and slander.**”¹⁴¹ The Papacy, through its misrepresentation of God, “spoke terrible words of blasphemy against God, **slandering his name...**” Revelation 13:6. The word for “name” not only indicates the title of a person, but also their “**reputation**, what is said about a person.”¹⁴² Yes, the Roman Church has defamed and slandered God’s name—His

¹⁴⁰ Tonstad, *The Lost Meaning of the Seventh Day*, p. 446, 450, 451.

¹⁴¹ Donald Mills, “Blasphemy,” in *Lexham Theological Wordbook*, ed. Douglas Mangum et al., Lexham Bible Reference Series (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014).

¹⁴² James Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Greek (New Testament)* (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997). An explicit passage which equates God’s name with His character is Exodus 33:19.

reputation and *character*—just as the inventor of this system has done since the beginning. Like father like son (John 8:44).

CHAPTER 6

THE IMAGE OF THE BEAST

God didn't leave the Church alone without any help as she was persecuted by the Serpent. Instead, He led her into "14 the **wilderness**. There she would be cared for and protected from the dragon for **a time, times, and half a time**. 15 Then the dragon tried to drown the woman with a flood of water that flowed from his mouth. 16 But **the earth** helped her by opening its mouth and swallowing the river that gushed out from the mouth of the dragon." Revelation 12:14-16.

As the text says, the Dragon (Serpent) did not give up at this point. Instead, he seeks to bring a new power on the stage to assist him in his deception. The earth had been the woman's ally as a place of refuge, but now a Satanic power arises "**up out of the earth**" (Rev. 13:11) towards the end of the 1,260 years of Papal persecution. As we will see, this power acts as a "false prophet" and attempts to deceive the Church and lead her to accept the lies about God that were introduced by the first beast.

This begs the question: who does this beast from the earth represent?

IDENTIFYING THE BEAST FROM THE EARTH

The book of Revelation describes the "beast" from the earth in the following words:

Revelation 13:11 Then I saw another **beast** come up **out of the earth**. He had **two horns like those of a lamb**, but he spoke with the voice of a dragon.

As we have seen, a beast in prophecy is symbolic of a kingdom (Dan. 7:23). Just as John described the Papal kingdom as the beast from the Sea, so too does this second beast **(1) represent a kingdom**.

This kingdom is described as "coming up out of the earth." What does the earth represent? John had previously described the Papacy as arising out of the "sea" (Rev. 13:1), which, according to his accompanying angel, represented "**masses of people**

of every nation and language.” Revelation 17:15.¹⁴³ The beast we are looking at, however, comes from the inverse of the sea—the earth. If the sea represents a highly populated place, the earth represents a sparsely populated area.

Job 38:25–26 (KJV) ²⁵ Who hath divided a watercourse for the overflowing of waters, Or a way for the lightning of thunder; ²⁶ To cause it to rain on **the earth, where no man is**: On the wilderness, wherein **there is no man**... (Also see Jeremiah 2:6; 51:43)

With the above in mind, we can be sure that this kingdom would be **(2) established in a sparsely populated area**.¹⁴⁴

And what of this beast’s lamb-like horns? Firstly, a lamb is a baby sheep, so this nation is **(3) a young country** in comparison to other nations that have been around for millennia.

Not only does a lamb denote the idea of youthfulness, but it also brings to mind the character of Christ.

John 1:29 The next day John saw **Jesus** coming toward him and said, “Look! **The Lamb of God** who takes away the sin of the world!”

Yes, the Lamb represents the meek, gentle, and lowly character of Jesus, and He is thus symbolized over twenty times in the book of Revelation. The symbol of a lamb not only represents Christ, but also those who are “following the Lamb wherever he goes.” Revelation 14:4.

Luke 10:3 Now go, and remember that **I am sending you out as lambs** among wolves. (cf. John 21:15 and 1 Peter 1:9)

¹⁴³ Also see Isaiah 8:7-8; 17:12; 57:20; Jeremiah 46:7-8; 47:2; Ezekiel 26:3; Psalm 144:7.

¹⁴⁴ Further evidence affirming this position is seen when we realize that Revelation’s symbols of the two beasts, one from the sea and the other from the earth, were most likely taken from the cultural myth of the multi-headed sea beast called Leviathan (Job 3:8; 7:12; 41:1-34; Ps. 74:12-14; 104:26; Is. 27:1) and the oxlike land beast referred to as Behemoth (Job 40:15-24). According to Jewish apocalyptic literature, Leviathan occupied “the abysses of the sea” while Behemoth resided in “a waste wilderness named Dûidân,” “the dry land of the wilderness” (Enoch 60:7-10; cf. 2 Esdras 6:49-52; 2 Baruch 29:4; ApAbr 21:4). These creatures were infamous in the ancient near east, and since the original readers of Revelation were likely acquainted with this lore, they would have connected the dots. See Richard Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (London: T & T Clark, 1998), p. 189-190, 193; Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, p. 89; Adela Yarbro Collins, *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation* (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1976), p. 164-165.

If a kingdom looks “like a lamb,” we can conclude that **(4) *most people who comprise this nation look like Christians***; it has the guise of a Christian nation.

This second beast also appears around the time the first beast receives her deadly wound at the end of the 1,260-year prophecy (Rev. 13:5, 10-11). Thus, this nation should **(5) *be established in the late 1700s***, when the Papacy received her deadly wound from the French nation. It seems that John Wesley understood that the second beast was going to appear soon, as he wrote in 1754 that this power “is not yet come, though he cannot be far off. For he is to appear at the end of the forty-two months of the first beast” (Wesley likewise identified the first beast as the Papacy).¹⁴⁵

This kingdom will eventually force the world into a false system of worship (Rev. 13:12), and a nation can only do this if they are **(6) *a dominant superpower with a powerful military presence***.

To summarize, this beast is described as:

1. A Kingdom
2. That Arose in a Sparsely Populated Area,
3. Which is a Relatively Young Nation,
4. That was Founded and Comprised by Professed Christians,
5. Around the late 1700s,
6. And is Now a Dominant World Superpower.

What modern kingdom arose in the late 1700s in a sparsely populated region as a “Christian nation,” yet now is a dominant world power? The answer is plain: *the United States of America*.

6.1 LAMB OR BEAST?

RIGHTEOUSNESS EXALTETH A NATION

One of the primary Lamb-like principles upon which the United States of America was founded is the *separation of Church and State*. This idea springs from the principle of religious and civil liberty. As Christ declared, “give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and give to God what belongs to God.” Matthew 22:21. Neither the Church nor the State has the right to meddle in the realm of religious convictions.

¹⁴⁵ John Wesley, *Explanatory notes upon the New Testament* (New York: Carlton & Porter, 1754), p. 704.

This principle comes straight from the Kingdom of God and was manifested at the beginning of the cosmic controversy. Instead of squashing Lucifer like a bug for daring to question the Sovereign of the Universe, God gave him the freedom to do so and didn't persecute him for that.

Many of America's founding fathers were alive near the tail end of the Dark Ages, so religious persecution at the hands of the established Churches of Rome and England was fresh on their minds. They well understood the dangers of the Church and State mingling together, which is why the very First Amendment of the Constitution declares that "**Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof...**" Perhaps the distinction between the civil and religious powers could thus be symbolized as the two horns of the American beast.¹⁴⁶

Where did the idea of the separation of Church and State stem from? When we look at history, we find that these principles were the natural outgrowth of traditional Protestant views—particularly **righteousness by faith**. At the start of the Protestant Reformation, God revealed to Martin Luther (1483-1546) the truth that we are justified and made right with God by choosing to trust in Him for salvation instead of trusting in our own works to "get on His good side." When we receive Christ into our hearts by faith, *choosing* to make Him the Master of our lives, He will lead us in the paths of righteousness.

If the essence of salvation comes down to exercising faith—by *choosing* to trust God to save us and *choosing* to submit to His Spirit—then to take away this choice by forcing or coercing one to "be good" or accept Christ is to do away with faith and the salvation that comes with it! Thus, the Protestant doctrine of justification by faith naturally led to the principle of **liberty of conscience**. Martin Luther understood this when he said "No one must be constrained [forced]. Liberty is the very essence of faith."¹⁴⁷ Every believer has the right to hearken to the dictates of his conscience, for conscience is simply the "still small voice" of the Spirit (1 Kings 19:12 KJV) which says, "This is the way you should go" (Is. 30:21). No one has the right to impose his

¹⁴⁶ Uriah Smith, *The United States in Light of Bible Prophecy* (Battle Creek, MI: Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, 1874), p. 77. Isaac Backus (1724-1806), a prominent Baptist minister, shared similar sentiments when he wrote (almost 100 years earlier) that the two horns symbolized "church censures and corporal punishments." Isaac Backus, *Testimony of the Two Witnesses, Explained and Improved* (Providence: 1786), p. 11-13, <http://tinyurl.com/yc6w68hp>.

¹⁴⁷ Jean Henri Merle D'Aubigne, *History of the Reformation* (New York: Robert Carter, 1847), vol. 3, p. 66, <http://tinyurl.com/2f6yuy7e>. Though Luther at first emphasized liberty of conscience, his later actions contradicted this tenant.

particular views on others. We are accountable to God alone for our relationship with Him.

Since salvation is directly between the individual and God, we are all equal before Him (Matt. 23:8); we are all called to be “a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.” 1 Peter 2:5 (KJV) (cf. 1 Pet. 2:9; Rev. 1:6; 5:10). As such, it is not the duty of priests or pastors to handle religious duties for us while we only think about secular affairs. Acknowledging the spiritual responsibility of all is known as **the priesthood of all believers**. Luther articulated this idea as follows:

“It is pure invention that pope, bishop, priests, and monks are called the spiritual estate while princes, lords, artisans, and farmers are called the temporal estate. This is indeed a piece of deceit and hypocrisy. Yet no one need be intimidated by it, and for this reason: all Christians are truly of the spiritual estate, and there is no difference among them except that of office.”¹⁴⁸

John Calvin (1509-1564) built off the principle of Christian equality by creating a democratic church government. In his system church members elect and vote for their leaders from among themselves. When the Pilgrims came to America, they appropriated these democratic principles from their churches to the colonies they established—forming them as small democratic, self-governing republics. Thus, the principle of **representative democracy** was brought to America.

The combination of the above principles led to the perfect storm that produced the heaven-sent concept of **separation of Church and State**.¹⁴⁹ Since we are all equal in the sight of God (priesthood of all believers) because salvation is a matter of a personal relationship with God (righteousness by faith), everyone must have the liberty to listen to their God-given convictions (liberty of conscience). No man, whether he be a politician or a pastor, should force (with coercion, threats, or violence) his spiritual beliefs on another group of people, or give special treatment to one group over another. If he does so he would be denying, by his actions, the principles of spiritual equality (he has set himself above others on the judgment seat), liberty of conscience (he denies the freedom of others to serve God as they see fit),

¹⁴⁸ Malcolm B. Yarnell III, *Royal Priesthood in the English Reformation* (Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 92.

¹⁴⁹ I'm not saying your religious convictions should not inform your political decisions, but I am saying that your convictions are just that—they are *yours*. It's wrong for the State to hinder the religious convictions of others, and it's wrong for the Church to do the same.

and ultimately righteousness by faith (for liberty is the very essence of faith). This violation of God's principles would never happen if men had a true and just conception of righteousness by faith.

Not only that, but if man had a right conception of the incompatibility of God's Kingdom with Caesar's Kingdom, the separation between Church and State would not be questioned. Boyd backed this claim up with the following point:

"... the kingdom of the world, by definition, can never be the kingdom of God... No version of the kingdom of the world, however comparatively good it may be, can protect its self-interests while loving its enemies, turning the other cheek, going the extra mile, or blessing those who persecute it. Yet loving our enemies and blessing those who persecute us is precisely what kingdom-of-God citizens are called to do. It's what it means to be Christian. By definition, therefore, you can no more have a Christian worldly government than you can have a Christian petunia or aardvark. A nation may have noble ideas and be committed to just principles, but it's not for this reason Christian."¹⁵⁰

NATIONAL LAWLESSNESS LEADS TO NATIONAL RUIN

Unfortunately, prophecy declares that the wall between the civil and religious powers in America will not remain intact forever, for America, a civil power, is said to eventually compel the whole world to "worship the first beast, whose fatal wound had been healed." Revelation 13:12. Though America at first appeared as a lamb, or Christ-like nation, Scripture warns that it will **speak "with the voice of a dragon."** Revelation 13:11.

What does it mean that America will speak "as a Dragon"? Jesus taught that **"the words you speak come from the heart..."** Matthew 15:18. Thus, whatever the Dragon speaks is simply a revelation of what is in his heart. What do we find in the heart of the Arch Rebel?

Isaiah 14:13–14 (KJV) ¹³ For **thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north:** ¹⁴ I will

¹⁵⁰ Boyd, *Myth of a Christian Nation*, p. 54.

ascend above the heights of the clouds; **I will be like the most High.** (cf. Is. 47:10; Ezek. 28:2–6)

The principle of self-exaltation at the expense of others is the spirit of the Serpent and is the *modus operandi* of the kingdoms of the world. This is the antithesis of Christ's Kingdom of the cross, for His citizens conquer by allowing themselves to be disadvantaged for the sake of uplifting others.

We have seen Dragon and Lamb-like qualities striving for the supremacy in America since its inception. On the one hand, America provided a safe haven and freedom for persecuted peoples. On the other hand, America enslaved millions and ruthlessly persecuted Native Americans. One of the tragic facts about these injustices is that religious leaders often gave “Christian” justifications for these practices.¹⁵¹

As the American Empire has continued to expand, so have the Lamb-like blessings and Dragon-like curses. We have liberated the oppressed while simultaneously oppressing the free. We toppled corrupt governments and genocidal dictators that didn't have the best interest of their nation at heart, and we toppled governments and good leaders that did have the best interest of their nation at heart—they just didn't implement our preferred economic, social, or military policies.

“For example, in 1951 a nationalist named Mohammad Mossadegh was [democratically] elected Prime Minister of Iran. When he persuaded the Iranian Parliament to nationalize the British-run oil company that pumped most of the oil in the country, the American CIA sponsored a coup that threw him out of power, closed the Iranian Parliament, and imposed a dictator (known as the Shah). The Shah was a close ally of the United States and remained in power for nearly 30 years with the help of a secret police force that was trained by the CIA.

“Now, imagine that, in 1778, Lafayette had come to the United States and helped Benedict Arnold remove General Washington, shut down the Continental Congress, and set up a dictatorship that was closely allied with France for 30 years. Wouldn't it be logical to say that the US had become part of the French Empire, even though France did not actually occupy the

¹⁵¹ Isaac Backus took note that Protestant America had already been acting like a Dragon through her blatantly un-Christlike actions which condoned slavery, genocide, unnecessary war, etc. Backus wrote that “the Protestant beast hath carried blood and slavery round the world, in galleys and gallant ships, as far as the first beast ever did... the spiritual tyranny, which came from Rome and England, is continued in several of the United States of America.” Isaac Backus, *The Infinite Importance of the Obedience of Faith* (Boston: 1791), p. 26, <http://tinyurl.com/2s9jvbkf/>.

country? If Benedict Arnold had ruled the United States with an iron hand for 30 years and then was overthrown in a revolution led by Andrew Jackson, wouldn't the people of the United States regard France as a deadly enemy and Jackson as the country's savior?"¹⁵²

America has, like the Roman Empire, implemented Dragon-like policies since its inception. And like Rome, America has increasingly been cloaking itself in sheep's clothing to justify its actions. Heretofore the Church and State have been flirting off and on whenever it benefits either party. But we have yet to see the political and religious realms merge to such an extent that the American Empire uniformly and actively promotes the dogmas of the Church.

While America has manifested characteristics of the Dragon, the time is coming when America will *be exactly like* the Dragon that said in his heart, "I will be like the most High." Scripture says that the spirit of *religious* self-exaltation will be especially manifested in America at the end of time, for this once great nation will compel all the world to partake of a false system of coercive worship (Rev. 13:11-17) when it ultimately "speaks like a Dragon." And how does a nation "speak"? — ***Through her legislation.***

Yes, the time is coming when the churches in America will exalt themselves over the rest of the nation by establishing themselves as "God's representative" by legally imposing their religious dogmas on the masses with the power of the sword.

That this political exaltation of the Church is currently underway is evident from various voices in the Church that are calling for a marriage between the Church and State. Why do they want to merge these two kingdoms? So *they* can make and enforce their religious dogmas and "take America back for God." Once this happens, America will look like the "spitting image" of the Roman Church-State during the Middle Ages. Then the prophecy that declares the United States will "**make an image to the beast** [the Papacy]" (Rev. 13:14 KJV) shall be fulfilled.

But how will America transform into a mirror image of the Vatican?

¹⁵² Monte L. Pearson, *Perils of Empire: The Roman Republic and the American Republic* (New York: Algora Publishing, 2008), p. 7.

6.2 THE COUNTERFEIT SPIRIT

What does it mean to make an “image” of something? It means to make a likeness of something, just like heathens would make graven *images* of their gods. So, if America is to erect an “**image of the Papacy**,” it means that America will create a mirror image of the Roman hierarchy.

Christians are called to worship “Christ, who is the **image of God**,” (2 Cor. 4:4), and as we dwell on His character we will be conformed into His image (Rom. 8:29). How does this happen?

2 Corinthians 3:18 (KJV) But we all, with open face **beholding** as in a glass **the glory of the Lord**, are **changed into the same image** from glory to glory, even as **by the Spirit of the Lord**.

The Holy Spirit brings to our mind Christ’s revelation of His Father’s character. This revelation, if accepted by faith, transforms our character into the likeness of Christ, the image of God. The inverse occurs with the counterfeit.

Just as the Dragon is a counterfeit of the Father, and the Papal Beast a counterfeit of the Son, the False Prophet of nationalistic, Americanized Christianity is a counterfeit of the Holy Spirit.

PARALLELS	AMERICAN BEAST	HOLY SPIRIT
<i>Lamb-like</i>	Rev. 13:11	John 16:13
<i>Speaks like one before</i>	Rev. 13:11	John 16:13-14
<i>Came after one before was killed</i>	Rev. 13:10-11	John 14-17; Acts 2
<i>Exercises authority of one before</i>	Rev. 13:12	John 16:13-14
<i>Directs worship to the one before</i>	Rev. 13:12, 15	John 16:14
<i>Performs miracles</i>	Rev. 13:13	Acts 15:12
<i>Fire from heaven</i>	Rev. 13:13	Acts 2:2-4
<i>Life/breath gives life</i>	Rev. 13:15	John 20:22, Gen. 1:27; 2:7
<i>Marks followers</i>	Rev. 13:16	Eph. 1:13; Rev. 7:3

In the end, the true Spirit will be successful in making an image of the Son (Rom. 8:29; Col. 3:10), just as the spirit of Americanized Christianity will finally be successful

in making an image of the Papacy (the false son). Yes, those who receive the Seal of God through the Spirit will look just like Christ, while those who receive the Mark of the Beast through America will look just like the Beast (we will dig more into the Seal of God and Mark of the Beast in the coming chapters).

But how could America create an image of the beast, a system patterned after the Papacy?

BY BEHOLDING THE BEAST WE BECOME A BEAST-LIKE NATION

Firstly, we need to understand that the Roman Catholic beast (system) is made up of *individuals* who *see God a certain way*. Earlier we talked about how Satan misrepresented God's character to Eve, and this paradigm shift led to a change in her thoughts and feelings, which led to a rebellious behavior and attitude. In like manner, those who will comprise the "image of" the Roman beast will see God through the lens of a Romanized, Caesarian Jesus, and by beholding this false image of God they are transformed into that same image (2 Cor. 3:18). This is why God detests idolatry, because a person's perception of their object of worship directly translates to their behavior. This is why the Psalmist declared that "**those who make idols are just like them**, as are all who trust in them." Psalm 135:18.

In other words, those who worship the beast shall become beast-like individuals, emulating the characteristics of the beast. Thus, the Papal beast is composed of people who see God very much the way Eve saw God after talking with the Serpent:

- One who enacts arbitrary laws (that could thus be changed on a whim)
- One who externally enforces His laws through the use of force & violence
- One who selfishly exalts Himself at the expense of others
- One who will uproot and destroy His enemies who disagree with Him (no liberty of conscience)

But wasn't the Little Horn Papacy the power that sought to change God's laws—implying they are *arbitrary*? Hasn't the Roman Church enacted religious laws and enforced them through *violence* in order to *preserve herself*? And didn't the Papacy *destroy* anyone who protested her methods? Yes, these characteristics are that of the first beast—the counterfeit, or Romanized, Christ, whose kingdom is both temporal and spiritual.

Is our Father like the Pope of Rome? That is the question we must all ask ourselves. Does our loving Father enact pointless laws that He changes on a whim to flex His sovereignty? Does He use violence against His children who disagree with Him? Is the Kingdom of God rooted in the principle of self-preservation at the expense of its enemies like every worldly kingdom? I would suggest that our Father is just like Jesus who loved His enemies, turned the other cheek, never hurt anyone who rejected Him, and did not “come to destroy the law” (Matt. 5:17). If this is the God we worship, then we shall become like Him and emulate these selfless, other-centered principles. However, if we believe that God is like the Pope, we will inevitably be transformed into the same image.

John 16:2–3 (The Remedy Paraphrase) ² **They will disfellowship and excommunicate you, and call you ‘evil’ and ‘heretic;’** in fact, a time is coming when **anyone who kills you will actually think they are doing what God would have them do.** ³ They will practice methods of misrepresenting what you teach, using force, intimidation and coercion—just **because they have accepted Satan’s lies about me and my Father,** and they believe we are like them.

If we think that God has arbitrary laws that can be changed on a whim because they don’t have any inherent consequences, then we will think to change the law of God as well. If we believe that God runs His government like the Papal States, burning all “heretics” to death just like Nebuchadnezzar, then what would it take for us to comply with religious laws against those we already hold in contempt? If most individuals in a kingdom have the spirit of the Papacy, if they have the “pope of self” enthroned in their heart, they will inevitably erect an *image of the Papacy* and walk the same path as that organization. Yes, the image of the beast is simply a system that is erected by a community of people who view Jesus like Caesar and His Kingdom like the Roman Church-State. Unfortunately, the majority of Protestants in America already view God in the exact way the Little Horn power is described in prophecy! This is evident from the fruit they are bearing.

The most concentrated group of people who sees Jesus as a Caesarian Ruler who arbitrarily changed His laws (akin to imperial decrees) at the cross, enforces His “new” system of laws through force and violence, and destroys all “heretics,” is found in America today, and the new label for this movement is “Christian Nationalism.”

6.3 CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM GIVES LIFE TO THE IMAGE OF THE BEAST

JESUS AND JOHN WAYNE

“[Jesus] is an Ultimate Fighter warrior king with a tattoo down his leg who rides into battle against Satan, sin, and death on a trusty horse, just like every decent Western from Pecos Bill to the Rifleman, the Cisco Kid, the Lone Ranger, Buffalo Bill, and Wild Bill Hickok. If we were to see Jesus today, we would see him in glory, not in humility. We would see a Jesus who will never take a beating again, but is coming again to open a can on the unrepentant until their blood flows upon the earth like grapes crushed in the violence of a winepress.”¹⁵³

This is a typical portrait of Jesus in the mind of many Evangelicals today. I remember seeing a friend of mine on social media posting pictures and videos depicting John Wayne as a type of Jesus, who would come back to execute “justice” upon (aka slaughter) all who refuse to submit to Him. In the minds of many today, Jesus and His followers were “‘brash, offensive’ (Stine), ‘self-reliant, competitive’ (Murrow), ‘punch-you-in-the-nose dudes’ (Driscoll),” even though “Paul says that those who are filled with the Holy Spirit will be loving, patient, peaceful, kind, and gentle.”¹⁵⁴ To quote Driscoll again, many Christians would rather worship “a pride fighter” Jesus who has “a sword in His hand and the commitment to make someone bleed” instead of worshipping “a guy I can beat up.”¹⁵⁵

The fact that my Instagram friend is not alone in his conception of Jesus is clear from the fact that someone wrote a whole book on “how evangelicals have worked to **replace the Jesus of the Gospels with an idol of rugged masculinity and Christian nationalism**—or in the words of one modern chaplain, with ‘a spiritual badass.’” This book is called *Jesus and John Wayne*.

Jesus said that if you have seen Him, you have seen His Father (John 14:9)—not *some* of the Father, but *all* of Him. Christ’s life was His testimony of His Father’s

¹⁵³ Mark Driscoll and Gerry Breshears, *Vintage Jesus: Timeless Answers to Timely Questions* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), p. 150.

¹⁵⁴ Brandon O’Brien, “A Jesus for Real Men, What the new masculinity movement gets right and wrong” (April 18, 2008) *Christianity Today*, <http://tinyurl.com/2ddskevz>.

¹⁵⁵ Mark Driscoll in “7 Big Questions: Seven Leaders on Where the Church is Headed” (2007), *Relevant Magazine*, <http://tinyurl.com/jpj48tv>

character, but if He didn't show *everything* about His Father's character (including His anger, wrath, and judgment), then He failed the mission. According to the authors of the quote about the violent tattooed Jesus, the picture of Christ's life is an “**incomplete**” revelation of Himself,¹⁵⁶ and therefore an incomplete picture of our Father in Heaven. When people involved in Christian Nationalism (whether they realize it or not) want to invoke Scripture to sanction violence and force against their political and religious enemies, they typically point to the Old Testament and the Book of Revelation.

In Revelation we do see Christ wearing “a robe dipped in blood” (Rev. 19:13), but whose blood is it? His own or His enemies?¹⁵⁷ Is He the perpetrator of violence or the victim of it? Christ conquers His enemies by being killed, not by killing. As Satan stripped Christ on the cross, Satan himself was “stripped naked” before the onlooking universe. The Mudslinger's lies were exposed, and his character was revealed—not by Christ hating and killing His enemies, but by loving them and being killed (Matt. 5:43-45).

THE FRUIT OF A JOHN WAYNE JESUS

When Eve accepted a view of God that was contrary to the testimony of Jesus, what happened? It led to the instinct of self-preservation that culminates in violence. That history was repeated in the Roman Church as well—they adopted a view of God as the Imperial Caesar instead of Jesus, and religious self-exaltation and persecution ensued. What then could be the result of such a picture of God as is held by Christian Nationalists? I got a glimpse of these views when I saw a picture of the gallows someone set up at the Capitol “Insurrection”¹⁵⁸ with the words “IN GOD WE TRUST” written on them. The phrase “God, Guns, and Trump” also comes to mind. What happens if I worship a Jesus who is “a kick-butt savior who is willing to smite enemies to restore America to a Christian nation by force, if necessary”?¹⁵⁹ Du Mez explains the resulting attitude of people who see God in such a way:

¹⁵⁶ Driscoll and Breshears, *Vintage Jesus*, p. 150.

¹⁵⁷ In the context of this passage, Christ's robe is dipped in blood *before* the resurrected wicked launch their attack (Rev. 19:13, 19). This is evidence that the blood which stains His cloak is the blood He shed on the cross, *not* the blood of His enemies.

¹⁵⁸ I put insurrection in quotation marks because the definition of this word is “an act or instance of revolting against civil authority or an established government.” While this is *legally* true, it conveys a sense of extreme violence and an actual attempt to overthrow the government, which didn't happen.

¹⁵⁹ Kristin Kobes Du Mez, quoted in John Blake's article “An ‘imposter Christianity’ is threatening American democracy” (July 24, 2022), *CNN*, <http://tinyurl.com/mvm266jk>.

“If you deem somebody in power to be working against the goals of a Christian America, then **you should not submit to that authority and you should displace that authority**... Because the stakes are so high, **the ends justify the means.**”¹⁶⁰

This is what happened during the Middle Ages. The Papacy, and other “Christian” nations, believed non-Christian foreigners were working against the goals of Christianity, so they did what it took to overthrow them.

PROTESTANTS & POWER

The *spirit* of Christian Nationalism—the same spirit of the medieval Papacy—is manifesting itself more day by day. The attempts of the Church to utilize the State to enforce her dogmas are steadily increasing. At a televised conference, mega-church leaders taught followers a “Watchman Decree” based on their “spiritual authority,” which said, in part:

“We decree that **America’s executive branch of government will honor God** and defend the Constitution.

“We decree that **our legislative branch (Congress) will write only laws that are righteous** and constitutional.

“We decree that **our judicial system will issue rulings that are biblical** and constitutional...”¹⁶¹

Keep in mind that the ideas in “The Watchman Decree” are not limited to those who went to a small church conference. Journalist Matthew Sheffield informs us that “This isn’t just some backwoods church meeting. It’s a nat’l conference convened by the Family Research Council, **far right lobbyists that regularly meet with the**

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

It’s interesting to point out that the popular phrase, “*the end justifies the means*,” owes its origin to the German Jesuit Hermann Busembaum (1600-1668), who declared that “... **when the end is lawful, the means are also lawful** [*Cum finis est licitus, etiam media sunt licita*].” Hermann Busenbaum, *Medulla Theologiae Moralis* (Neapoli: Apud Alexium Pellechium, 1748), p. 539, <http://tinyurl.com/5dwhuw8t>. Also see J. Beaufort Hurlbert, *The End Justifies the Means: Proven from Jesuit authors to have been taught for 350 years* (Montréal: 1890), <https://tinyurl.com/p52zps>.

¹⁶¹ “Watchman Decree,” *flashpoint.govictory.com*, <https://tinyurl.com/mpvcbe7>.

highest Republicans in government. The event is about *helping pastors build political machines.*¹⁶² This “decree” begs the question: what denomination would decide which things “honor God” and “are righteous” and “biblical”? The Pentecostals? Catholics? Mormons? Baptists?

But the even bigger question is this: would Jesus want us to take over the government in His name and enforce our own interpretations of the Bible on others? Many Christian Nationalists believe this, one of whom is Sean Feucht, former worship leader at Bethel Church and worship leader for the popular and influential ReAwaken America Tour.¹⁶³

“... That’s why we get called ‘well you’re Christian nationalists, **you want the Kingdom [of heaven] to be the government**’—yes! **‘You want God to come and overtake the government**’—yes! ‘You want Christians to be the only ones...’—Yes we do! We wouldn’t be a disciple of Jesus if we didn’t believe that. We want God to be in control of everything! **We want believers to be the ones writing the laws? Yes, guilty as charged...**”¹⁶⁴

The idea of taking over worldly governments for God is directly influenced by the “New Apostolic Reformation,” or NAR for short. The NAR is a radical movement based on Christian dominionism, which is “a subset of American Christianity that is conservative, politically active, and **believes that Christians should, and eventually will, take control of the government.**”¹⁶⁵

Christian dominionism, also known as dominion theology, is (like most Christian Nationalist beliefs) rooted in Roman Catholic theology: “In the year 1455 a papal bull (mandate or decree) titled *Romanus Pontifex* was issued by Pope Nicholas V declaring the Discovery Doctrine, which asserted the right of the Roman Catholic Church to take possession of any land occupied by pagans or heathens and to destroy the inhabitants if they would not convert, as well as do whatever was necessary with the land and resources to the furtherance of the

¹⁶² Mark Frauenfelder, “Kenneth Copeland’s Christofacist ‘Watchman Decree’ is straight out of *The Handmaid’s Tale*” (July 14, 2022), <http://tinyurl.com/4dfvpdwf>.

¹⁶³ To see a partial list of the highly influential speakers at these conferences, see the Wikipedia article, “ReAwaken America Tour.”

¹⁶⁴ Right Wing Watch, “Sean Feucht Proudly Admits to Being a Christian Nationalist,” YouTube video, April 21, 2023, <https://tinyurl.com/2e576d5r>.

¹⁶⁵ “What is Christian dominionism?,” *Got Questions*, <http://tinyurl.com/2p996sns>.

church.”¹⁶⁶ Instead of trying to take over foreign lands occupied by “infidels” and “heathens,” the religious right is seeking to take possession of the American government that is occupied by “godless liberals” and democrats.

Some have referred to this flavor of Christian Nationalism as “Christian Sharia” (“Charia”) or “The American Taliban,” as the parallel between Bible touting, gun-bearing Christians posing in front of the US flag looks ironically similar to the Muslim extremists (whom the former detest) doing the same—just switch out the flags, replace the Bible with the Quran, and call the Crusades Jihads. A *Rolling Stones* article from September 1, 2022, offers some insights on the origins of the NAR and their views:

“The NAR faithful take literally the command given by the resurrected Jesus to his followers to ‘make disciples of all nations.’ **They view Christianity as a missionary faith with a manifest destiny to conquer the planet...**

“The religious movement is extraordinary, Snow says, in that **it is ‘hyper-politicized’ and literally demonizes its opponents.** If you’re not an advocate for their theology, you’re on the side of Satan. **They view those who stand in opposition to Christian nationalism as afflicted by demons, and they view their struggle to impose biblical order as ‘spiritual warfare.’** Far from praying to be raptured to heaven, as many other evangelicals do, **NAR adherents anticipate reigning alongside Christ** — as wealthy and favored ‘kings and priests’ — during his long, heavenly rule **on Earth.**¹⁶⁷¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁶ Danutasn Brown and Ben Kramlich, *Dominion and Destiny: The Future of Man and the Earth* (Maranatha Media, 2020), p. 61, <https://tinyurl.com/DominionAndDestiny>.

¹⁶⁷ The idea that the Millennium will take place on earth does not appear to be Biblical, because (1) the saints shall meet Christ in the air (1 Thes. 4:16-18); (2) Christ shall subsequently bring them to the “many mansions” He has prepared for them in heaven (John 14:2, 3) where they shall live and reign with Christ for 1,000 years (Revelation 20:4); (3) after the 1,000 years Christ descends *with the saints* (Jude 14) in the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:1:1-3) to resurrect the wicked (in the 2nd resurrection, Rev. 20:5-6) for the Great White Throne Judgment; (4) once the “old earth” passes away and the “new earth” is created (Isaiah 65:17; 66:22; 2 Pet. 3:13; Rev. 21:1), the redeemed will “will inherit the whole earth” (Matt. 5:5) and will live there forever with God and His Son (Rev. 21:1-7; 22:1-5).

¹⁶⁸ Tim Dickinson, “Meet the Apostle of Right-Wing Christian Nationalism” (September 1, 2022), *Rolling Stones*, <http://tinyurl.com/5ybksedz>.

Just as the Roman Church-State justified colonization of the world by claiming they wanted to convert the world, the majority of churches in America likewise advocate violent, imperial expansion of the American Empire so they can “conquer the planet” for Christ.¹⁶⁹

The above article references Dutch Sheets, a prominent leader in the NAR, and informs us of what he currently teaches concerning the separation of Church and State, Christian nationalism, and Donald Trump:

“Sheets, 68, is one of America’s most influential Christian voices **demanding an end to the separation of church and state**. He’s been at the forefront of that movement for 20 years, but now the Republican party has come to him, with a growing contingent that’s embracing his end-times **vision of America as Christian theocracy**. At this July 1 worship event, Sheets told the crowd, **‘We must marry these two arenas — the civil and the sacred**. They are not separate in Scripture,’ he added, then insisted, ‘God never intended for it to be separate...’

“William ‘Dutch’ Sheets is a leading figure in a fundamentalist movement known as **the New Apostolic Reformation**, whose followers believe **America is anointed by God to convert the world to Christianity — by force if necessary** — and they seek to accelerate Jesus’ return and **rule over the Earth**. This divine mission, as they see it, will be carried out **when true believers seize control of the institutions of the U.S. government**. Their allies in positions of power include **members of Congress...**

“Like many other NAR preachers, **Sheets prophesied that Trump would be reelected**. And in the aftermath of Biden’s victory, Sheets didn’t admit error. Rather, he insisted, the result was fraud perpetrated by Satan that would not stand. **‘We have prophesies, dreams that God wants to give Trump eight years,’** Sheets insisted on a podcast with *Charisma* magazine.

¹⁶⁹ “Alluding to China’s massive population, one speaker held that ‘God [had] thrown down a thousand isles in the Pacific as jewels,’ by which he meant the Philippine archipelago, ‘as stepping-stones over which Columbia, with the Stars and Stripes in one hand and the cross of Christ in the other, may pass to the commerce, education, and spiritual salvation of one half of the people of this world.’...

“... In a sermon in Denver, Colorado on June 17, 1900, as violence continued to escalate in China [during the Boxer Rebellion], [Bishop Earl] Cranston declared that the potential of converting the Chinese to Christianity was worth any cost in bloodshed and war. He said proudly that he would ‘break all the treaties ever made’ in order to put U.S. forces ‘in the fore’ against the Boxers.” Jeffrey Rosario, “Protestant Anti-Imperialism and the Vindication of the Boxer Rebellion, 1899–1901,” *Diplomatic History*, vol. 46, is. 2 (April 2022), p. 364, 365.

Sheets insisted that the election result was ‘going to be overturned, and President Trump is going to be put back in office for four years.’ Sheets warned, however, that followers would ‘have to push this thing through,’ insisting: ‘I believe there’s **a remnant army** out there that is not going to let this go. And we’re going to make sure that God’s will is done.’

“Sheets continued to use metaphors of war and violence through the runup to Jan. 6. On a Nov. 9 podcast titled ‘God Is Not Finished with President Trump,’ **Sheets asked his listeners, ‘Are we gonna fight or not? Is Trump God’s choice or not?’** He exhorted, ‘We must make a stand right now,’ and to ‘war and get God’s will and God’s person back in office.’

“By late December, Sheets was invoking the Black Robed Regiment, a group of colonial preachers who were instrumental in the Revolutionary War, and asking God to ‘fight for us as you did our founders.’ **Sheets decreed that ‘there is coming a great partnership of the church and government,’** and asked his followers to ‘war with me for our great nation.’”¹⁷⁰

As is evident from the above articles, the colors of many Christian nationalists were especially brought out when Trump stepped onto the stage of American politics. When Trump came on the scene, politics entered the churches in a more striking way than previously.

“In courting this group, the Trump campaign chose allies who easily outnumber American Jews, Muslims, Buddhists and Sikhs combined.

“What is now **a network of charismatic evangelical Trump supporters began with a friendship between Trump and White-Cain,** a flamboyant prosperity preacher from the president’s second home state of Florida.

“White-Cain stumped for Trump on television and connected him to other high-profile Pentecostals and charismatics in 2016. The Trump campaign skillfully mapped stops at megachurch congregations like Darrell and Belinda Scott’s New Spirit Revival Center in Cleveland and the International Church of Las Vegas, where candidate **Trump received divine anointing and prophetic blessings.**

¹⁷⁰ Dickinson, “Meet the Apostle of Right-Wing Christian Nationalism” (September 1, 2022), *Rolling Stones*.

“While Trump appeared uncomfortable receiving such blessings, **he was still receptive to the prayers that described his bid for office as divinely ordained.**

“While in office, Trump has continued to receive anointing prayers that have invoked him as a ruler akin to Israel’s King David and Queen Esther — biblical monarchs with a divine purpose.

“Trump has steadfastly nurtured this intimacy during his first term. **He’s made moves that appeal to charismatics’ long-standing priorities and tastes, including support for Israel, prosperity, *spiritualized authoritarianism* and plain-spoken populism...**”¹⁷¹

The influence the Pentecostals and charismatics had on the rise of Trump being seen as an “anointed of God” is startling. Trump understands the influence Evangelicals have, which is why he has made sure to cater to their beliefs and aims. One of the beliefs mentioned in this article is “spiritualized authoritarianism,” which is the essence of the “image of the beast”—the idea that the Church has spiritual authority (power) from God to direct all branches of government accordingly, the same authority the Papacy exercised during the Dark Ages.

The Protestants want *power*, and the beast is ready to give it (Rev. 13:12, 14). Indeed, the religious right is catering to their desires, as is evident from the following words from Donald Trump during his 2024 Presidential campaign.

“... the former president vowed to hand power over to the Christian nationalist movement on an unprecedented scale... Trump said, ‘If I get in, you’re going to be using that *power* at a level that you’ve never used before.’”¹⁷²

With churches turning into tax-exempt “political machines,” one must wonder how politicians could ignore this potential power grab.

POLITICIANS & POWER

¹⁷¹ Erica Ramirez and Leah Payne, “President Trump’s hidden religious base: Pentecostal-charismatic celebrities” (August 27, 2020), *Religion News Service*, <http://tinyurl.com/22ynaftw>.

¹⁷² Jon Queally, “Trump tells right-wing Christians they will have power at ‘level you’ve never used before’ (Feb. 25, 2024), *Raw Story*, <https://tinyurl.com/4sd5ufpw>. Also see Right Wing Watch, “RWW News: Donald Trump Promises Christian Nationalists Unprecedented Political Power,” YouTube video, February 23, 2024, <https://tinyurl.com/mrb72xcb>.

Not only are religious leaders and influencers seeking to enter the political realm, but politicians seem to be catering to the religious right to gain their support. Consider the use of Scripture to support America's wartime efforts under the Bush administration:

“Former Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld put **Bible verses on the top of the ‘Worldwide Intelligence Update’ presented to President George W. Bush...**

“Next to a picture of an American tank is the quote: ‘Open the gates that the righteous nation may enter. The nation that keeps faith. Isaiah 26:2.’

“A photo of two soldiers in prayer is accompanied by the quote, ‘Whom shall I send, and who will go for us. Here I am Lord, send me! Isaiah 6:8.’

“A photo of an American tank at sunset has superimposed on it, ‘Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Ephesians 6:13.’”¹⁷³

To rally the religious right to support the invasion on Iraq, George W. Bush used the language of Scripture, depicting America as being on a holy “crusade” against the Muslim “evildoers.”¹⁷⁴ He said that **America is “the light”** that “shines in the darkness, and **the darkness” (our national enemies)**, “will not overcome it.”¹⁷⁵ But wait, I thought the Bible said that *Jesus* is the Light of the world?

“There’s power, wonder-working power...” Where is this wonder-working power? Is it in the blood of the Lamb, as the hymn goes? Well, according to Bush “There’s power, wonder-working power in the goodness and idealism and faith of the American people.”¹⁷⁶ In other words, Bush subtly (and frequently) said “**America = Jesus,**” and the Churches didn’t bat an eye at this blatant idolatry. What a striking example of how the United States has used the lamb-like cloak of Christianity, claiming to liberate the oppressed, to cover our agendas.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷³ Steven Waldman, “Bible-Quoting Defense Memos and Holy War” (May 18, 2009), *Wall Street Journal*, <https://tinyurl.com/52vef38c>.

¹⁷⁴ George W. Bush, “User-Clip: Bush – War on Terror = Crusade” (September 16, 2001), *C-Span*, <https://tinyurl.com/49whprxp>.

¹⁷⁵ “The Jesus Factor,” *PBS Frontline* (April 29, 2004).

¹⁷⁶ George W. Bush, State of the Union Address (January 28, 2003), *George Bush White House Archives*, <https://tinyurl.com/y7hubcf8>.

¹⁷⁷ Unless, of course, the American government only had the altruistic purpose of upholding democracy from the threat of terrorists in mind and didn’t mind the fact that Saddam Hussein decided to abandon the dollar in favor of the euro in oil sales. But the fact that there was an agenda

It is so unfortunate that many churches in America have fallen for this America = Jesus paradigm, as it is doing incalculable harm to their mission of spreading the Gospel. When America is presented to the world as a “Christian nation,” and proceeds to do things that are exploitative and oppressive to surrounding nations, the contempt of people is not only directed towards America, but also Christianity. Because of the alliance between the Church and America, people around the world “hear the gospel as *bad* news, as *American* news, *exploitive capitalistic* news, *greedy* news, *violent* news, and *morally decadent* news. They can’t see the beauty of the cross because everything the American flag represents to them is in the way.”¹⁷⁸

The government is using the religious right to further their own selfish goals—they are not on the side of the Church. The Church refuses to see this, but politicians don’t, and they see the power behind catering to this zealous group. This is evident from Donald Trump’s 2016 campaign, when many politicians used highly religious rhetoric when discussing Trump, politics, and the role of Western Christianity in both. Many government officials began saying things like “God wanted Trump to become President,” “Trump is the Chosen One,” and “if Christian nationalism is something to be scared of, they’re lying to you, and they’re lying to you on purpose”¹⁷⁹, etc.¹⁸⁰ Of course, this would instantly get them the support of any evangelical church which is led by someone who adheres to Christian Nationalistic sentiments.

We keep mentioning Christian Nationalism, but what exactly is it? According to the Baptist Joint Committee on Religious Liberty, the core beliefs of Christian Nationalism can be encapsulated as follows:

1. **America is a divinely appointed nation by God that is Christian.**

in mind is well documented. Richard Clarke, Bush’s former counter terrorism advisor, revealed that the Bush Administration began discussing how to proceed with an invasion of Iraq in January 2001, eight months before 9/11 (See his book, *Against All Enemies: Inside America’s War on Terror* (New York: Free Press, 2004)). And of course there was nothing suspicious at all about the attack of the World Trade Center that helped provide more justification for this planned invasion. (For a five-minute run-down of the 9/11 conspiracy “theory,” watch or read the information here: <https://tinyurl.com/yne2bmm7> [some of the links provided have been removed, but they can be found by pasting them in the Wayback Machine on archive.org]).

¹⁷⁸ Boyd, *Myth of a Christian Nation*, p. 110.

¹⁷⁹ Patriot Takes (@patriottakes), Twitter, June 3, 2022, 4:41am, <https://tinyurl.com/257wh83z>.

¹⁸⁰ VICE News, “Trump and His Allies Think He Was Sent by God to Be President.” YouTube video, November 27, 2019, <https://tinyurl.com/yey4uxnm>.

2. **America's founders**, rather than wanting to disestablish religion as a unifier for the nation, **were in fact establishing a nation based on Christian principles**,¹⁸¹ with white men as the leaders.
3. Others (Native Americans, enslaved Africans, and immigrants) would accept and cede to this narrative of America as a Christian nation, and accept their leadership.
4. America has a special place not only in world history, but in biblical Scripture, especially concerning the return of Christ.
5. **There is no separation between church and state**¹⁸²

Of course, not all Christian Nationalists adhere to these beliefs, as there are numerous variants, but many today (in both the political and religious spheres) are adopting and preaching these tenets.

US Representative for Colorado, Lauren Boebert, is a striking example of a Christian Nationalist politician, declaring that “**The church is supposed to direct the government.** The government is not supposed to direct the church—that is not how our founding fathers intended it and **I'm tired of this separation of church and state junk...**”¹⁸³ These sentiments aren't just the thoughts of a few extreme individuals, but they are likewise touted by the new Speaker of the House, Mike Johnson.¹⁸⁴

CRACKS IN THE WALL

The cracks in the wall separating Church and State are appearing everywhere—simply listen to our pledge of allegiance or read our national motto. The original “Pledge of Allegiance” was written in 1892 by Baptist Minister Francis Bellamy, and

¹⁸¹ Which is in direct contradiction to evidence such as the Treaty of Tripoli, which was approved by George Washington and states that “**The government of the United States is not in any sense founded on the Christian religion...**” Keep in mind that, according to Article VI of the Constitution, “all Treaties made... shall be the supreme Law of the Land...”

¹⁸² Baptist Joint Committee on Religious Liberty, *Report on Christian Nationalism and the January 6 Insurrection*, (February 9, 2022) p. 4-5, <https://tinyurl.com/bddw4a59>.

¹⁸³ Cornerstone, “Cornerstone Christian Center welcomes US Congress Representative Lauren Boebert.” YouTube video, June 26, 2022, <https://tinyurl.com/yawd2ctn>.

¹⁸⁴ Andrew Whitehead and Samuel L. Perry, “The Christian Nationalism of Speaker Mike Johnson” (October 27, 2023), *Time*, <https://tinyurl.com/2ksa9nt7>; “Mike Johnson, pedigreed evangelical, suggests his election as House speaker ordained by God,” *Religion News Service*, <https://tinyurl.com/3j5tker8>; Disciple's Voice of Hope with Alex T. Ray, “DVOH - God in Politics with Mike Johnson,” YouTube video, August 30, 2016, <https://tinyurl.com/ydz7j4tw>.

the phrase “Under God” was not included until 1954, thanks to a lobbying campaign led primarily by the Catholic Knights of Columbus. Likewise, our national motto was once *E Pluribus Unum* (Out of Many, One), but since 1956 it has been “In God We Trust”—the same words found on our currency.

Also consider the fact that in 2013, fourteen Republican legislators in North Carolina proposed the Rowan County Defense of Religion Act, which blatantly attacked the idea of separation between Church and State. The main part of this resolution is stated as follows:

“SECTION 1. The North Carolina General Assembly asserts that **the Constitution of the United States of America does not prohibit states or their subsidiaries from making laws respecting an establishment of religion.**

“SECTION 2. The North Carolina General Assembly does not recognize federal court rulings, which prohibit and otherwise regulate the State of North Carolina, its public schools or any political subdivisions of the State from making laws respecting an establishment of religion.”

The Constitution indeed forbids *Congress*, not the *States*, from creating laws respecting an establishment of religion, but does that mean it would be *right* for States to do this? Katherine Stewart, in her book *The Power Worshipers: Inside the Dangerous Rise of Religious Nationalism*, comments on the above bill, showing where such ideas could lead to:

“... The U.S. Constitution’s church-state separation provision, they claimed, only applied to the federal government. Think of it as a new nullification provision, only **aimed directly at the First Amendment. The bill would have allowed, say, public schools to insist that principals prove they had been ‘born again.’ It could have mandated that candidates for public office prove weekly church attendance and that all public meetings begin with prayers that infidels will come to know the Lord.**

“... passing the bill wasn’t the point of the exercise. The sponsors put it forward because they believed—rightly—that **this kind of posturing is just**

the way to gain popularity among the right-wing evangelical base and win power in North Carolina.”¹⁸⁵

Another force that’s chipping away the wall between Church and State is Speaker of the House, Mike Johnson. Recently a group of congressional representatives invited Johnson to talk about some of their concerns regarding the separation of Church and State, but he declined. Because of this, they decided to release a “white paper” report entitled “Speaker Johnson: Christian Nationalism in the Speaker’s Office?,” in which they lay out some of their worries to their fellow representatives. The representatives are part of the Congressional Freethought Caucus (CFC), “a group of twenty members of Congress who reflect the religious diversity of America—Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, other believers, and nontheists.” According to their paper, they “share a commitment to protecting the constitutional separation of church and state; ensuring public policy is based on facts, science, and reason; and defending religious liberty in the United States and abroad.”

Though this group, like myself, “respect, celebrate, and treasure his [Speaker Mike Johnson’s] right—and the right of every American—to freely practice his faith as guaranteed by the First Amendment,” they are likewise worried about some of his agendas. Below is the essence of their findings, and I highly encourage you to read the full document and look at the evidence they provide concerning Johnson and religious liberty, regardless of your view on other controversial issues they bring up.

“Speaker Johnson is deeply connected in political practice and philosophy to Christian Nationalism, more so than any other Speaker in American history. He has spent decades working to deny, reject, and undermine the constitutional separation of church and state... He has spent much of his career trying to impose sectarian-based moral codes on others. He has a long record of opposing and undermining civil rights and liberties in the name of religion. And he has collaborated closely with hate groups and Christian Nationalist extremists to advance a theocratic agenda by transforming our pluralist constitutional republic into a ‘biblically sanctioned government.’”¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁵ Katherine Stewart, *The Power Worshipers: Inside the Dangerous Rise of Religious Nationalism* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2020), p. 20.

¹⁸⁶ Congressional Freethought Caucus, “Speaker Johnson: Christian Nationalism in the Speaker’s Office?” (January 11, 2024), <http://tinyurl.com/2ntcdtv8>.

This agenda is an explicit description of the prophetic “image of the beast” where the “beast” is the theocratic Papal government which claims to be a “biblically sanctioned government” where there is no separation of Church and State. If this agenda succeeds, America will look like the spitting image of the medieval Papacy.

Not only do political and religious leaders think that Christianity should influence the laws of the land, but according to a 2021 Pew poll, it was found that **34%** of the “White Evangelical” group believes that **the Federal government should stop enforcing the separation of church and state**, followed by 31% of “Highly religious Christians” believing the same.¹⁸⁷ Likewise, according to a 2020 report by the Pew Research Center, “**Almost half of adults in the United States believe that the Bible should influence the laws**, with over a quarter saying that it should overrule the will of the people...”¹⁸⁸

6.4 WOMAN WITH THE FORBIDDEN FRUIT RIDES THE BEAST

As we saw earlier, the Serpent sought to destroy the symbolic woman in Revelation (the Church) by persecuting her, but when he realized that the blood of martyrs was like Gospel seed, he decided to change his strategy. Instead of seeking to use violence first, he used deception and seduction. He couldn’t conquer the Church, but perhaps he could corrupt and seduce her. Just as the Serpent seduced Eve with the spirit of self-exaltation and *power* (Gen. 3:5) through lies about God’s character, so too did the Serpent try to seduce Christ by offering Him the kingdoms of the world. Where Christ prevailed, the Church in Rome failed. She sold her birthright for a bowl of soup and traded her humble garments for the riches of empire. She wanted to be a Christian *and* have the power and the glory of this world. Eusebius describes the scene of Constantine’s banquet for the Roman clergy:

“Not one of the bishops was missing from the imperial banquet... the men of God passed fearlessly, and entered the innermost royal courts. Some then reclined with him [Constantine], others relaxed nearby on couches on either

¹⁸⁷ “In U.S., Far More Support Than Oppose Separation of Church and State” (2021), *Pew Research Center*, <https://tinyurl.com/d4vs59wr>.

¹⁸⁸ Michael Gryboski, “Nearly half of Americans believe the Bible should influence US laws” (2020), *The Christian Post*, <https://tinyurl.com/yicyfp67a>.

side. It might have been supposed that it was an imaginary representation of the kingdom of Christ, and that what was happening was ‘dream, not fact.’”¹⁸⁹

This scene brings to mind images of Evangelicals surrounding Trump in the White House.

Today Christian Nationalism in America is acting as the spirit of the false prophet. Just as the Holy Spirit brings about the union between Christ and the Church, so does this unholy spirit seek to bring about a union between the State and the Church. Just as the Holy Spirit seeks to transform the hearts and minds in the image of Christ, so does the spirit of Christian Nationalism seek to transform hearts and minds into the image of the Papal beast. This Americanized, imperial form of Christianity—which tempts Christians with having both Christ *and* power, the cross *and* the sword—is looking more and more like the Papacy each day.

God had led the Church of the Dark Ages into the wilderness of obscurity to preserve her from persecution. Towards the end of this period of persecution, God led the Church to the wilderness of “the earth,” where America arose. Here the Church was free from the persecution of the Papacy for a long time. However, as the Papacy went down in 1798, America as a nation was rising, and thus Satan continued his plan of corrupting this nation, seeking to combine the Church with the State.

What will be the result of Satan’s efforts to corrupt the pure woman of Revelation 12? What happens when the churches in America get the power the politicians are offering her? Tragically, in Revelation 17 we see the outcome for the Church, and it is eerily similar to what we saw in Revelation 12:

Revelation 17:3 So the angel took me in the Spirit into **the wilderness**. There I saw **a woman sitting on a scarlet beast** that had seven heads and ten horns, and blasphemies against God were written all over it.

The woman—the Church—which had once been loyal to God has been seduced by the Serpent’s misrepresentation of God! Just like Eve! This woman (Church) is now seen working together with the beast (State) which looks just like the Papal beast (both have seven heads, ten horns, and are full of the names of blasphemy, or slander—Rev. 13:1). Oh, how this picture shows the moral fall of the Church which has gone to bed with the State, like a wife who has cheated on her Husband, Christ.

¹⁸⁹ Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*, trans. Averil Cameron and Stuart G. Hall (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), bk. 3, ch. 15, p. 127, <http://tinyurl.com/2eusftva>.

This picture of a woman riding a beast is a fitting representation of *both* the early Church that was seduced into joining forces with the Roman State (the beast)¹⁹⁰ and the end-time Church which will be seduced into joining forces with the United States of America (the image of the beast).

The Protestant Churches in America are being deceived just like Eve—by a false picture of God and His government that incites the desire for self-exaltation and power. The woman holding the *forbidden fruit in Eden* perfectly depicts the seductive slanders of the Serpent, just as the woman holding the *forbidden wine in Revelation* depicts the same. By joining forces with the Serpent, the Church has gained much wealth, prestige, and power (symbolized by her fancy jewelry, Rev. 17:4), but has lost her purity in the process. And just as Eve did not keep the forbidden fruit to herself, but shared it with man, so too will the end time Church share her false view about God with mankind. And since violence is the result of believing lies about God’s character, violence was the result of the union of Church and State in Rome, and violence will be the result of the union of Church and State in America. The Church traded the worship of the *violated Lamb* for a *violent Leader*, and thus the *persecuted Church* becomes the *persecuting Church*; she became drunk on false views of God which led her to become “drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus.” Revelation 17:6 (KJV). When John saw this scene he was “**extremely horrified with a great horror**” Revelation 17:6.¹⁹¹

In the beginning the Serpent deceived “all the world” (Adam and Eve), and the end shall be no different (Rev. 12:9; 13:3). In Eden the Serpent led *man* astray through the *woman* who partook of the forbidden fruit by believing *lies about God’s character*. In the end Satan is trying to lead all *mankind* astray through *churches* (women) which are spreading *lies about God’s character* (the forbidden fruit) by misrepresenting Him and His government.

	GENESIS	REVELATION
PURE WOMAN	Pre-Fall Eve	Pure Woman / Church (Rev. 12)
POWER BEHIND BEAST	Satan behind the Serpent (Rev. 12:9)	Serpent behind the Papal Beast (Rev. 13:2, 4)
SYMBOL OF LIES ABOUT GOD	Forbidden Fruit (Gen. 3:6)	Wine of Babylon (Rev. 17:4; 18:3)

¹⁹⁰ “Revelation epitomizes, and encapsulates for analytical scrutiny, the larger and later process whereby Christianity... [after the] Constantinian period, paradoxically *became* Rome.” Stephen D. Moore, *Empire and Apocalypse: Postcolonialism and the New Testament* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2006), p. 115.

¹⁹¹ Trans. Tonstad, *Revelation*, p. 245.

**PURE WOMAN
DECEIVED**

**DECEIVED ONE
BECOMES AGENT OF
DECEPTION**

**BETRAYED BY
PARTNER**

Fallen Eve	Fallen Woman / Church (Rev. 17)
Eve teams up with Serpent & gives Fruit to Man (Gen. 3:6)	Harlot teams up with Beast & gives Wine to Mankind (Rev. 14:8)
Eve betrayed by man she seduced (Gen. 3:12)	Harlot betrayed by mankind she seduced (Rev. 17:16)

And what shall this American union of Church and State do with their newfound power? The same thing the union of Church and State did in Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome—legislate and enforce religious laws, thus implementing a false system of worship. This time, however, the laws will implemented under the Christian flag. All of this is symbolized in Revelation when Scripture says that America, the earth beast, will force “¹⁶ all, *both* small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads: ¹⁷ and that no *man* might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name.” Revelation 13:16–17. But before we can dig into exactly what the Mark of the Beast is, we must first understand what the Seal of God is, for the Mark is a counterfeit of the Seal.

THE SEAL OF GOD & TREE OF LIFE

7.1 2 TREES & 2 VIEWS OF GOD

Earlier we considered the first voting booths on earth, namely, the two trees in Eden. These were literal, physical trees, but they also had spiritual significance. Scripture informs us that if we partook of the Tree of Life we would live forever (Gen. 3:22). Some think this means that the tree was a source of life, and in a way it was for Adam and Eve. However, the tree did not have life inherent within itself, for Scripture declares that God is the Source of all life (Acts 17:25, 28; Ps. 36:9). God is the Source of life, not a tree, and we partake of this life by being in a trusting relationship with Him.

John 17:3 And **this is the way to have eternal life—to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ**, the one you sent to earth.

God is the Source of all life and He can choose to make a tree the channel of this life if He wants. However, the Bible tells us that the ultimate channel for God's life is through His only begotten Son:

1 Corinthians 8:6 (KJV) but to us *there is but* one God, **the Father, of whom are all things**, and we in him; and one Lord **Jesus Christ, by whom are all things**, and we by him.

God is the *of whom*, the Source, of all life, and Christ is the *by whom*, the Channel, through which we receive this life. God saw fit to put life in His Son, and make Him the only way to the Father (John 14:6). The tree of life (and anything else that gives physical life) is a symbol of Christ. Eating from the tree of life was a sign that Adam and Eve trusted in God as their Provider, their Source of life, and it was this trusting relationship that connected them to God and filled them with His life.

Every time Adam and Eve partook of the tree of life they were casting their vote for God as their faithful Father, believing that He had their best interests at heart and

selflessly gave them all things—they had perfect freedom and His commands were for their benefit. But when they swallowed Satan’s lies about God, they no longer trusted that God had their best interest in mind, but rather, that He was trying to restrict their liberty with His senseless rules. They no longer trusted that God was *all* good, but they now believed He was good *and* evil, One who gives life *and* death! As they spiritually swallowed these lies, they physically swallowed ***the forbidden fruit*** from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

The result of seeing God through Satan’s lies was fear towards God, seeing Him as One who would destroy them if they broke His arbitrary rules. This paradigm produced a spirit of rebellion in Adam towards Christ which was later manifested in his son, Cain. Cain persecuted Abel because he accepted the righteousness of Christ by faith (Heb. 11:4)—thus Cain used force to violently crucify Christ in the person of Abel.

The outworking of Satan’s lies and principles was seen in the kingdoms of the earth, where disaster has inevitably been the result. Christ came to dispel these lies about His Father and His Kingdom, showing that God does love us like a trustworthy Father, that His rules are not arbitrary, and that God values the freedom of His creatures immensely. The life and death of Christ shows the truth of these things, and His testimony can restore our trust in God, thus reconnecting us to the Source of life. All we need to do is trust Christ and allow Him to lead us in the way of life.

2 TREES—PHYSICAL THEN SPIRITUAL

Ecclesiastes 1:9 **History merely repeats itself. It has all been done before. Nothing under the sun is truly new.** (cf. Is. 46:10)

Everything that will happen has already happened in different ways in the past. God’s people have always faced religious persecution at the hands of corrupt religious systems in bed with the State. During these crises, everyone involved had the opportunity to take a stand under the banner of one of two kingdoms: God’s Kingdom of selfless love and freedom, or Satan’s Kingdom of selfishness and authoritarian force.

The war between these two Kingdoms began in heaven and moved to earth, and in the beginning all mankind (Adam and Eve) cast their vote for their ruler. As it was in the beginning, so shall it be in the end: all will one day have to choose between these two trees. Just as the Jews clamored for Christ’s death under the guise of the “common good,” end-time powers will seek to destroy God’s faithful remnant under

the same pretext. But it will only further manifest Satan’s principles. The voting booth in the beginning was two physical trees and the voting booth in the end will be two spiritual trees. The physical comes first, and then the spiritual (1 Cor. 15:46). Physical types—symbols—are first and are followed by spiritual antitypes—substance.

Instead of describing the two voting booths in the end as the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they are known as *the Seal of God* and *the Mark of the Beast*.

7.2 WHAT IS THE SEAL OF GOD?

Many Christians zealously try to decode the meaning of the Mark of the Beast. This is usually to no avail, as most don’t know who the Beast is. Thankfully, God has given us ample evidence that the Beast from the Sea (aka the Little Horn Antichrist) is the Roman Catholic system. To determine what their Mark is, we must first understand what the Seal of God is. Why? Because the Mark of the Beast is a counterfeit of the Seal of God:

	SEAL OF GOD	MARK OF BEAST
SIGN OF...	THE FATHER (REV. 7:2; MATT. 16:16)	THE BEAST (REV. 13:17)
LOCATED...	IN FOREHEAD & HAND (REV. 7:3; DEUT. 6:8)	IN FOREHEAD OR HAND (REV. 13:16; 14:8-10)
SYMBOLIZED AS...	GOD’S NAME (REV. 14:1)	BEAST’S NAME (REV. 13:17; 14:11)

THE SEAL OF GOD IS HIS NAME

The Bible declares that the righteous in the end will have the “**Seal of the Living God**” “**in their forehead**” (Rev. 7:2-3 KJV). John, in vision, sees this group and describes them as standing with Christ, the Lamb, and “**having his Father’s name written in their foreheads.**” Revelation 14:1 (KJV). Thus *the Seal of God is His Name*.

Does this mean that God’s people will all get tattoos of God’s Hebrew name on their foreheads? Or is there a deeper truth that God is trying to convey?

GOD'S NAME IS HIS PRESENCE

What is the name of God? In both scholarly and fringe circles, there's a lot of debate surrounding this topic. Is it Yahweh, Jehovah, or Yahuah? Are they the same or different? What are the missing letters in the tetragrammaton? How do we accurately pronounce the "divine name"? *Should* we pronounce the divine name? I'm not a fan of this debate. I am content to refer to God the same way our Perfect Pattern always referred to Him: as our Father. Jesus didn't focus on pronunciation, so neither will I.

Another reason I avoid this debate is because it seems superficial. Yes, there is importance to understanding the truth of these things, and the insights we can gain from a knowledge of the original Hebrew can be awesome, but it seems that we are trying to understand "God's name" from a very Western and legalistic point of view. Could it be that there is a deeper significance concerning the name of God that goes beyond translation and pronunciation? I think so, and I think the Bible agrees.

The Scriptures refer to God by several names and designations, such as Yahweh (or whatever transliteration you prefer), El, Elohim, Adonai, El Shaddai, etc. One of the more interesting and overlooked appellations of God is His identification with His name. Michael Heiser informs us that "the Name' functions as a substitute word for Yahweh. In several the Name is personified—the Name is *a person*." He goes on to show how God's Name in Isaiah 30:27-28 and Psalm 20:1, 7 "is clearly cast as an entity, as Yahweh himself... How is it that the psalmist would pray that 'the Name' protects anyone? Israelites wouldn't get much protection from a string of consonants (Y-H-W-H). The point of the psalm is that **trusting in the Name means trusting in Yahweh himself—he is the Name.**"¹⁹²

This helps us make sense of many Biblical references to God's name which don't make sense if taken in a strictly literalistic fashion. For instance, in Deuteronomy we read that God chose a place to "put his name" (12:5 KJV) and would "cause his name to dwell there" (12:11 KJV). Scratching the tetragrammaton onto the temple doesn't put God there any more than writing "pizza" on a plate offers instant delivery. God's presence is what "etches" His name into a place. When God said, "In Jerusalem will I put my name" (2 Kings 21:4 KJV), He was saying that His presence would be there, not that someone would graffiti "YHWH" all over the city.

With this in mind, when John saw the 144,000 having the Father's name in their foreheads, he must have realized the massive implications! The 144,000 aren't those

¹⁹² Michael Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the Supernatural Worldview of the Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2015), p. 144-145.

who can perfectly pronounce Hebrew names, but these are they who are filled with the presence of God!¹⁹³ But what will this look like? Aren't all Christians supposed to be full of God's Spirit?

GOD'S NAME & PRESENCE IS IN CHRIST

In the Old Testament we find a very interesting reference to God putting His name *in* someone:

Exodus 23:20–22 (KJV) ²⁰ Behold, **I send an Angel before thee**, to keep thee in the way, and to bring thee into the place which I have prepared. ²¹ Beware of him, and obey his voice, provoke him not; for he will not pardon your transgressions: for **my name is in him**. ²² But if thou shalt indeed obey **his voice**, and do **all that I speak**; then I will be an enemy unto thine enemies, and an adversary unto thine adversaries.

Here we see that God placed His “name” in the Angel which led Israel through the wilderness after the Exodus; He was working in and through this Angel to lead His people. And who was this “Angel” through which God led them? According to Paul, the “**rock that traveled with them... was Christ.**” 1 Corinthians 10:1-4. The pre-incarnate Christ was the “Angel,” or messenger, which led them!

God is the Lord of heaven's armies, and His Son is the Captain of His Father's armies. When Jesus, “the commander of the Lord's army,” appeared to Joshua, He told the soldier, “**Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy.**” Joshua 5:13-15. This is the same language used to describe the scenario at the burning bush with Moses, when “the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a blazing fire from the middle of a bush... When the Lord saw Moses coming to take a closer look, God called to him from the middle of the bush,” and He told Moses, “**Take off your sandals, for you are standing on holy ground.**” Exodus 3:2-5. Here the

¹⁹³ Some think that the 144,000 is a literal number of Jews at the end of time, while others (myself included) think it is symbolic of God's loyal children at the end of time. I take this position for a few reasons. Firstly, the 12 tribes don't exist today, as the 10 tribes gradually intermingled with Gentiles during the aggressive Assyrian assimilation campaign (2 Kings 17:6-23) and thus disappeared from history. Secondly, the number 144,000 itself—being 12 x 12 x 1,000—testifies of its symbolic nature. Thirdly, after John *bears* of the 144,000 (7:4) he *sees* an innumerable multitude (7:9); thus the 144,000 is equated with the Church triumphant (for more on this hearing / seeing dichotomy, see pages 24 and 208). The Great Multitude does not seem to be the redeemed throughout history, and thus separate from the 144,000, for they are described as those who go through the great tribulation in the end (7:9, 13-14).

Angel (Messenger) of the Lord—Christ—is identified with the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Exodus 3:6; cf. Judges 13:21-22). Why? Because **“God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself”** (2 Cor. 5:19). When Christ spoke, **“the word which”** was heard wasn’t His own, but it was the Father speaking through Him. John 14:24, 10 (KJV).

Since God’s name—or presence—is within His Son, He was the only One who could perfectly proclaim God’s “name” to the world, which is why He could say to His Father, **“I have manifested thy name”** (John 17:6 KJV), or as the NLT clearly put it, “I have revealed you.” Christ manifested His Father’s name by revealing His *character*. You can’t separate someone from their character.

THE SIGN OF GOD’S PRESENCE—RIGHTEOUSNESS

If we want to avoid the Mark of the Beast in the end, we must have the name of God written in our foreheads; we must be filled with God’s presence. But how can we know if we are filled with the Spirit of God? The same way we know a tree is in a living relationship with the soil, sun, and rain—by the fruit it bears.

Galatians 5:22–23 ²² But **the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,** ²³ gentleness, and self-control. **There is no law against these things!**

The first fruit of the Spirit is love, and **“love is the fulfilling of the law.”** Romans 13:10 (KJV) (cf. Rom. 13:8; Gal. 5:14; Jam. 2:8).¹⁹⁴ This is significant because Christ explained God’s laws as “Love for Dummies.”

Matthew 22:37–40 ³⁷ Jesus replied, ““You must **love the Lord** your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.’ ³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹ A second is equally important: **‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’** ⁴⁰ **The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments.**”

¹⁹⁴ Polycarp, the disciple of John, likewise affirmed the importance of “love toward God and Christ and toward our neighbour,” declaring to the Philippians that “if any man be occupied with these, he hath fulfilled the commandment of righteousness; for he that hath love is far from all sin.” Polycarp 3.3. Lightfoot and Harmer, *The Apostolic Fathers*, p. 178.

The first tablet, containing the first four commandments, describes *how to love God*, while the second tablet, with the last six commandments, tells us *how to love our fellow human beings*.

Paul (who said that love is the fulfillment of the law) describes for us what love looks like when a person fulfills this law of love: “⁴Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud ⁵or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged. ⁶It does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out.” 1 Corinthians 13:4-6. Imagine living in a world where everyone loved God and their neighbor supremely, where everyone is like Paul’s description of love! Since love is the central characteristic of God (1 John 4:8, 16), and His laws are love, it is plain to see that God’s laws are simply a transcript of His character. Where God’s presence is, His character of love will be there.

On Mount Sinai, after giving the 10 commandments—the law of love—again, God said the following:

Deuteronomy 6:6–8 (KJV) ⁶ And **these words [the 10 commandments—the law of love]**, which I command thee *this* day, **shall be in thine heart:** ⁷ and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. ⁸ And **thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes.**

God’s law (character) of love is to be a *sign* between the eyes, or in the *forehead*, of His people—just like the Seal of God is in the forehead of the 144,000! When we love like God, it is a *sign* that we are His children (Matt. 5:44-45) and are filled with His presence!

Obedience to God’s law of love is also described as righteousness (Ps. 119:172), while the absence of love is described as unrighteousness (1 John 3:4 + 1 John 5:17; cf. Heb. 1:9; 1 Cor. 15:34; Rom. 7:7). As such, those who are full of the Spirit of Christ and abide in Him will “walk, even as he walked.” 1 John 2:6. How did Jesus walk?

John 15:10 When you obey my commandments, you remain in my love, just as **I obey my Father’s commandments and remain in his love.**

Yes, at the end of the day, “**this sealing means the outward manifestation of character**... In the reign of the Antichrist goodness and evil, righteousness and sin,

come into their fullest manifestation and antagonism. Character ultimately enters on the stage of finality.”¹⁹⁵

7.3 HOW TO RECEIVE THE SEAL OF GOD

The question in many minds now becomes, how can I keep God’s law and be righteous? I thought that was impossible? Evidently it is not impossible to be righteous, for Scripture describes many people who fulfilled the law of love. It talks of “righteous Abel” (Matt. 23:35) and Noah, who was also “a righteous man” (Gen. 6:9); Zacharias and Elisabeth, living right before the birth of Christ, were both “righteous in God’s eyes, careful to obey all of the Lord’s commandments and regulations.” Luke 1:6. Paul also said that the Gentiles whom he shared the Gospel with had also “attained unto righteousness” (Rom. 9:30; 6:17-22 KJV). It shouldn’t be hard to believe that the Bible meant what it said when it declared that Christ’s mission was to “do away with sin” (Rom. 8:3 GNT), to “save his people from”—not in—“their sins.” Matthew 1:21.

Why did Jesus come to save us from our sins? Why does He want us to stop sinning? Because He’s an incessant perfectionist who won’t tolerate any divergences from His sovereign will? No, Jesus wants to save us from our sins because they’re dangerous. God doesn’t kill, but sin does. Sin is like the poisonous fruit God warns us not to eat, and we rebel against His loving prohibitions when we distrust Him. The forbidden fruit is a fallen perception of God, and this false view of God causes us to distrust Him and subsequently rebel against His law of love.

In Eden our first parents believed the lies of the Serpent and were subsequently alienated from God, the Source of life, because their trust in Him was broken (Eph. 4:18). Because they didn’t trust God fully, they disregarded His warnings and began living out of harmony with the Source of life and wisdom, which brought on the curse of sin—degradation and death.

All mankind has broken God’s laws because, at a deep, subconscious level, we have consumed the poisonous lies and misrepresentations of the Serpent. The only way for us to be healed (*justified*)¹⁹⁶ is to stop consuming poison (Satan’s lies) and

¹⁹⁵ R.H. Charles, *The Revelation of St. John* in the “International Critical Commentary” (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1920), vol. 1, p. 205-206.

¹⁹⁶ Some view justification as primarily a legal matter which denotes that someone is legally right with God through pardon which is obtained by faith. However, what if we viewed justification as primarily a healing matter which denotes that someone is relationally set right with God by trusting Him? This seems logical, as Jesus focused on healing people, not adjusting legal

receive the antidote. What is the antidote to Satan’s lies about God? The truth about what He is really like—which was revealed in the life and death of Jesus, “the faithful and true witness” (Rev. 3:14). If we trust that God looks exactly like Jesus—that He is willing to lay down His life to prove that He loves us like a Father and Friend to win our trust—and accept His offer of friendship, then our once broken relationship with Him is healed, and we are reconciled to Him (justified).

When we are healed (justified) we will obey God’s laws (Rom. 2:13), but we don’t obey God’s laws in order to be healed (justified) (Gal. 3:11). A tree bears fruit *because* it is a fruit tree; it doesn’t bear fruit in order to *become* a fruit tree. In other words, friends of God act like God, but you don’t become a friend of God by acting like Him—you become a friend by seeing Him as He is and trusting Him.

As we spend time with and admire our new Friend, His character will rub off on us. Thus we will manifest His character, “Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, Saith the LORD of hosts.” Zechariah 4:6 (KJV). This is crucial because we don’t have it in ourselves to do what is right by our own strength and power (Rom. 3:10-12; 7:18; 8:7). We will only think and act like Jesus once we are connected to the Source of goodness and love (Matt. 9:17) by faith.

And when I say faith in God, I don’t mean a mere intellectual assent to the truth. According to Jesus, the Author and Finisher of faith (Heb. 12:2), the greatest example of faith He saw was when a Roman officer asked Jesus to heal his servant. He didn’t simply acknowledge that Jesus had powers from God like the Pharisees (John 3:2), but He clung to Christ as a personal Savior, *trusting* and *depending* wholly upon His Word to accomplish what is promised.

Matthew 8:5–10⁵ When Jesus returned to Capernaum, a Roman officer came and pleaded with him, ⁶ “Lord, my young servant lies in bed, paralyzed and in terrible pain.” ⁷ Jesus said, “I will come and heal him.” ⁸ But the officer said, “Lord, I am not worthy to have you come into my home. **Just say the word from where you are, and my servant will be healed.** ⁹ I know this because I am under the authority of my superior officers, and I have authority over my soldiers. I only need to say, ‘Go,’ and they go, or ‘Come,’ and they come. And if I say to my slaves, ‘Do this,’ they do it.” ¹⁰ When Jesus heard

matters. In fact, the word “salvation” (σῶσις) in the Gospels is used to denote healing people from their diseases (Matt. 9:21-22; Mark 5:23, 28, 34; 6:56; 10:52; Luke 8:36, 48, 50; 17:19; 18:42) and healing people from sin (Matt. 1:21; 13:15; Mark 3:4; 8:35; 13:13; 16:16; etc.). Also see Ps. 41:4; 103:2-4; Is. 53:5; Jer. 17:14; Mal. 4:2; etc.

this, he was amazed. Turning to those who were following him, he said, “**I tell you the truth, I haven’t seen faith like this in all Israel!**”

Saving faith is a deep *trust in God* and a surrender and giving up of all *trust in self*. In other words, ***faith is trusting and depending on God*** like a child who trusts his loving father.

If I, as a child, implicitly trust my parents, I will submit my will to them by choosing to let them raise me and make choices for me. Likewise, when a child of God hears the “gentle whisper” (1 Kings 19:12) of their Father saying, “This is the way you should go,” (Is. 30:21), the faithful child will not be rebellious (Is. 50:4–5), but will *choose to submit and surrender* Himself to God (James 4:7), trusting and depending wholly upon Him to “call the shots.” I love this little poem, as it perfectly shows us what it means to trust (or distrust) God:

*“As children bring their broken toys
With tears for us to mend,
I brought my broken dreams to God
Because He was my friend.*

*But then instead of leaving Him
In peace to work alone,
I hung around and tried to help
With ways that were my own.*

*At last I snatched them back and cried,
“How could you be so slow”
“My child,” He said, “What could I do?
You never did let go.”*

– Laretta P. Burns

In this poem, the child initially expressed trust in God to fix what was broken, but later the child manifested their distrust in God by trying to do things their own way. If the clay doesn’t remain moldable, if we don’t fully submit to God’s guiding voice, the Potter cannot transform us into what He has destined us to become.

When we trust God as a Father and Friend, depending on Him for all things, He sends His Spirit into our hearts (Eph. 3:17), which speaks to and impresses us to live

like Jesus. When we submit to His ways and choose to listen to His voice, He will live out His law of love in and through us.

John 15:4–5 ⁴Remain in me, and I will remain in you. For **a branch cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine, and you cannot be fruitful unless you remain in me.** ⁵“Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. **Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit.** For apart from me you can do nothing.

2 Corinthians 6:16 (KJV) ... **ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in *them*;** and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. (cf. John 3:21; 14:10; Matt. 10:20; Rom. 5:19; Ps. 31:19; Is. 54:17)

This is how Christ is “made unto us... righteousness” (1 Cor. 1:30 KJV), how His obedience in and through us makes us righteous (Rom. 5:19), and why He has the name, “**THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS**” (Jer. 23:6 KJV). Jesus is the Channel of all righteousness—all loving thoughts and actions. Only by receiving His Spirit—His presence—into our hearts and minds can we bear the fruit of righteousness.

The whole battle of the Christian walk is not to “do right,” but to believe, to trust in God. Thus, Christ declared, “This is the only work God wants from you: Believe in the one he has sent.” John 6:29. I like how Dr. Timothy Jennings expounded on the above in his Remedy Paraphrase Bible:

John 6:29 (The Remedy Paraphrase) God doesn’t require that you perform some work or task in order to enjoy complete healing of mind, reconciliation with him, and eternal life. **All he requires of you is this: Believe the truth that I have come to reveal — which will result in the lies of Satan being expelled from your minds, trust in God being restored, and you being healed by God’s recreative power — so that you may live forever.**

Our job is to trust God through the revelation of Christ. This is why Paul counseled Timothy to “lay hold on eternal life” by fighting “the good fight of faith” (1 Tim. 6:12 KJV), and why he said at the end of his days that he himself had “fought a good fight”—because he “kept the faith.” 2 Timothy 4:7 (KJV). In like manner, those who receive the Seal of God are described as those who “**keep... the faith of Jesus.**” Revelation 14:12. This not only means they will have **faith *in* Jesus**, but they

will also accept the **faith of Jesus**—the trust Christ had in His Father. This level of trust can only be received by fully believing that Jesus was a faithful Witness who fully revealed the trustworthiness character of God (this is **the faithfulness of Jesus**).¹⁹⁷ If we keep trusting in God, through Christ, with all of our heart, not depending on our own understanding, He shall direct and guide our paths (Prov. 3:5-6) in the ways of righteousness (Prov. 8:20).

THE NEW BIRTH

The choice to surrender self and depend on Christ alone to lead us is referred to in Scripture as dying to self and living in Christ, and is also known as the “new birth.”

Galatians 2:20–21 ²⁰ My old self has been crucified with Christ. **It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God**, who loved me and gave himself for me. ²¹ I do not treat the grace of God as meaningless. For if keeping the law could make us right with God, then there was no need for Christ to die.

When we die to our selfish ways (the “old man”) and accept Christ as the Master of our life by trusting Him to call the shots, then He and His Father will come into the repentant sinner’s heart and make Their “abode with him.” John 14:23 (KJV). Then the same Jesus who fulfilled God’s law on earth (Matt. 5:17), by selflessly loving God and others (Rom. 13:8, 10), will continue to fulfill His Father’s law of love in and through us, thereby making us righteous! Then the good we do shall no longer be of ourselves, but it will be **God “working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him.”** Phil. 2:13. Thus, “**by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous**” (Rom. 5:19 KJV)—Christ seeks to be obedient through

¹⁹⁷ The rendering of “faith in/of Jesus” as “faithfulness of Jesus” is now done by many scholars. See Sigve K. Tonstad, *Saving God’s Reputation: The Theological Function of Pistis Christou in the Cosmic Narratives of Revelation* (Library of New Testament Studies, vol. 337. Edinburgh: T&T Clark., 2006); Richard B. Hays, “The Faith of Jesus Christ: An Investigation of the Narrative Substructure in Galatians 3.1-4.11” in the *Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series*, no. 56 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983; repr. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002); Douglas A. Campbell, “The Rhetoric of Righteousness in Romans 3.21-26,” *Journal for the Study of New Testament Supplement Series 65* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992); N.T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (2 vols.; London: SPCK, 2013), p. 836-851; Sigve K. Tonstad, “πίστις Χριστοῦ: Reading Paul in A New Paradigm” in *Andrews University Seminar Studies*, vol. 40, no. 1, (2002), p. 37-59, <http://tinyurl.com/yc2z8jm9>; Michael Bird and Preston M. Sprinkle (eds.), *The Faith of Jesus Christ: Exegetical, Biblical, and Theological Studies* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2009).

us all, but only those who surrender their life to Christ can have His righteousness working in and through them. This experience is the New Birth and the New Covenant:

Hebrews 10:16 **“This is the new covenant I will make with my people on that day, says the Lord: I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds.”**¹⁹⁸

God’s law is written on our heart when Christ is brought into our heart. When we choose to make Jesus the boss of our lives by faith—by trusting and depending on Him—we are made righteous by His indwelling Spirit. Thus, the once corrupt tree becomes righteous, and will naturally bear the fruit of the Spirit! Our role? Trust Him (John 6:28-29) and submit to His guiding voice (Jam. 4:7; Rom. 6:13; 12:1)—the impressions to do good and refrain from evil. This is righteousness by trust.

Psalm 37:5–6 (KJV) ⁵ (A) Commit thy way unto the Lord; **Trust also in him;** and he shall bring *it* to pass. ⁶ **And he shall bring forth thy righteousness** as the light, And thy judgment as the noonday.

¹⁹⁸ The Old Covenant is seeking to establish *our own righteousness* by trusting in *our works* (Rom. 10:3), saying **“We will do** everything the Lord has commanded...” Exodus 19:8. “An old covenant experience is an externalized religion, engraved on stone (in granite) only, not ingrained in the heart. An old covenant experience is going through the motions of religion with an unconverted heart... It’s a religion of ‘the flesh,’ represented by Paul’s pre-conversion experience—as for legalistic righteousness, faultless’ (Phil. 3:4-6). It takes the ‘holy, righteous and good’ law of God and converts it into a legalistic instrument of spiritual bondage and death, into a letter that kills...” Skip MacCarty, *In Granite of Ingrained?* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2007), p. 81.

The New Covenant, by contrast, is trusting in God which results in the writing of His laws and *His righteousness* within us—it is *the work of God*. God only asks us to “listen” to His guiding voice (impressions of the Spirit) and treasure (“keep”) His words (Ex. 19:5 GNV, WYC, JUB, YLT)—if we trust Him implicitly, we will allow Him to lead us, and He will write His laws on our heart through the Spirit (compare Matt. 12:28; Lk. 11:20; Ex. 31:18; Heb. 10:16). For more information on the nature of the two covenants, please see ***Removing the Veil: The Glory of the Gospel in the Covenants*** (Libertador San Martín: Daniel Edgardo Bernhardt, 2022), by Daniel Bernhardt, <https://tinyurl.com/RemovingTheVeil>; E.J. Waggoner, ***The Gospel in Galatians*** (1888), <https://tinyurl.com/Gospel-in-Galatians>; A.T. Jones, ***The Two Covenants in Galatians*** (1900), <https://tinyurl.com/Covenants-in-Galatians>. Cf. Robert Rayburn, “The Contrast Between the Old and New Covenants” (PhD thesis, University of Aberdeen, 1978).

IN CONCLUSION...

Seal of God → His Name → His Righteous Presence

- The Seal of God = His name (Rev. 7:2-3; 14:1)
- God's name = His presence (Is. 30:27-28; Ps. 20:1, 7; Deut. 12:5, 11)
- God's Presence = His character (Ex. 34:1-7)
- God's character = His law in Christ (1 John 4:8 + Matt. 22:37–40; Rom. 13:8; Gal. 5:14; James 2:8)
- God's law in Christ = righteousness (1 John 3:4; 5:17; 1 Cor. 15:34)
- All righteousness is found in Christ (Rom. 3:10–12; Matt. 19:17; Gal. 2:20–21; Phil. 2:13; Rom. 5:19; Eph. 3:17; 1 Cor. 1:30; Jer. 23:5-6)

Therefore,

- **The Seal of God = Christ's Righteous Presence**

... which we receive by:

- **Receiving Christ in the heart by implicitly trusting and depending on God (Phil. 2:13; Rom. 5:19).**

Ultimately the Seal of God is His name, presence, character, law, and righteousness—all of which is found in Christ. God's name is in Christ, God dwells in Him, God's character is revealed through Him, God's law is magnified by Him, and the righteousness of God is found in Him. We receive all of this when we receive the gift of Christ into our heart by trusting Him.

Knowing that the Seal of God (His righteousness/selfless character) is "imprinted" in our mind by the Spirit of Christ (His presence), it now makes sense why Paul counseled us to always heed the pleadings of the Spirit and His still small voice:

Ephesians 4:30 (KJV) And grieve not **the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed** unto the day of redemption. (cf. Eph. 1:13; 2 Cor. 1:21-22)

If we receive Christ's Spirit, we will be "strengthened in might... in the inner man" (Eph. 3:16). This is how the tree of life worked. If Adam and Eve trusted God,

depending on Him for all things, they would partake of His life through the channel of the tree of life, which would give them strength. Yes, **receiving Christ and His righteousness into the heart by trusting Him (faith) is the equivalent of receiving the fruit of the tree of life by trusting Him (faith)!** If our first parents wanted to live, they had to go to the tree of life and receive its fruit which filled them with life; if we want to receive the Seal of God and be righteous, we must go to Christ, the Tree of Life, and receive His Spirit which fills us with the righteousness of Christ.

7.4 SEALING TIME & A SPECIAL SIGN

Knowing that eating from the tree of life is symbolic of the reception of the Spirit of God and His righteousness, it is interesting to note that the physical tree of life in the new earth will produce its fruit at appointed times:

Revelation 22:2 ... On each side of the river grew **a tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, with a fresh crop each month.** The leaves were used for medicine to heal the nations...

Only those who kept God's commandments will be able to receive this fruit at appointed times (Rev. 22:14). In like manner, if we allow Christ to keep His commandments in and through us, we shall be able to partake of Christ's Spirit in an extra measure at appointed times! How so?

The tree of life in the middle of the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2:9) gave life-giving fruit at appointed times to Adam and Eve who were walking in harmony with God's law of love. In like manner, there is a commandment in the middle of the Ten Commandments which points us to our Life-Giver.

Exodus 20:8–11 ⁸“**Remember to observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.** ⁹You have six days each week for your ordinary work, ¹⁰ but **the seventh day is a Sabbath day of rest dedicated to the Lord your God.** On that day no one in your household may do any work. This includes you, your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, your livestock, and any foreigners living among you. ¹¹ For in six days **the Lord made the heavens, the earth, the sea, and everything in them; but on the seventh day he rested.** That is why the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and set it apart as holy.

The Sabbath commandment points us to the worship of the Creator, our Source of life!

Attached to this command is a special time when the Creator of the universe seeks to draw closer to us in a distinct way. But doesn't this commandment simply forbid work on the Sabbath? Where does it say that the Creator seeks to draw closer to us in a special way on this day?

THE FORMING AND FILLING GOD

In the beginning “the earth was *formless* and *empty*” (Gen. 1:2), so God, like the Artist He is, begins to *form* canvases and *fill* them. He *formed* the day and night (day 1), sea and sky (day 2), land and vegetation (day 3). Then God *fills* these canvases. He *fills* the day with the sun and the night with the moon and stars (day 4); He *fills* the sea with sea creatures and the sky with birds of the air (day 5); and finally, He *fills* the land with land animals and humans (day 6).

God made man by first *forming* his body (Gen. 2:7), then *filling* Him with the breath of life (Gen. 2:8). Once Adam existed, God had him name all the animals (Gen. 2:18-20). As he encountered each type of animal, Adam must have noticed that they came in pairs—male and female—each with a corresponding companion; “but for Adam no companion who corresponded to him was found.” Genesis 2:20 (NET). Thus God *formed* a special canvas in Adam's heart, which He *filled* by creating Eve. “At last!” the man exclaimed, “Here is someone like me!” Genesis 2:23 (GNT).

Why did God bring Adam through this experience? Could it be that God was teaching Adam, who was created in His own image (Gen. 1:27), that God is a Being who desires a relationship with the creation He brings forth?

SIGN OF GOD'S PRESENCE

After God finished His work of Creation, Scripture says that He “rested” (Gen. 2:2). This word not only denotes a physical end of labor, but it suggests the mental picture “of arrival: a ship gliding into the harbor after a long voyage, a train coming to a halt at a station... there is **the expectancy of one person longing to see the other**. If resting has the connotation of a car that has been parked, ceasing shows the moment of arrival itself. In the context of the creation account the ceasing points to **the joy of being with someone**... When God ceases the work of creating, hallowing

the seventh day, we see **God coming into an enduring relationship with Creation.**¹⁹⁹

Thus we see that as the capstone of Creation, God *forms* a special day and *fills* that day with His presence! Like a Father coming home to meet His children after a long day at work, God enters into the human experience in a special way on the seventh day, desiring to spend quality time with those made in His image, to show them that He loves them. On this day God shows us that we weren't made for the express purpose of working, but for having relationships. Our value doesn't come from what we have accomplished—Adam and Eve, like newborn babies, had infinite value in the eyes of God before they even had a chance to try and earn it! Yes, God formed this special time for mankind to fill it with His presence, to show us that He loves us and wants to spend time with us.

FORM

FILL

DAY 1: DAY & NIGHT	DAY 4: SUN & MOON (& STARS)
DAY 2: WATER & SKY	DAY 5: FISH & BIRDS
DAY 3: LAND & VEGETATION	DAY 6: ANIMALS & HUMANS
DAY 7: SABBATH DAY	DAY 7: GOD'S PRESENCE

The fact that our heavenly Father is present in the Sabbath is evident from the word itself:

S A B B A T H

Yes, our Abba—Father—is in the Sabbath! Could this be connected to the fact that the 144,000 have the Father's name in their forehead (Rev. 14:1)?

Further evidence that the Creator draws closer to us on the Sabbath lies in the fact that God made the seventh day “holy.” When Moses was at the burning bush and Christ commanded Moses to “Take off your sandals, for **you are standing on holy ground.**” (Ex. 3:5), what made that place holy? It was holy because the Creator of the universe was there. In like manner, when Joshua met the Commander of the Lord's host, as recorded in the fifth chapter of Joshua, he said, “Take off your sandals, for **the place where you are standing is holy**” (Josh. 5:15), because Christ was

¹⁹⁹ Tonstad, *The Lost Meaning of the Seventh Day*, p. 32-33.

there.²⁰⁰ In like manner, God described the seventh day of the week, Saturday, as the “holy Sabbath.” If Christ’s presence is what makes something holy, then the thing that makes the Sabbath day holy is likewise Christ’s presence!

Exodus 33:14 (KJV) And he said, **My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest.**

SIGN OF GOD’S EXTRA BLESSINGS — SPIRITUAL SACRIFICES

God illustrates the concept of extra measures of His presence at certain times through the sacrificial system. Each day, Israel offered animals, flour, and oil to the Lord, and Numbers 28:3-6 outlines the amount of each that was offered every morning and evening. Each of these pointed to Christ—the Lamb of God (John 1:36; Rev. 7:17), the living Bread from heaven (John 6:41, 51), and the symbolic oil of Christ’s Spirit (Ex. 29:7; Luke 4:18; Heb. 1:9).

These physical sacrifices and offerings were to cease among the believers at the death of Christ (Dan. 9:27) and were to be replaced with “spiritual sacrifices” (1 Pet. 2:5) which begin at certain times, but linger indefinitely. Yes, we are counseled to “present your bodies a living sacrifice” (Rom. 12:1 KJV), along with “the sacrifice of praise to God” (Heb. 13:15), even, “the calves of our lips” (Hos. 14:2 KJV). The sacrifices were taken away, but the special times remain. Instead of evening and morning sacrifices, we should have evening and morning worship—special quiet time with God before and after sleep.

The amount of sacrifices were typically consistent every day of the week, but there was one day that stood apart: the Sabbath! Yes, every seventh day, the sacrifices were doubled (Num. 28:9–10)! Thus we see that on the Sabbath day, we have the opportunity to receive double the amount of blessings normally available to us! Because all spiritual blessings are “in Christ” (Eph. 1:3 KJV), double blessings mean double the amount of Christ’s Spirit!

In the beginning God pronounced a blessing upon mankind (Gen. 1:22, 28) and upon “the Sabbath day” (Ex. 20:11). He never blessed any other day of the week—only the seventh day Sabbath. So when we, upon whom the blessing of God already

²⁰⁰ The fact that the “the commander of the Lord’s army” was the preincarnate Christ is evident from the fact that Joshua worshipped Him without rebuke (Joshua 5:14), unlike other ordinary angelic beings (Rev. 19:10; 22:8–9). Also see Exodus 3:2-6; Judges 13:21, 22; 1 Corinthians 10:1-4.

rests, come to the seventh day, upon which another blessing rests, we find *two blessings available for us!* Yes, on the seventh day we have the opportunity to enjoy a blessing that normally isn't available.

The “**Bread of the Presence**” (Ex. 25:30) in the sanctuary likewise demonstrated the special way in which Christ's presence is given in the Sabbath.

“The term ‘showbread’ is literally ‘bread of the presence;’ and signifies Christ the ‘true bread which came down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world.’ This bread of the presence therefore signified the presence of Christ with the whole people—the twelve tribes—of Israel. **The bread's being always there, signified the presence of Christ always with his people. But this bread of the presence was always there only by being renewed, and it was renewed every Sabbath. And thus God would teach the people then, and now, and forevermore, that his presence in Christ is renewed to the believer every Sabbath.** When the Sabbath is past, however, his presence still abides through all the days of the week until the next Sabbath, when it is renewed; and thus is fulfilled the scripture. ‘My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest.’ Exodus 33:14.”²⁰¹

But what does “more of God's presence” and “extra blessings” at specific times mean? Shouldn't we treat every day as a Sabbath? Why should I spend one “special” day with God when I'm with Him every day? Try using this argument on your spouse when they want to go on a date and see how this line of reasoning goes.

There is something special when you set aside distinct times—such as anniversaries—to spend with the person you love. During these special times, you receive “extra blessings” from simply being in the presence of your beloved in a special way (“extra presence”)—a blessing that you don't get to enjoy every day of the work week. I find that whenever I get to enjoy times like these with my wife, I often learn something new about her and our relationship deepens. God wants to spend some special time with you, and it is an opportunity for you to get to know Him more and fall more in love with Him. He set the date, and it would be a shame if we keep flaking on Him!

²⁰¹ A.T. Jones, *The Great Nations of To-day* (Battle Creek, MI: Review and Herald Publishing Company, 1901), p. 213.

SIGN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS BY FAITH—
THE WATER OF LIFE

The idea that God’s Spirit is poured out in an extra measure on the Sabbath is also seen in Ezekiel’s vision of the temple (Ezek. 40-48). In the vision, he saw water flowing from the throne of God out of the sanctuary through the eastern gate (Ezek. 47:1). This water from the throne of God was the source of life for the trees by the river, causing them to bear fruit (Ezek. 47:12).

Ezekiel saw these living waters coming from the throne of God out of the eastern gate, but God had said that this gate would only be opened at appointed times:

Ezekiel 46:1 “This is what the Sovereign Lord says: **The east gateway of the inner courtyard will be closed during the six workdays each week, but it will be open on Sabbath days and the days of new moon celebrations.**

Just as the tree of life bore fruit every month, so does the water of life come forth from the throne of God at appointed times, not only at the beginning of each month, but also on the seventh-day Sabbath!

But what is the water of life, which is given at specific times, symbolic of?

John 7:37–39 ³⁷ **On the last day, the climax of the festival,** Jesus stood and shouted to the crowds, “Anyone who is thirsty may come to me! ³⁸ **Anyone who believes in me may come and drink!** For the Scriptures declare, **‘Rivers of living water will flow from his heart.’**” ³⁹ (When he said “living water,” **he was speaking of the Spirit...**) (Also see Is. 44:3; Ezek. 36:25–27; John 4:10–14; Rev.22:1)

The water of life is a symbol of Christ’s Spirit—His very life and righteousness—which He imparts to those “trees” who receive Him by faith! We have access to this living water at all times, but the Lord of the Sabbath pours out His Spirit in an extra measure on the Sabbath. Thus the Sabbath is a sign of righteousness by faith, for the gift of the Spirit on the Sabbath can only be accepted by trusting God’s word!

Ezekiel 47:12 Fruit trees of all kinds will grow along both sides of the river. The leaves of these trees will never turn brown and fall, and there will always be fruit on their branches. **There will be a new crop every month, for they**

are watered by the river flowing from the Temple. The fruit will be for food and the leaves for healing.” (compare with Rev. 22:1-2)

The trees do not bear fruit in order to be healthy, but they are healthy because they receive the living water which makes them healthy and they subsequently bring forth fruit! All who receive the Spirit of God will naturally bear the “fruit of the Spirit.”²⁰² If you accept the Words (Spirit, John 6:63) of God (instead of the slanders of Satan) and dwell upon His character, you will be **“like trees planted along the riverbank, bearing fruit each season. Their leaves never wither, and they prosper in all they do.”** Psalm 1:1–3.

SIGN OF GOD’S TRUSTWORTHINESS IN THE COSMIC CONFLICT

As we have seen, the Sabbath is a symbol that has incredibly rich Biblical meanings attached to it. I would love to continue diving into the depths of the Sabbath as a sign, but I also don’t want to make this book any longer than necessary. But what’s the common denominator of the Sabbath? *God in Christ*. Below is a partial chart showing the clear relationship between the Father, Son, and the Sabbath.

SABBATH POINTS TO...	GOD...
God’s Presence (Ex. 33:14)	Put His Presence <u>in Christ</u> (John 10:38; 14:10)
God’s Rest (Gen. 2:2; Heb. 4:4-5)	Gives Rest <u>in Christ’s</u> Presence (Matt. 11:28)
God’s Holiness (Gen. 2:3)	Hallows <u>in Christ’s</u> Presence (Ex. 3:4-5; Josh. 5:13-15)
God’s Blessing (Gen. 2:3)	Put All Blessings <u>in Christ</u> (Eph. 1:3; Acts 3:26)
God as Creator (Ex. 31:17)	Created all <u>through Christ</u> (1 Cor. 8:8; Heb. 1:2; Eph. 3:9)
God’s Deliverance (Deut. 5:15)	Delivers <u>through Christ</u> (Luke 4:18; Gal.1:4; 2 Cor.3:17)

²⁰² In John’s parallel vision in Revelation 22:1-2, instead of seeing multiple trees, he describes the tree of life receiving water from the throne of God, causing it to bear 12 varieties of fruit, one each month. Since the water is the Spirit, the fruits can be symbolic of the fruit of the Spirit, which, according to the Vulgate’s rendering of Galatians 5:22, consist of 12 fruits!

God's Sanctification (Ex. 31:12)	Sanctifies <u>through Christ</u> (Ex. 29:43; 1 Cor. 1:30)
God's Creative Power (Ex. 20:11)	Shows Power <u>through Christ</u> (Eph. 2:10; 1 Cor. 1:24)
SOURCE—"OF WHOM"	CHANNEL—"BY WHOM"

The presence of the Creator brings rest, holiness, blessings, and creative power to deliver from sin and sanctify—and God gives all of this through Christ, whose Spirit is in the Sabbath.

In the beginning, God had declared that His work of creation (which the Sabbath points to) was “very good.” Genesis 1:31. However, soon after this the Serpent came on the scene and slandered God’s character, claiming that the “paradise” He had created was “not very good.” In response to these lies, Christ “was born and came into the world to testify to the truth” (John 18:37)—particularly the truth concerning His Father’s trustworthy character—and His life and death was His testimony. By coming to dwell among us, He showed that God was willing to condescend and enter into a relationship with us through the medium of time. By going about and healing everyone He came into contact with, particularly the outcasts and the oppressed, He revealed God’s creative and restorative power as well as His care for His creation. Through Christ’s life and death of self-denial, we likewise see God’s creative power in upholding those who trust in Him. In all of these things, the evidence points to one grand, underlining theme: *God’s faithfulness and love*.

Since Christ always conveys the truth of God’s faithfulness, and Christ’s Spirit is in the Sabbath, the Sabbath must also convey the truth of God’s faithfulness. Through the Sabbath we see that God was willing to condescend and enter into the created order of things through the medium of time (Gen. 2:2). God’s command for all, including the oppressed and non-human creation, to rest on the Sabbath (Ex. 20:10) shows that God cares for *all* of His creation. Christ’s special work of healing on the Sabbath²⁰³ shows that the Sabbath (since the fall) is not meant to be a passive experience, but one of entering into the lives of others and being a blessing to them through relationships. The Sabbath also reminds us of not only Christ’s rest after His work of creation, but also His rest after redemption and re-creation—He rested on the Sabbath after He finished revealing His Father’s character on the cross, and we

²⁰³ The Gospels record 7 healing miracles performed by Christ on the Sabbath, where he healed [1] a lame man (John 5:1-18), [2] a demon-possessed man (Mark 1:21-28), [3] Peter’s mother-in-law (Mark 1:29-31), [4] a man with a deformed hand (Mark 3:1-6), [5] a blind man (John 9:1-16), [6] a crippled woman (Luke 13:10-17), and [7] a man with dropsy (Luke 14:1-6).

will physically rest with Him on the celestial Sabbath after all things have been restored. Since all these things bear witness to God’s trustworthiness, it is safe to say that *the Sabbath is likewise a sign of God’s love and faithfulness.*

During Israel’s wilderness experience, the Sabbath was meant to test and build their trust in God. They had previously been living in a system of oppression where they had to fend for themselves. In the wilderness, however, God gave them freedom from this oppression and subsequently provided food for them in the form of manna. The newly liberated Hebrews were used to working for bread, so going out to gather it each day was normal for them.

However, God changed things up at the end of each week. He told Israel to gather twice as much on Friday than the other days because there wouldn’t be any on the Sabbath. In fact, He told them that “On the Sabbath day you must each stay in your place. Do not go out to pick up food on the seventh day.” Exodus 16:29. This would have been a big test of Israel’s faith. All they had known in Egypt was the fight of self-preservation. As the Sabbath day approached, they must have asked themselves many questions. Will they starve? Will the extra manna they gather go bad like it did the rest of the week (Ex. 16:20)? Could they trust that God would sustain them, or should they go out and fend for themselves?

When the Sabbath came, God held up His side of the deal by miraculously keeping the manna from spoiling (Ex. 16:24). He was faithful. The Israelites, however, were not. The fact that many of the people still did not trust God was evident when “Some of the people went out anyway on the seventh day” to find food (Ex. 16:27). They didn’t trust that God would provide for them, and thus they failed the “test.”

This was not an arbitrary test to see if they would be obedient, but it was a way of bringing to light what was in their heart (Deut. 8:2) for their sake. Many of these former slaves were stuck in their slave mentality of self-preservation, competition, and distrust towards authority. One of the purposes of this Sabbath miracle was to “test” them, to see whether or not they trusted God. God already knew what was in their hearts, but many of them were unaware of the unconscious distrust they had towards God.

During the whole time in the wilderness, God *always* provided for them—proving that He is completely faithful, trustworthy, and dependable. Those who learned to trust God during these 40 years would keep the Sabbath as a sign that they had faith in God’s trustworthiness and depended on Him to sustain them. Passing this “test” would reveal to everyone in the cosmic controversy that they sided with God, believing He was trustworthy.

This Sabbath test is nothing different from the “test” in Eden. Every time Adam and Eve ate from the tree of life they were proclaiming that they trusted in God and depended on Him to sustain them. They sided with God in the controversy over His character, believing that His works were “very good.” However, when Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit, they simply did what Israel in the wilderness did when they looked for manna on the Sabbath. Both acts of disobedience were signs that they no longer trusted God—they believed His works were “not very good”; they believed He was “good and evil” and that they had to work for their own welfare.

In like manner, the final point in the great controversy is over the same issue: God’s character and trustworthiness. Do we worship a benevolent Creator, or a Caesarian task-master? Before Israel could enter Canaan, they had to fully trust God, and the sign of this trusting relationship was resting and worshipping God on the Sabbath. In like manner, before spiritual Israel can enter the heavenly Canaan, we must likewise implicitly trust God, and the sign of this will be our worship of the Creator on the Sabbath.

Revelation’s description of the final conflict (Rev. 12-14) is centered on who we worship, which is why “worship” is mentioned seven times in Revelation 13 and 14 (Rev 13:4, 8, 12, 15; 14:9, 11). Each passage describes the majority of the world worshipping God through the lens of corrupt (Roman Imperial) Christianity—a view which clothes God with the attributes of the Dragon instead of the Lamb.

In contrast to the seven references to false worship, we find a single call to true worship in these chapters:

Revelation 14:7 ... **“Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea, and all the springs of water.”**

What’s especially interesting about this call to true worship is the verse that is being referenced.

Exodus 20:8, 11 ⁸“Remember to observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy... ¹¹ For in six days **the Lord made the heavens, the earth, the sea, and everything in them;** but on the seventh day he rested. That is why the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and set it apart as holy.

As Jon Paulien notes, “At the decisive centerpoint of Revelation’s description of the final crisis is a direct allusion to Exod 20. **Attention to the Sabbath command is,**

therefore, the ideal response to God’s final call to worship...²⁰⁴ The Sabbath command is “the ideal response to God’s final call to worship,” precisely because the Sabbath points to God’s character as revealed by Jesus!

This callback to the Sabbath is not only seen through this verbal parallel, but also through a structural parallel. The controversy in the end centers around the type of God we will worship, and the commandments related to worshipping the true God are found in the first four of the Ten Commandments:

1. **Don’t worship false gods** (Ex. 20:3)
2. **Don’t worship images** (Ex. 20:4-5)
3. **Don’t misuse God’s name / misrepresent God** (Ex. 20:7)
4. **Remember the Sabbath day** (Ex. 20:8-11)

Since the Dragon is seeking to exterminate the worship of the true God and get all the world to worship himself, it is no surprise that we find direct violations and counterfeits of each of the first four commandments:

1. **Worship beast** (Rev. 13:4, 8)
2. **Worship image of beast** (Rev. 13:14-15)
3. **Blasphemes God’s name / misrepresents God** (Rev. 13:1, 5, 6)
4. **Receive Mark of the Beast** (Rev. 13:16-17)

The violations of the first three commandments are clear, but how does the Mark of the Beast violate the Sabbath commandment and act as a counterfeit Seal of God? Let’s dig into Scripture and see if we can learn more about what the Mark of the Beast could be.

²⁰⁴ Jon Paulien, “Revisiting the Sabbath in the Book of Revelation,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*, vol. 9, is. 1, art. 18 (1998), p. 182-183, <https://tinyurl.com/2cy7cz9j>.

CHAPTER 8

THE MARK OF THE BEAST & TREE OF GOOD AND EVIL

The Seal of God, symbolized as His name, is a reference to His righteous presence which we receive by faith. The sign of this is the seventh-day Sabbath, for on this day we receive the Spirit of God in a special way by faith—thus the Sabbath encapsulates the essence of the Seal of God. But what about the Mark of the Beast? Let’s go through the process we did to discern the nature of the Seal of God to see what we can learn.

THE MARK OF HIS NAME

Since many don’t stop to consider the spiritual nature of the Seal of God, they assume the Mark of the Beast will be some physical mark, like a tattoo or microchip, in the forehead or hand. Instead of doing this, we should compare spiritual things with spiritual things (1 Cor. 2:13).

Just as the Seal of God is symbolized as His name, so too is the Mark of the Beast—the Papacy—also symbolized as a “name.”

Revelation 14:11 (KJV) And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth **the mark of his name**. (cf. Rev. 13:17)

THE NAME, OR CHARACTER, OF THE BEAST

Just as the name of God represents His Spirit and character, so too is the Name of the Beast a sign of the spirit and character of the beast. What is the character of the beast? After looking at the origins of the beast from Babylon to Rome, we should be familiar with its “genetic makeup.” These are the characteristics we have seen from the beasts of history:

- The ruler is a **representative of the gods**
- who wields both **political and spiritual authority**
- while exercising **world-wide influence**.
- **Religious laws are created by the religious power**
- and **enforced through the arm of the State**
- through **force or coercion**.

At the core of all these characteristics is a specific belief and objective: distrust towards God and desire for self-exaltation. Eve ate the forbidden fruit because she was led to distrust the goodness of God and wanted to have an exalted position “as god.” After she partook of this philosophy, the natural result was fear of God, judging Him as oppressive; this leads to the fight or flight method of self-preservation, which ultimately results in the use of force and violence to protect self from the one that is not trustworthy.

Each of these kingdoms throughout history likewise distrusted God and sought to exalt their kingdom above all others. They were afraid of losing their authority to those whom they judged as a threat to their established power, and to preserve their kingdom, they resorted to violently persecuting all dissenters. The creation and violent enforcement of religious laws is simply a manifestation of distrusting God’s methods of ruling, which breeds the spirit of fear, judgment, and violent self-exaltation.

The Seal of God is righteousness by faith. Faith (trust in God) is the root, the Holy Spirit is the sweet water of life, and righteousness (obedience to God’s law of love) is the fruit. The inverse is true for the Mark of the Beast: distrusting God is the root, a distorted view of God is the bitter water, and unrighteousness (disobedience to God’s law of love) is the fruit. In the end, the rebellious fruit of distrusting God and self-exaltation—fear, judgment, self-preservation, and violence—shall overtake the majority of mankind, just as it did in the days of Noah.

8.1 THE FORBIDDEN FRUIT & FLAG OF THE BEAST

PHILOSOPHY OF THE 2 TREES

The two trees in Eden were not only two voting booths, but also two flags representing Christ's Kingdom of trusting God or Satan's Kingdom of distrust. As it was in the beginning, so shall it be in the end. This time, however, the two voting booths and flags are spiritual. The tree of life voting booth declares that *God's laws are not arbitrary*, but have natural consequences, and that true freedom and joy can only be experienced when perfect obedience is rendered to God. It is reasonable to *trust God's Word*, even if there are still questions. Eating from the tree of life also showed that our first parents *depended on God for life* and *implicitly trusted Him*.

Eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, on the other hand, was a sign, or mark, that they believed the lies the Serpent told about God. They ate the forbidden fruit because they believed that God's prohibition was *arbitrary*. They viewed this law as a burden and yoke of bondage which unnecessarily kept them from exercising their "freedom." Instead of trusting what God had plainly told her, Eve *exalted her own reasoning above God's Word* to dismiss what He had commanded. She *trusted self instead of God's Word*. Why? Because she now believed that she was naturally immortal and that she would never die. There was no need to be so strict in obeying His laws because she couldn't really die anyway. She didn't have to depend on God and follow His laws—she could exercise her *independence from God*, and eating from the tree of good and evil was a "flag," or sign, of her independence.

The spiritual tree of life today is Christ's Spirit of trust and submission which is found in the Sabbath day. On that day we are meeting up with our Beloved for our date, our Father to rest in His bosom, our Friend for lunch, and our Physician for our weekly checkup and medication. *This is anything but arbitrary*. In fact, this is essential for a healthy relationship with Him! We *need* His love and His Spirit, so if He says I can come and receive special gifts from Him at appointed times—just as the tree of life bears fruit at certain times—it would be extremely detrimental to my relationship with Him if I were to miss out on this extra blessing. He is the Source of our life, for in Him we live, and move, and have our being!

If the Sabbath is the symbolic voting booth and spiritual tree of life today, what is the spiritual tree of good and evil? What is *the* Mark, or flag, of the Beast's Kingdom

which encapsulates the antithesis of the Seal of God? To see this, let's look at what else the Bible says about the essence of the Mark of the Beast.

NEBUCHADNEZZAR AND THE MARK OF THE BEAST

The Mark of the Beast crisis in Revelation 13 is exemplified in the story recorded in Daniel 3, where King Nebuchadnezzar erects an image of himself and passes religious legislation forcing people to worship this image.

DANIEL 3

REVELATION 13

Powerful Kingdom (v. 1)	Powerful Kingdom (v. 11-12)
Builds Image (v. 1)	Builds Image (v. 14)
Image is 60 x 6 (v. 1)	Image Related to 666 (v. 18)
Gathers ALL People (v. 4)	Gathers ALL People (v. 16)
Commands Worship (v. 5)	Commands Worship (v. 15)
Death Decree (v. 6)	Death Decree (v. 15)

Nebuchadnezzar's image is 60 cubits by 6 cubits. $60 \times 6 = 360$. This is the number of the Zodiac, with its 36 lesser gods, each ruling 10 degrees of the heavens. All of these gods were emanations of **the sun god**, which was summarized by adding up the number of all of the lesser gods. $1+2+3+4+5\dots +33+34+35+36 = 666$.

The image Nebuchadnezzar created was made of all gold, whereas the image God showed him in Daniel 2 only had a head of gold. This represents how the Mark of the beast will be a **counterfeit of God's truth**. From the above table we also can see that **powerful kingdoms will seek to enforce the Mark** of the beast, which is connected to the **worship** of a symbolic image which is based on pagan **sun worship**. All will be forced to follow this apostate system of worship which will be **contrary to God's law**.

We have seen that the essence of the Seal of God (righteousness by faith) is in the Sabbath (for it demonstrates righteousness by faith), so what is a counterfeit for this day of worship that: is contrary to God's law, based on sun worship, and encapsulates the essence and fruit of distrusting God and exalting self? What about SUN-day? It is a counterfeit of the seventh day Sabbath, is contrary to God's law, is

related to worship, and has a historical relationship with sun worship,²⁰⁵ and Christian Nationalists are trying to enforce it by law (as we will see). Of course, the Mark of the Beast can't simply be Sunday observance, for God has many Spirit-filled children who faithfully go to church every Sunday because they think that is what God wants them to do.²⁰⁶

In Revelation, the Mark of *the Beast is a religious law* that will be *enforced* by a world power (the lamb-like beast) in the end. Could a national (and then international) Sunday law, beginning with legal restrictions (Rev. 13:17) and ending in the death penalty (Rev. 13:15), be *the ultimate Mark of the Beast's Kingdom*?

SUNDAY & THE FORBIDDEN FRUIT PHILOSOPHY

Could an enforced Sunday law be symbolic of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, just as the Sabbath is symbolic of the tree of life? Could Sunday observance reveal that we have been deceived by lies that Satan has told us about God and His government, just as eating the forbidden fruit revealed that Eve had believed Satan's lies about God? If you look back at the lies Eve believed about God which led her to partake of the forbidden fruit, it will soon become evident that much of Christendom today worships on Sunday instead of the Sabbath for the same reasons.

God designated that the tree of life in the middle of the Garden (Gen. 2:9) should be a channel of life, and in like manner, He designated that the seventh-day Sabbath, which is in the middle of God's law,²⁰⁷ should be a channel of His Spirit. The "test" between the tree of life and the tree of good and evil seems arbitrary, just as the "test" between the Sabbath and Sunday seems arbitrary. Yes, the Catechism of the Council of Trent says as much when they explain "why Christians observe not the Sabbath, but the Lord's day."

²⁰⁵ Shelby Vernon McCasland, "The Origin of the Lord's Day," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, vol. 49, no. 1 (1930), p. 65-82.

²⁰⁶ One of (if not the) first to connect Sunday observance with the Mark of the Beast was Thomas Tillam, a Baptist minister, in 1657. According to Tillam, the seventh-day Sabbath "is in these very last days become the last great controversie between the Saints and the Man of Sin, The Changer of Times and Laws [Dan. 7:25]." Thomas Tillam, *The Seventh-Day Sabbath Sought Out and Celebrated* (London: 1657), p. 1, <https://tinyurl.com/y7p7cctd>.

²⁰⁷ Of the 319 words in the KJV rendering of the 10 commandments (Ex. 20:2-17), the 159th word lies in the first clause of the Sabbath commandment (there is no real difference between translations). The Sabbath commandment is likewise in the middle of the 172 words of the Hebrew text.

“the other commandments of the Decalogue are precepts of the natural law... we are not instructed by the natural law to worship God on the Sabbath rather than on any other day.”²⁰⁸

It is logical to avoid murdering, stealing, lying, etc., but the Sabbath is not something that we can deduce from our observations of nature. This is the strongest argument for disregarding the command to remember the Sabbath. However, the idea of using “natural law” as our moral compass fails tragically when we realize that “tenets of behavior thought to derive from the nature of things often are **culturally conditioned**. Philosophers have argued for the justice of **slavery** based on natural law... Thomas Aquinas, observing the ways of nature such as the king bee among bees, concludes that... **monarchy** is the best form of government... He also decries religious freedom, believing the **death penalty** to be the dictate of nature for heresy... Conceptions of ‘natural law,’ then, are not above cultural conditioning, and attempts to derive what ought to be from the way things are open to tremendous pitfalls.”²⁰⁹ According to the majority view of Christendom, commandments that are not based on natural law, like the Sabbath, are, by implication, *arbitrary*.

The failures of “natural law” as a moral compass, as evidenced above, is made explicit in Eden. Here God had given mankind a law that is not revealed naturally to them: do not eat the forbidden fruit. In order to lead mankind astray, the Serpent insinuates that this command is arbitrary and oppressive (Gen. 3:1-5). Nothing in nature told Eve that disobeying God’s command was immoral; in fact, nature seemed to testify to the contrary, for she “saw that the tree *was* good for food, and that it *was* pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make *one* wise” (Gen. 3:6 KJV).

The goal of the Serpent was to convince mankind that God’s laws are arbitrary and oppressive, and thus misrepresent the Lawgiver as arbitrary and oppressive. The sign that our first parents had accepted the Serpent’s slanders was eating from the tree of knowledge instead of the tree of life. In like manner, the Serpent has caused most of Christendom to disregard the Sabbath commandment because nature does not uphold it. Like the command to refrain from the forbidden fruit, the fourth command is seen as arbitrary, and the whole world sees God as One who occasionally creates arbitrary laws in a demonstration of His superior power and sovereignty.

Viewing God’s laws as arbitrary naturally leads to the belief that these laws need an external judge and executioner to enforce them. This view of God was

²⁰⁸ *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, trans. Rev. J. Donovan (Baltimore: Lucas Brothers, 1829; first published in 1566 under Pope Pius V), p. 264, <http://tinyurl.com/23j9ymjj>

²⁰⁹ Tonstad, *Lost Meaning of the Seventh Day*, p. 427.

strengthened when the Roman Empire became “Christianized,” and the previous methods of governing were transposed onto God’s methods of governing. When the Roman Church came to dominance during the Dark Ages, the Pope and his government became the visible manifestation of God and His government in the eyes of the world. Thus the Serpent, through the Papal Beast, “spoke terrible words of blasphemy against God, slandering his name.” Revelation 13:6.

The Serpent led Eve to believe that God’s prohibition of the tree of good and evil was a yoke of bondage that arbitrarily restricted her freedom, and in like manner, many today view the command to keep Saturday holy instead of Sunday as an arbitrary yoke of bondage which infringes on their “freedom in Christ.” Eve surely thought she should have the right to eat from whichever tree she wanted (though she just wanted to eat the forbidden fruit), just as many today assert the right to keep whatever day they want as the “Sabbath” (though they want to worship on Sunday). Eve placed her own reasoning above God’s plain command so she could do what she wanted to do, just as many use their own reasoning instead of a plain “Thus saith the Lord” to get out of keeping the seventh-day Sabbath.²¹⁰

At the end of the day, eating from the tree God forbade acted as a sign of independence from God, just as Sunday worship is a sign of independence from the authority of God’s Word. The philosophical backing behind Sunday is the philosophical backing behind the forbidden fruit—a fact that the transfer from Sabbath to Sunday demonstrates.

²¹⁰ The most common reasoning used is that Christ was resurrected on Sunday, so we worship on Sunday to honor this. It is great to remember such an important event, but nowhere in God’s Word did He say that because of this the sacredness of the Sabbath hours has been transferred. This is simply human reasoning above the Word of God.

FORBIDDEN FRUIT**SUNDAY**

Command to refrain from fruit seems arbitrary and restrictive of freedom	Command to refrain from Sunday seems arbitrary and restrictive of freedom
Restriction is seen as a burdensome yoke of bondage	Restriction is seen as a burdensome yoke of bondage
Don't need to eat from Tree of Life for sustenance since we are immortal—sign of independence	Don't need to observe Sabbath for Spirit since we are immortal—sign of independence
“We can eat from any tree we want”	“We can observe any day we want”
God said not to eat it, but I see it differently	God said to observe the Sabbath, but I see it differently

TREE OF LIFE**SABBATH**

Middle of the Garden	Middle of the Commandments
Points to the Source of life—the Creator	Points to the Source of life—the Creator
Channel of Life from God	Channel of Spirit from God
Fruit Given at Appointed Times	Spirit Given at Appointed Times
Eat Fruit by Trusting God	Receive Spirit by Trusting God
Opportunity for Character Development / Sanctification	Opportunity for Character Development / Sanctification
Natural Consequences if Fruit not Eaten	Natural Consequences if Spirit not Received

With this in mind, consider what the Papal the Beast herself—whose sole purpose is to slander and misrepresent the character of God—says the *sign of her authority* over God's Word is:

“... **The [Catholic] Church altered the observance of the Sabbath to the observance of Sunday...** Protestants who say that they go by the Bible and the Bible only, and that they do not believe anything that is not in the Bible, must be rather puzzled by keeping of Sunday when God distinctly said, ‘Keep holy the Sabbath Day.’ The word Sunday does not come

anywhere in the Bible, so, **without knowing it, they are obeying the authority of the Catholic Church.**²¹¹

“The first precept in the Bible, is that of sanctifying the seventh day: God blessed the SEVENTH DAY, and sanctified it. Gen. ii. 3. This precept was confirmed by God in the Ten Commandments: Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. The SEVENTH DAY is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God. Exod. xx. On the other hand, Christ declares that He is not come to destroy the law but to fulfil it. Matt. v. 17. He Himself observed the Sabbath day: Luke iv. 16. His disciples likewise observed it, after His death: They rested on the Sabbath day according to the commandment. Luke xxiii. 56.²¹² Yet with all **this weight of scripture authority for keeping the Sabbath or seventh day holy, Protestants, of all denominations, make this a profane day, and transfer the obligation of it to the first day of the week, or the Sunday. Now what authority have they for doing this? None at all, but the Unwritten Word, or Tradition of the Catholic Church...**²¹³

“... **Why do they [Protestants] honor the first day of the week instead of the seventh? Why do they baptize children? Contrary to their principles, they must look outside the Bible to the voice of tradition, which is not human, but divine, because guaranteed by the divine, infallible witness of the Catholic Church...**

“What Bible authority is there for changing the Sabbath from the seventh to the first day of the week?

“Who gave the Pope the *authority* to change a command of God?

“**If the Bible is the only guide for the Christian, then the Seventh Day Adventist is right in observing the Saturday with the Jew. But the Catholics learn what to believe and do from the divine, infallible authority established by Jesus Christ, the Catholic Church...**

²¹¹ H. Canon Cafferata, *The Catechism Simply Explained* (London: 1935), p. 89. <http://tinyurl.com/2bzcerah>.

²¹² The fact that the early church, Jew and Gentile alike, observed the seventh day Sabbath is evident from the following passages: Acts 13:14, 42; 16:13; 17:1-2; 18:3, 4, 11. That Paul never taught that the Moral Law was, or could be, set aside, is attested to in Romans 3:31; 6:1-2; Rom. 7:7, 12; 1 Cor. 7:19.

²¹³ Rev. John Milner, *The End of Religious Controversy: in a Friendly Correspondence Between a Religious Society of Protestants and a Roman Catholic Divine; Addressed to the Right Rev. Lord Bishop of St. David's, in Answer to his Lordship's Protestant's Catechism*, (London: Keating, Brown, and Co., 1818), vol. 1, p. 119-120, <http://tinyurl.com/5n6fpdya>.

“Is it not strange that those who make the Bible their only teacher should inconsistently follow in this matter the tradition of the [Ed.: Catholic] Church.”²¹⁴

“Protestants often deride the authority of Church tradition, and clam to be directed by the Bible only; yet they, too, have been guided by customs of the ancient Church, which find no warrant in the Bible, but rest on Church tradition only! A striking instance of this is the following:- The first positive command in the Decalogue is to ‘Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy,’ and this precept was enforced by the Jews for thousands of years. But the Sabbath Day, the observance of which God commanded, was our Saturday. Yet who among either Catholics or Protestants, except a sect or two, like the ‘Seventh Day Baptists,’ ever keep that commandment now? None. Why is this? The Bible, which Protestants clam to obey exclusively, gives no authorisation for the substitution of the first day of the week for the seventh. On what authority, therefore, have they done so? Plainly on the authority of that very Catholic Church which they abandoned, and whose traditions they condemn.”²¹⁵

There we have it, right from the horses’, or more accurately the beast’s, mouth that Sunday is a sign, flag, and Mark of the Papal beast’s authority. The majority of Sunday keepers have no idea why they go to church on Sunday, and this is just as Satan wants it. He wants all the world to see the Sabbath as a stern, arbitrary, and legalistic law instead of a loving opportunity for extra blessings. And he wants all the world to be caught up in the tradition of Sunday to miss out. Not only that, but if I

²¹⁴ Bertrand L. Conway, *The Question Box* (New York: The Columbian Press, 1910), p. 75-76, 254, 255. <http://tinyurl.com/pctf297w>.

²¹⁵ John L. Stoddard, *Rebuilding a Lost Faith* (1922), p. 80. <http://tinyurl.com/3e4777d5>.
For more quotes saying the same, please consult the following references: James Cardinal Gibbons, *The Faith of Our Fathers* (1917), p. 72-73, <http://tinyurl.com/5yfs62m9>; Bertrand L. Conway, *The Question Box* (New York: The Columbian Press, 1910), p. 75-76, 254, 255. <http://tinyurl.com/pctf297w>; John Anthony O’Brien, *The Faith of Millions: The Credentials of the Catholic Religion* (Huntington, Indiana: Our Sunday Visitor (1955), p. 472-473, <http://tinyurl.com/yyuyhbnp>; John Anthony O’Brien, *Understanding the Catholic Faith* (1956), p. 13, 156-157, <http://tinyurl.com/yc2shvfs>; John Walsh, S.J., *This is Catholicism: A Comprehensive and Lucid Explanation of the Catholic Faith in Question and Answer Form* (1959), p. 325, <http://tinyurl.com/2tttnuma>; Peter Geiermann, *The Convert’s Catechism of the Catholic Doctrine* (St. Louis, MO: B. Herder Book Co., 1946), p. 50-51, <http://tinyurl.com/fnwnhyrd>; W.O. Carver, *Sabbath Observance*, (Nashville, TN: The Broadman Press, 1940), p. 49, <http://tinyurl.com/4n6rjtja>.

view the Sabbath as stern, arbitrary, legalistic, and oppressive, then what does this say about my view of the God who gave that law in the beginning? Wouldn't an arbitrary law necessarily come from an arbitrary Law-giver?

It is interesting to note how prominently tradition is for people these days. Many traditions are like modern-day sacred cows. Could this be why the Greek word for **“tradition”** in the New Testament, **paradōsis (G3862)**, comes out to the number **666**,²¹⁶ the number of the beast? Tradition, in and of itself, is not wrong, but a certain type of tradition is wrong according to Jesus:

Matthew 15:3, 7–9 ³ Jesus replied, **“And why do you, by your traditions, violate the direct commandments of God?... ⁷ You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you, for he wrote, ⁸ “These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. ⁹ Their worship is a farce, for they teach man-made ideas as commands from God.”** (cf. Colossians 2:8)

THE SIGN OF SUNDAY LAWS

The two trees were not only spiritual voting booths, but once partaken of, they also became two flags that show whose authority you are under—they show who you are listening to and trusting. As long as Adam and Eve trusted God, they were citizens of His Kingdom, and eating from the tree of life was a sign of this fact. Alternatively, whenever our first parents distrusted God and trusted Satan's lies, they ate from his tree and became his subjects under his banner. Likewise, the Sabbath is a sign that we trust God as the Source of life whose laws are the principles upon which life

²¹⁶ P⁽⁸⁰⁾A⁽¹⁾R⁽¹⁰⁰⁾A⁽¹⁾D⁽⁴⁾O⁽⁷⁰⁾S⁽²⁰⁰⁾I⁽¹⁰⁾S⁽²⁰⁰⁾. The other words in the Bible which add up to 666 include the Greek word for **“wealth,”** *εὐφῶρια* (G2142, Matt. 26:24-25), and a man named **“Sethur”** (H5639, Num. 13:13), which means **hidden**, mysterious, or concealed. The number 666 likewise shows up in two other places: 666 talents of gold which Solomon earned (1 Kings 10:14) and 666 children of Adonikam (Ezra 2:13). Adonikam is the combination of **“Adoni”** [H1113] and **“qûwm,”** [H6965]. In Exodus 15:7, the word **“qûwm”** is rendered as **“those who rise up [qûwm] against you [God].”** Thus the **“number of the beast”** symbolizes a kingdom which puts a large emphasis on tradition and wealth, has mysteries, and rises up against God.

Not only that, but many titles of the Roman Church and Pope come out to 666 in Latin, Greek, and Hebrew. The most prominent of these titles which adds up to 666, V⁽⁵⁾I⁽¹⁾C⁽¹⁰⁰⁾A⁽¹⁾R⁽¹⁾I⁽¹⁾V⁽⁵⁾S – F⁽¹⁾I⁽¹⁾L⁽⁵⁰⁾I⁽¹⁾I⁽¹⁾ – D⁽⁵⁰⁰⁾E⁽¹⁾I⁽¹⁾ [Vicar of the Son of God], along with several others, was uncovered over 400 years ago by the German scholar and linguist Andreas Helwig (1572-1643) in his *Antichristus Romanus, in proprio suo nomine, numerum illum Apocalypticum* [The Roman Antichrist, in His Own Name That Notorious Apocalyptic Number] (Wittenberg: 1612), <https://tinyurl.com/n7m5z65e>.

operates. Sunday, on the other hand, is a flag that is worn by people who believe Satan's lies about God (either consciously or unconsciously)—that God and His laws are arbitrary and that God's Kingdom operates like the Beast's. Just as the two trees revealed whose side in the cosmic controversy they were on, so do the two days reveal the same.

But simple Sunday observance is *not* the Mark of the Beast, for Scripture declares that the Mark of the Beast will be accompanied by *legal enforcement* and *economic restrictions* (Rev. 13:16-17). Many honest children of God go to Church on Sunday because they have never known that the Sabbath is Saturday. Others thought that it was done away with because their pastors, who “have hid their eyes from my sabbaths” (Ezek. 22:26), told them it was abolished. Many pastors and congregants do not comprehend the philosophy behind Sunday worship and the subtle implications such a belief has on one's view of God's character. However, once Sunday laws begin to be implemented and enforced with violence, everyone will see the spirit behind the forbidden fruit philosophy and will be compelled to make a choice: will they go along with such a system, or will they take their stand among God's children “which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.” Revelation 12:17 (KJV). To summarize, **the mark of the beast will be “willful, knowledgeable, end-time approval of coercive Sunday observance in *opposition* to clear light on the Sabbath question and in *harmony* with classic Roman Catholicism. As such, the mark of the beast is evidence of personal *character* matured in opposition to God.”**²¹⁷

BRANDED IN THE HAND OR FOREHEAD LIKE ADAM OR EVE

When these Sunday laws begin to be enforced, will you go along with this Satanic system of force and coercion and suffer the “wrath of God” (reaping the consequences of our actions), or will you choose to receive an extra blessing from God's presence but suffer the wrath of man (potential torture and death)? Those who are not grounded in the Word of God, and don't have implicit trust in Him and His ways, will inevitably receive the Mark of the Beast. Some will go along with this authoritarian theocracy because they believe violent force and coercion is the right

²¹⁷ C. Mervyn Maxwell, “The Mark of the Beast,” in *Symposium on Revelation: Exegetical and General Studies, Book 2*, ed. Frank B. Holbrook, vol. 7, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1992), p. 44.

way to do things, while others will go along with it because it is easier than resisting and suffering monetary fines, imprisonment, and ultimately death. Those who genuinely buy into this system have completely swallowed the lies of Satan—they worship the Beast and its false image of God—and will subsequently be “branded” with the Mark of the Beast in their forehead, which is symbolic of the mind, or thoughts (Rom. 7:25). Those who go along with this new system out of convenience will receive the Mark of the Beast in their hand, which corresponds to their works (Ps. 28:4; Jer. 25:14).

The former group totally buys into the lies of Satan and is deceived, while the latter is not necessarily convinced that this is the right way to go. Those who believe the lies of Satan will lead the way in this new system, where they shall establish these laws and persuade even those who are not convinced to go along with it. This is the same situation our first parents found themselves in. Scripture says that Eve was deceived by the Serpent and believed his lies fully, but Adam was not (1 Tim. 2:14). Eve, the one who believed the lies, convinced Adam to partake. She is a symbol of the fallen Church in the end (Jer. 6:2 + Is. 51:16; Matt. 25:1; Eph. 5:23–32; 2 Cor. 11:2), and Adam is a symbol of the rest of humanity. Eve represents those who receive the Mark of the Beast’s lies in her forehead, while Adam represents those who receive the Mark of the Beast’s lies in the hand.

JESUS WAS PERSECUTED FOR VIOLATING MAN-MADE SABBATH LAWS

As incredible as it sounds, one day men and women will establish and enforce Sunday observance on pang of death. This, however, shouldn’t come as a surprise after we have seen Satan’s methods from Babylon to Rome, for every world power in the prophetic stream of time has enforced religious laws through the arm of the State with the death penalty. Why will this happen? The same reason it happened throughout history—humans imitate the one they worship.

Why did the Jewish Church begin to persecute Christ? Because He did not look like the god they worshipped. They worshipped a god who makes arbitrary rules and crushes anyone who crosses him. Because they saw God this way, they emulated this behavior by legislating many arbitrary restrictions and burdens that they placed on the people. One of the main burdens they added was arbitrary *Sabbath laws*. Jesus came to reveal the true nature of His Father’s laws, and as such, did away with their arbitrary Sabbath laws. Yes, “the very first open steps that the Pharisees and the doctors of the law ever took against Jesus Christ to do him harm in any way, were

taken because he had not kept the Sabbath to suit them. That was the controversy between Christ and them; and upon this point everything else turned.”²¹⁸

Mark 2:23–3:6 ²³ **One Sabbath day** as Jesus was walking through some grainfields, his disciples began breaking off heads of grain to eat. ²⁴ But the Pharisees said to Jesus, “Look, **why are they breaking the law by harvesting grain on the Sabbath?**”... ²⁷ Then Jesus said to them, “**The Sabbath was made to meet the needs of people**, and not people to meet the requirements of the Sabbath. ²⁸ So **the Son of Man is Lord, even over [of] the Sabbath!**” ^{3:1} Jesus went into the synagogue again and noticed a man with a deformed hand. ² Since **it was the Sabbath**, Jesus’ enemies watched him closely. If he healed the man’s hand, **they planned to accuse him of working on the Sabbath.** ³ Jesus said to the man with the deformed hand, “Come and stand in front of everyone.” ⁴ Then he turned to his critics and asked, “Does the law permit **good** deeds on the Sabbath, or is it a day for doing **evil**? Is this a day to **save life** or to **destroy it**?” But they wouldn’t answer him. ⁵ He looked around at them angrily and was deeply saddened by their hard hearts. Then he said to the man, “Hold out your hand.” So the man held out his hand, and it was restored! ⁶ **At once the Pharisees went away and met with the supporters of Herod to plot how to kill Jesus.**

Christ was a Sabbath-keeper but was persecuted as a Sabbath-breaker, while those who persecuted Him claimed to be Sabbath-keepers but were really Sabbath-breakers! In Christ’s day, the controversy was bound up in whether God’s ideas of the Sabbath should prevail, or whether man’s ideas of it should prevail.²¹⁹ As it was then, so shall it be in the end. This is why the “testimony of Jesus,” which He gave through His life, is also described as “the spirit of prophecy.” Revelation 19:10 (KJV). The life of Christ on earth reveals what will happen at the end of time.

²¹⁸ A.T. Jones, *Christ and the Pharisees* (International Religious Liberty Association, 1894), p. 10.

²¹⁹ Jesus never broke the Sabbath, but He did violate the man-made traditions of the Pharisees which they enforced as law, seeking to reveal the true nature of His Father’s law, and subsequently change their perception of God’s character. “At issue behind this seemingly minor matter is whether the Pharisaic tradition... is God’s revelation to man and binding on all Jews... According to the Oral Torah as we have it now in the Mishna (Shabbat 7:2) thirty-nine categories of m.lakhah (work) are prohibited on Shabbat...” David H. Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary: A Companion Volume to the Jewish New Testament*, electronic ed. (Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications, 1996), Mt 12:2.

The Jews worshipped a god who was the source of life *and* death, good *and* evil. Thus they partook of the tree of good and evil, and the sign of this was their rejection and crucifixion of the Lord of the Sabbath. To enforce their false Sabbath laws, they employed the arm of the State to crucify Christ for them, just as in the end the apostate Churches will seek to use the sword of the State to persecute anyone who does not keep their “sabbath” the way they see fit.

Because the majority of Christendom likewise worships a god who enforces his laws by threats of torture and death, they will eventually mimic this behavior if they think it is necessary to preserve their traditions. Thus the words of Christ shall be fulfilled again:

John 16:2–3 ²For you will be expelled from the synagogues, and **the time is coming when those who kill you will think they are doing a holy service for God.** ³**This is because they have never known the Father or me.**

Because these people do not know God and His ways, they will be transformed into something that is very much unlike Him.

We have very clear examples of what will play out in the future by looking at and examining each kingdom from Babylon to Papal Rome, seeing how they enforced religious laws and how God’s people should respond. One of the most striking examples is the persecution of Christians during the Dark Ages by the Catholic Church when they enforced religious dogmas through the arm of the State and tortured or burned alive all the “heretics” they could. So before we look at the current religious and political movements discussing Sunday laws, let’s examine the Sunday laws enforced by the Papacy during the Dark Ages.

8.2 THE BEAST IN THE DARK AGES

536 A.D., two years before the last of the three horns were uprooted, is considered by many historians to be the worst year in human history. Cassiodorus, an eyewitness to these events, describes what occurred in the year 538, writing that **“The Sun, first of stars, seems to have lost his wonted light, and appears of a bluish colour. We marvel to see no shadows of our bodies at noon, to feel the mighty vigour of his heat wasted into feebleness, and the phenomena which accompany a transitory eclipse prolonged through a whole year.”**²²⁰ Many

²²⁰ Hodgkin, *The Letters of Cassiodorus*, p. 518-520.

historians describe this year as “The volcanic winter of 536 AD,” which “was the most severe and protracted episode of climatic cooling in the Northern Hemisphere in the last 2,000 years.”²²¹ The smoke from the volcanoes ended up blotting out the sun for a whole year! Many today surely think it is foolish to construe this event as an omen of dark things to come, but the same could be said for the supernatural darkness that preceded the death of Christ on the cross:

Matthew 27:45 At noon, darkness fell across the whole land until three o'clock.

Just as there was darkness leading up to the death of Christ, so too was there darkness leading up to a spiritual travesty.

About two years after this darkness began, Christ was spiritually crucified by the Roman union of Church and State, for on May 7, 538—the *beginning of the 1,260-year prophecy*—the Catholic Church made a direct attack on the law of God through the third Synod of Orleans:

“The third Synod of Orleans, like the second, was **not merely a provincial [local] Synod**, since bishops of several ecclesiastical provinces took part in it... The assembled bishops declare **their aim to be the reestablishment of old laws of the church and the passing of new ones.**”²²²

The 28th canon of this synod is incredibly startling:

“28. Whereas the people are persuaded that they **ought not to travel on the Lord's day [Sunday]** with the horses, or oxen and carriages, or to prepare anything for food, or to do anything conducive to the cleanliness of houses or men... But **from rural work**, i.e., plowing, cultivating vines, reaping, mowing, thrashing, clearing away thorns or hedging, **we judge it better to abstain**, that the people may the more readily come to the churches and have leisure for prayers. **If any one be found doing the works**

²²¹ “Volcanic winter of 536,” *Wikipedia*, <http://tinyurl.com/5n7mrnu6>.

²²² Charles Joseph Hefele, *A History of the Councils of the Church* (Edinburgh: T. and T., 1895), vol. 4, p. 204-209.

forbidden above, let him be punished, not as the civil authorities may direct, but as the ecclesiastical powers may determine.²²³

Along with the Sunday law of Orleans, Justinian's Codex III, which includes various Sunday laws, was likewise enforced throughout all of Christendom in 538 A.D., once Justinian retook legal jurisdiction in Italy:

"2. ... All judges and the people in the city should rest, and the work in all crafts should cease, on holy Sunday..."

"9. ... (1) We decree therefore that the holy Lord's Day [Sunday] shall always be honored and venerated and excused from all executions of judgments... (2) The day shall not be open for the theater, the competition of the circus, or the tearful spectacle of wild beasts... (3) If anyone... violate[s] the provisions of this law under the pretext of public or private business, he shall suffer the loss of his office and confiscation of his property."²²⁴

In 538 A.D., for the first time in history, a religious law that directly attacked the law of God was *enforced* universally throughout all Christendom.²²⁵

Thus we see the work of the Little Horn power when they **"cast down the truth to the ground..."** Daniel 8:12 (KJV). What truth did they cast down?

Psalm 119:142 (KJV) Thy righteousness *is* an everlasting righteousness, And thy law *is* the truth.

²²³ Joannes Dominicus Mansi, *Sacrorum Conciliorum: Nova et Amplissima Collectio* (Florence: 1763), vol. 9, p. 19 (canon 28), <https://tinyurl.com/2jj5mkcc>. Translated by A.H. Lewis, *A Critical History of Sunday Legislation* (New York: Appleton, 1888), p. 64. Constantine's Sunday law from 321 A.D. allowed farmers to continue their duties on Sunday, but this new addition even outlaws the once exempt farmers.

²²⁴ Blume, *The Codex Of Justinian*, bk. 3, 12.2, 9, vol. 1, p. 643-647.

²²⁵ Miller and Sarris, *The Novels of Justinian*, Novel 9, p. 157-159. The transition that occurred in 538 is manifested on the subsequent coins of Justinian, for "In the year 538, Justinian I asked the minters of his coins, not to issue any coins in future displaying him as a soldier any longer. Instead, from 538, he was to be with a cross in his hand on a globe of the world in his hand, since he considered himself rather as a theologian and not a soldier. There is another change that Justinian I wished to introduce on his coins. No date was placed on the coins prior to this year but from 538 they were to put his regnal year on the coin. The 12th year of Justinian I or XII as one sees it on this coin, was exactly 538." Keum Young Ahn, et al., "538 A.D. and the Transition from Pagan Roman Empire to Holy Roman Empire: Justinian's Metamorphosis from Chief of Staffs to Theologian," *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, vol. 7, no. 1 (2017), p. 66.

Not only is God's law truth, but we know that **Christ is *the truth*** (John 14:6). Both Christ and the law can be described as truth because God's law is simply a transcript of Christ's character of selfless love. The following prophecy of Daniel specifically shows which law the Roman power cast down:

Daniel 7:25 He will **defy the Most High** and oppress the holy people of the Most High. **He will try to change their sacred festivals and laws**, and they will be placed under his control for a time, times, and half a time.²²⁶

A nation speaks by its legislation, and the Rome Church-State system spoke, or legislated, blasphemies when they thought to change the law of God! Which law did the Papacy think to change? The *law* relating to *time*, which is the Sabbath! Yes, the specific commandment the Papacy and the State cast to the ground was the fourth commandment concerning the Sabbath. Not only did the Church attack the Sabbath, but they were persecuting Christ Himself, for as we have seen, His Spirit is in the Sabbath!

Not only did Israel divorce Christ in favor of the State, but spiritual Israel, the Church, did likewise when they rejected the Sabbath for Sunday. As we have seen, Christ's Spirit is in the Sabbath, so when we reject this gift of close communion which God is offering, it impales the heart of God and His dear Son. Just as the sun ceased to shine in the hours leading up to the death of Christ on the cross, so too did the sun cease to shine in the years leading up to this Sunday law, for it was a spiritual crucifixion of Christ. Why did the sun cease to shine leading up to Christ's death? Because the sun is a symbol of the life of God in Christ, which gives life to all things, and when Christ, the "sun of righteousness" (Mal. 4:2) was being "put out," the sun responded in kind. Indeed, the sins of mankind affected the earth and caused it to try "vomiting" the wicked out of its mouth (Lev. 18:25).

FLASHBACK TO SODOM AND GOMORRAH

The forceful and violent actions of the illicit union of Church and State resulted in forceful and a violent volcanic eruption. Scripture seems to suggest that the "fire

²²⁶ Along with Sunday laws, Justinian's codex likewise had other laws regarding the observance of Easter, which took the place of the Biblical Passover feast.

from heaven” which destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah worked similarly, as it shows that the area near this place was highly volatile:

Genesis 14:10 As it happened, **the valley of the Dead Sea was filled with tar pits**. And as the army of the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, some fell into the tar pits, while the rest escaped into the mountains.

Deuteronomy 29:23 ²³They will exclaim, **‘The whole land is devastated by sulfur and salt.** It is a wasteland with nothing planted and nothing growing, not even a blade of grass. **It is like the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboiim**, which the Lord destroyed in his intense anger.’

Diodorus Siculus (1st century BC), the ancient Greek historian, wrote concerning the Dead Sea area, which is where Sodom and Gomorrah were located, “...**produces asphalt in abundance... and from its centre it spouts forth once a year a great mass of asphalt...**” ²²⁷ Strabo (63 B.C. – 24 A.D.), a first-century geographer, likewise recorded that the land surrounding the Dead Sea, including Sodom, shows many evidences of the fact that it is situated on a major fault zone and highly destructive. He writes that the Dead Sea “is full of asphalt,” and that “the country is fiery.” He likewise informs us that the people living in this region knew that the cities surrounding this area often suffered as a result of its unwelcoming landscape:

“... for near Moasada [near the Dead Sea] are to be seen... **ruined settlements here and there; and therefore people believe the oft-repeated assertions of the local inhabitants, that there were once thirteen inhabited cities in that region of which Sodom was the metropolis... and that by reason of earthquakes and of eruptions of fire and of hot waters containing asphalt and sulphur, the lake burst its bounds, and rocks were enveloped with fire; and, as for the cities, some were swallowed up and others were abandoned by such as were able to escape.**”²²⁸

²²⁷ Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca Historica*, vol. 2, bk 2, 48.6, trans. by C.H. Oldfather (London: William Heinmann, 1935), p. 43-44, <https://tinyurl.com/2yj7zmp7>.

²²⁸ Strabo, *Geography*, XVI:2.42, 44, p. 293-294, <https://tinyurl.com/5b56kz24>.

This all would make sense, for Sodom is known for being a sexually immoral city, and after God had declared his statutes forbidding all sexual immorality in Leviticus 18:6–24, he then stated what would happen if they defiled the land with their sins:²²⁹

Leviticus 18:25–28 (KJV) ²⁵ And the land is defiled: therefore I do visit [H6485, oversee] the iniquity thereof upon it, and **the land *itself* vomiteth out her inhabitants.** ²⁶ **Ye shall therefore keep my statutes and my judgments,** and shall not commit any of these abominations; *neither* any of your own nation, nor any stranger that sojourneth among you: ²⁷ (For all these abominations have the men of the land done, which *were* before you, and the land is defiled;) ²⁸ **That the land spue not you out also,** when ye defile it, as it spued out the nations that *were* before you.

Isaiah 24:3–6 ³The earth will be completely emptied and looted. The Lord has spoken! ⁴The earth mourns and dries up, and the land wastes away and withers. Even the greatest people on earth waste away. ⁵**The earth suffers for the sins of its people, for they have twisted God’s instructions, violated his laws, and broken his everlasting covenant.** ⁶**Therefore, a curse consumes the earth.** Its people must pay the price for their sin. **They are destroyed by fire,** and only a few are left alive. (Cf. Hos. 4:1–3)

Isaiah suggests that the curse of sin affects the earth in proportion to the sins of the people. When Cain killed Abel, God declared that he was now cursed. Did this curse come “from” God? According to the Creator, where did this curse truly come “from”:

Genesis 4:11 (KJV) And **now *art* thou cursed from the earth,** which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother’s blood from thy hand.

The curse does not come from God but from the earth itself!

In like manner, when our first parents sinned, God declared, “**cursed is the ground because of you...** thorns and thistles it shall bring forth...” (Gen. 3:17-18

²²⁹ Experiments such as *the rice experiment* show the fact that our words do affect things around us. In the experiment, rice is placed in two sterilized, air-tight jars, and then someone will speak, over the course of approximately one month, words in a loving tone to one jar and words with a hateful tone to the other. The rice which was spoken to with a hateful voice will grow moldy much faster than the jar which “heard” loving words spoken to it. If “The tongue can bring death or life” (Prov. 18:21), imagine what our actions can do!

RSV). Many today represent God as actively imposing a supernatural curse upon the earth, but the word for “curse” has a few caveats that are crucial to understand:

“The verb (curse), in the form of a *Qal* passive participle, serves as a noun which denotes a condition brought about by an external agent, which in this case is not stated or which is at the very least ambiguous... **the text does not support saying that YHWH Elohim has cursed the ground (3:17).** The passive participle form of the verb denotes that **the ground is in a condition of cursedness which may be the consequence of man’s action, not necessarily YHWH Elohim’s punishment... YHWH does not impose the curse, strictly speaking; rather, He recognizes and states a condition that has come to be. YHWH Elohim is not explicitly the agent of the cursing.”²³⁰**

We reap curses *from* the earth because we have sown sin.

Unfortunately we, like Adam, have shifted the responsibility for the consequences of our actions onto God (Gen. 4:13) instead of taking responsibility for them. Should we believe the testimony of Lamech, the first polygamist (Gen. 4:19), who claimed that God is the active cause of cursing the ground (Gen. 5:29)? Or should we believe Jesus, who said that “An enemy has done this!” Matthew 13:24-28.

God, unlike man, takes responsibility for His children’s punishments and allows Himself to be described as doing these things. Why? Because He *allows* these consequences to happen. This is why God is often described as actively *doing* what He *allows*. Consider the insight by Bullinger:

“By Hebrew idiom (and also by modern usage) a person is said to do that which he permits to be done. For examples, see Ex. 4:21; 5:22. Jer. 4:10. Eze. 14:9; 20:25. Mat. 11:25; 13:11. Rom. 9:18; 11:7, 8; 2Th. 2:11. God’s permission, but Satan’s suggestion (Jam. 1:13-14)...”²³¹

²³⁰ Eugene Combs, “Has God Cursed the Ground? Perplexity of Interpretation in Genesis 1-5,” in *Ascribe to the Lord: Biblical & Other Essays in Memory of Peter C. Craigie, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 67* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1988), p. 276-277, 285, <http://tinyurl.com/57t9mhu6>. Also see Kenneth A. Matthews, *Genesis 1-11:26* in “The New American Commentary” (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), p. 252.

²³¹ Ethelbert Bullinger, *The Companion Bible* (Sevierville, TN: C.T. Haywood, 2005), p. 24, <https://tinyurl.com/wcwz38ef>. Also see Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible: Explained and Illustrated* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1898), p. 821, <http://tinyurl.com/5d86jbrz>. This is known as the “idiomatic usage of verbs,” and another related Hebraic idiom is the “metonymy of

Instead of actively hardening hearts (Ex. 4:21; Rom. 9:18), He simply allows them to be hardened. He does not deceive (Jer. 4:10) or send delusions (2 Thes. 2:11), but He allows these things to happen. Thus, instead of God being the One to actively create the curse, He has simply allowed the sins of man to negatively affect the earth. This is why the book of Leviticus says that because of man's sins "**the land is defiled: therefore I do visit²³² the iniquity thereof upon it, and the land itself vomiteth out her inhabitants.**" Leviticus 18:25.

Man, 'ādām, was made from the earth, 'ādāmâb (Gen. 2:7), and is subsequently a microcosm, or miniature model, of it. For instance, both the earth and the human body are made up of about 70% water; both have a circulatory system that circulates life-sustaining fluid (water and blood); both have diverse ecosystems of numberless organisms that serve various functions, such as forming digestive tracts that break down, or digest, organic matter to better assimilate nutrients back into our bodies or the earth.

But what happens if our bodily terrain becomes "corrupt," or diseased with inorganic and toxic matter? It goes to work to rid itself of what shouldn't be there. For instance, if you eat something bad and get food poisoning, cause will follow effect. Your body seeks to get rid of the "bad stuff" through one end or the other! This is the natural "penalty" for breaking a law of health.

"When people get sick, they violate some law; but the penalty is intended to make a man better. That is what it is for. If it were not for the penalties, we would be doing wrong all the time. But **the penalty comes in as a correction, and not as an arbitrary punishment. Penalty is simply a consequence of the sin. It is a natural consequence of the things that a man did, and not an arbitrary thing.**"²³³

the subject." This literary device was also used by other ancient near eastern languages, as is evident from their conquest narratives. For an example, see K. Lawson Younger, *Ancient Conquest Accounts: A Study in Ancient Near Eastern and Biblical History Writing*, *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 98* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), p. 192-193, <http://tinyurl.com/5n8726db>. For more on the permissive sense, see Troy J. Edwards, *The Permissive Sense: Hints and Helps to Bible Interpretation that Vindicates God's Character of Love* (2017).

²³² Two of the definitions of "Visit" is to "oversee," or "deliver," (H6485) both of which are in harmony with the revelation of Christ—He delivered the wicked up to the consequences of their actions.

²³³ *General Conference Daily Bulletin*, February 18, 1897, p. 75, par. 15.

When we break the laws of health and corrupt our bodies, the natural result is volatile reactions, and this is exactly what happens when man corrupts the earth with the “toxic matter” of sin. Just as there is a relationship between our actions and our health, so too is there an intimate relationship between our actions and the rest of creation, as Sigve Tonstad eloquently put it:

“Significantly, **the mood of the land is described as a reliable barometer of the inhabitants’ spiritual and moral condition. Lawlessness and social injustice send ripples of disharmony throughout all creation, registered faithfully on the Richter scale of nature’s tortured soul.** After a series of examples of such injustice, the prophet Hosea claims that because of people’s cruelty, ‘the land mourns, and all who live in it waste away; the beasts of the field and the birds of the air and the fish of the sea are dying’ (Hosea 4:3).²³⁴ ‘How long will the land mourn, and the grass of every field wither?’ asks Jeremiah well over a century later, pained by **the same connection between ethics and ecology** (Jer. 12:4)... **the convulsions of the earth reflect the violation of the moral order and humanity’s short-sighted stewardship.**”²³⁵

But if someone is super sick and develops a deadly fever, a good doctor will try to restrain the fever from killing the patient. In like manner, our sins negatively affect the earth, and the only thing stopping the fever simmering beneath the earth’s crust from bursting is the restraining hand of the Great Physician.

If it is true that our sin “reverberates out and affects the whole, shaking” “this spiderweb of a world” “with varying degrees of intensity”²³⁶— if it is true that there is a symbiotic relationship between human life and creation—and obedience to God’s laws help uphold the fabric of the universe,²³⁷ then the story of Sodom and

²³⁴ According to Hans Walter Wolff, “the judgment results not from the direct actions of Yahweh himself, but from an ‘organic structure of order,’ ‘a sphere in which one’s actions have fateful consequences’... This conception results from a ‘synthetic view of life.’” *Hosea: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Hosea* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974), p. 68.

²³⁵ Tonstad, *The Lost Meaning of the Seventh Day*, p. 392.

²³⁶ Fretheim, *God and World*, p. 19.

²³⁷ In ancient Israel, “the just ordering of society—reflected in its laws—was brought into close relationship with the creation of the world. **A breach of those laws was considered a breach of the order of creation.** Hence, it had dire consequences on all aspects of the world order, not least the sphere of nature, threatening the world with chaos. There is thus a symbiotic relationship of ethical order and cosmic order.” Terrence E. Fretheim, “The Plagues as Ecological Signs of Historical Disaster,” *Journal of Biblical Literature*, vol. 110, no. 3 (Autumn, 1991), p. 385-396.

Gomorrah drastically changes. Instead of God saying, “Stop sinning or I’ll kill you,” He is really saying “Stop sinning or you’ll kill yourself,” “I don’t want you to die, says the Sovereign Lord. Turn back and live!” Ezekiel 18:32. God held back the destructive forces of nature (Rev. 7:1-3) as long as He could for these people to change their ways, but eventually He must allow them all to choose their own path, for this is His justice and judgments:

Psalm 9:16 **The LORD is known for his justice. The wicked are trapped by their own deeds...**

Galatians 6:7 **Don’t be misled—you cannot mock the justice of God. You will always harvest what you plant.**

We have no idea how much we owe Christ for His protection of us. What is keeping the super-volcano in Yellowstone from going off? What is holding back the wickedness of government leaders who could send the world into a nuclear holocaust at a moment’s notice? It is the restraining Spirit of God that prevents these disasters from occurring, just as He was the one who was holding back the impending destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. The Bible tells us that two of the cities which were destroyed along with Sodom and Gomorrah were called Admah and Zeboim (Deut. 29:23). According to Scripture, how were these cities overthrown? Hosea informs us:

Hosea 11:8 (KJV) **How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? How shall I deliver thee, Israel? How shall I make thee as Admah? How shall I set thee as Zeboim?** Mine heart is turned within me, My repentings are kindled together.

Once the inhabitants of a nation completely divorce the Spirit of Christ, He is forced to “give them up” to the natural result of their choices,²³⁸ for He is a Gentleman who

²³⁸ There is much debate as to how Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed. Scholars have proposed alternative views which seem more in harmony with the passages we have brought forward and the character of God as revealed in the life of Christ. Some theorize that the destruction of these cities may have been caused by a volcanic eruption or an earthquake or lightning (fire from heaven) which ignited bitumen deposits underground (since the Dead Sea fault line runs near the presumed location of the cities). Regardless of the specifics, it seems most likely that the sins of the people were returned on their own head and they were “destroyed with [by] the earth.” Genesis 6:13 (KJV).

would never force Himself on others or harm them for rejecting Him. All He would ever do is to allow us to walk our own path.²³⁹

In like manner, God had been pleading with the Roman Church and State since their inception, but when they began to reject and persecute Christ in the person of those whom His Spirit was drawing, nature began to vomit out its inhabitants. As violence was building up and erupting in the hearts of “God’s representatives” towards “heretics,” this enmity was mirrored back to them in the natural world. The volcanoes that erupted caused the light from the sun to be hindered, just as the violence of the Church and State caused the light of Christ to be obscured. The result of the lack of sunlight was that it caused a colder season, and in turn crop failures and subsequent famine—and as it was in the physical, so it was in the spiritual. When the light of the Gospel was shut out from the masses by the Church, the love of many grew cold (Matt. 24:12), and the natural result was a spiritual famine, which caused many to die of spiritual malnourishment.

Some say God supernaturally intervened to kill them with fire literally (as opposed to hyperbolically) “from heaven,” citing the presence of sulfur balls (nodules) in suspected locations of the cities referenced in Scripture (this information is typically gathered from unsubstantiated TikTok and YouTube videos). However, this is inconsistent with both science and the life of Christ, who rebuked His disciples for thinking it was okay to call fire down from heaven to destroy their enemies (Luke 9:54–56).

The presence of sulfur balls does not prove that a location is where Sodom and the other cities were, as sulfur balls have been found in several places, like Taiwan (See Zhigang Zeng, Chen-Tung A. Chen, Xuebo Yin, *et. al.* “Origin of native sulfur ball from the Kueishantao hydrothermal field offshore northeast Taiwan: Evidence from trace and rare earth element composition,” *Journal of Asian Earth Sciences*, vol. 40, is. 20 (2011), p. 661-671, <http://tinyurl.com/bddeb4a5>). People have examined the sulfur balls in the Dead Sea area and have found that they were formed by a process called *bacterial sulfate reduction*, which is where bacteria metabolizes sulfur compounds and subsequently forms sulfur nodules. See Tom Bishop, Alexandra V. Turchyn, and Orit Sivan, “Fire and Brimstone: The Microbially Mediated Formation of Elemental Sulfur Nodules from an Isotope and Major Element Study in the Paleo-Dead Sea,” *PLOS ONE*, vol. 8, no. 10 (2013), <http://tinyurl.com/5fa9z9t9>; Adi Torfstein and Alexandra V. Turchyn, “Rates and Cycles of Microbial Sulfate Reduction in the Hyper-Saline Dead Sea over the Last 200 Kyr from Sedimentary $\delta^{34}\text{S}$ and $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ _(SO4),” *Frontiers in Earth Science*, vol. 5 (2017), <http://tinyurl.com/4vj9je8d>; Elan J. Levy, Camille Thomas, Gilad Antler, *et. al.* “Intensified microbial sulfate reduction in the deep Dead Sea during the early Holocene Mediterranean sapropel 1 deposition,” *Geobiology*, vol. 20, is. 4 (2022), p. 518-532.

²³⁹ I think **the flood** occurred in a similar fashion as the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, but on a worldwide scale. Evidence of this is seen when we compare the principle of man’s impact on the earth with the following passages: Genesis 6:11–13; Job 22:15–17; Isaiah 54:7–9. For more information on the flood, please see Adrian Ebens, *Agape: A Revelation of the Father’s Character of Love* (Father of Love, 2017), ch. 13, <https://tinyurl.com/AgapeBook>; Greg Boyd, *Crucifixion of the Warrior God: Interpreting the Old Testament’s Violent Portraits of God in Light of the Cross* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2017), vol. 2, p. 1121-1142.

After the “universal” Sunday laws began to be enforced, another disaster “coincidentally” occurred: *Justinian’s Plague*. How did this happen?—Cause and effect. The cold weather caused by the lack of sunlight and warmth herded rats and fleas into houses, which helped infect many people, just as the lack of love in many hearts caused evil spirits to further “infect” them with selfishness. And because Justinian helped establish more trade routes and supply lines, it was much easier for the disease to spread. This wave of the Bubonic Plague broke out a mere three years after the Sunday laws began to be imposed! The volcanic activity, lack of sunlight, famines, and pestilence all made the perfect storm to bring about the death of millions. What a striking way to introduce the Dark Ages to the world.

CHAPTER 9

THE COMING CRISIS

Prophecy informs us that history will repeat itself and that another universal Sunday law will usher the world back into a “modern Dark Age,” with consequences we can’t begin to fathom.

Before we proceed, we need to add the fact that it is impossible to be 100% certain of how every detail of this final conflict will play out, for prophecy is best understood as it is being fulfilled or in hindsight (John 13:19; 14:29). For example, Isaiah prophesied that God would “wave his hand over the Euphrates River, sending a mighty wind to divide it into seven streams so it can easily be crossed on foot. He will make a highway for the remnant of his people, the remnant coming from Assyria, just as he did for Israel long ago when they returned from Egypt.” Isaiah 11:15-16. This prophecy makes it sound like God would supernaturally dry up the Euphrates to free His exiled people. However, when the time came for this prophecy to be fulfilled, we find Cyrus’ engineers diverting the river to conquer Babylon.

Israel could be confident that the Euphrates would dry up, but it would have been good for them to be open to different ways this could happen. In like manner, I believe we can be confident about *what* will happen in the end, but we need to exercise caution when we theorize *how* it will happen. With that being said, let’s examine some of the popular movements of today that are actively advocating Sunday laws.

The Mark of the Beast does not exist yet, but a power is working behind the scenes to bring it about. If our interpretation of final events is even remotely accurate, and we are near the time when this Mark will be enforced, there should be some evidence of this. So, is there any evidence?

Some claim Sunday laws would violate the 1st amendment, but really it depends on how you (or more accurately the Supreme Court) interpret the Establishment Clause which prohibits the government from making any law “respecting an establishment of religion.”²⁴⁰ Regardless, people have figured out a clever way to get around this clause: claim that the purpose of your law is secular, not religious. Law

²⁴⁰ For more information on the topic of Sunday laws as it relates to the Establishment Clause, see Sean Sutton, “The Establishment Clause and Sunday Laws” (May 23, 2024), *American-Sentinel*, <https://tinyurl.com/4pjz8prp>.

professor Doug Linder explains how framing religious laws in a secular framework is a way to bypass the Establishment Clause:

“Difficult constitutional questions are presented by laws which have a **strong religious purpose for enactment of a law** or adoption of a governmental practice, **but where the state can also assert some secular justification for the act in question.** *McGowan v Maryland*, considering the constitutionality of **a state Sunday closing law**, is such a case. **Clearly, the decision to require closing of certain commercial establishments on Sunday (rather than, say, Tuesday) had [apparently] something to do with the Biblical admonition to ‘Remember the Sabbath and keep it holy.’ But the Court found that the secular benefits of having a uniform day of rest, allowing the scheduling of community activities free from many work conflicts, predominated over any present day religious purposes or effects, and thus the Sunday closing law was constitutional.** The Eighth Circuit used a similar analysis in *Clayton*, upholding the Purdy, Missouri school district’s ban on dancing, finding a secular purpose even when there was ample evidence that the no-dancing policy was maintained in response to pressure from conservative local church groups.”²⁴¹

Today many Christian Nationalists are seeking to establish Sunday laws for religious reasons by claiming they have a secular purpose. Consider what Stephen Wolfe, author of “The Case for Christian Nationalism,” said concerning the plans for upcoming Sunday legislation:

“I mean even like the Supreme Court in the 19th century at least affirmed that Sabbath laws are okay, and I understand it’s still actually permissible today because they see it as a, you know, a day of rest—**it’s not religious and in itself it’s actually a secular sort of thing.** So I think, you know, **if that’s what the court wants to say fine—I’m still going to say it’s religious** and so... **I think [we should] have Sabbath laws for that purpose—for a religious end...** As I understand it though, it [a Sunday law] is deemed constitutional as a secular purpose. So... if a county or town wants to then enact these [Sunday] laws, they would, as I understand it, **they’d have to frame [it] in terms of kind of secular purpose.** And if they

²⁴¹ Doug Linder, “Evaluating Religiously-Based or Religiously-Motivated Laws,” *University of Missouri*, <http://tinyurl.com/d4w4nbxs>.

want to do that then, okay fine, **you still achieve the same end.** And there is a secular purpose to it so you're not exactly lying, but it's the better purpose, the higher purpose of it will be precisely the, you know church attendance—worship God.”²⁴²

THE ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS

One of the justifications people are using for Sunday laws is that they can use it to help fight climate change. When lockdowns for COVID-19 were implemented in big cities, people saw that pollution was reduced because many large businesses were closed down and few people were driving.²⁴³ The idea is that Sunday laws will drastically reduce pollution and help us fight climate change the same way. In fact, there are organizations created specifically for advocating this agenda. One such organization is known as the “Green Sabbath Project,” which says on their website, in big bold letters:

“Is there *nothing* you can do about the environment?

Nothing may be one of the best things you can do.

One day every week. Do *nothing*.”²⁴⁴

This same agenda was seen during the massive “Climate Sunday” service which was held in Glasgow, Scotland, in the run-up to the 2021 United Nations Climate Change Conference. According to the “Climate Sunday” website:

“In the run-up to COP26 in Glasgow, **over 2,200 churches and church groups** throughout Britain and Ireland **participated in the Climate Sunday Initiative, addressing climate change by holding Climate Sunday services**, committing to practical action and speaking up for climate justice.

²⁴² BiblicalHope, “Excerpts from the Waldenses,” YouTube video, 55:30-57:27, October 7, 2023, <https://tinyurl.com/y98kus37>.

Also see Wolfe’s comments on enforcing Sunday laws in Intercollegiate Studies Institute, “The Case for Christian Nationalism | Stephen Wolfe,” YouTube video, 17:28-22:08, July 2, 2024, <https://tinyurl.com/479r3svf>.

²⁴³ Peter Aitken, “Coronavirus quarantines, stay-at-home orders lead to pollution drop, studies find” (March 29, 2020), *Fox News*, <http://tinyurl.com/4d7fny4k>.

²⁴⁴ *Green Sabbath Project*, <http://tinyurl.com/4bmszmbj>.

“Climate Sunday was resourced by a **coalition of 31 denominations and charities**, members of the Environmental Issues Network (EIN) of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI). The coalition, though time-limited, aimed to leave a lasting legacy of churches committed to ongoing action. Its members will continue to provide opportunities for local churches to make climate action a significant part of their discipleship and mission and to contribute to civil society efforts to **secure adequate national and international action.**”²⁴⁵

Some of the partner organizations listed on their website include organizations and churches such as Green Christian, World Vision, The **Church of England**, The **Methodist Church**, **Baptists Together**, The **Church of Scotland**, The **United Reformed Church**, The **Church in Wales**, The **Salvation Army**, Young Christian Climate Network, The **Church of Ireland**, the **Catholic Agency or Overseas Development**, and the **Catholic Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales**, and many more.²⁴⁶ This movement was given extra force by the Catholic journal *The Tablet*, which said, “As G7 begins, **the world needs ‘climate Sundays’... more than ever.**”²⁴⁷

Pope Francis is also “getting with the times,” as he connected the idea of Sunday laws to the climate crisis in his 2015 encyclical “*Laudato Si, On Care for our Common Home.*”

“On Sunday, our participation in the Eucharist has special importance. **Sunday**, like the Jewish Sabbath, is meant to be **a day which heals** our relationships with God, with ourselves, with others and with **the world**... The law of weekly rest forbade work on the seventh day, ‘so that your ox and your donkey may have rest, and the son of your maidservant, and the stranger, may be refreshed’ (Ex 23:12). Rest opens our eyes to the larger picture and gives us renewed sensitivity to the rights of others. And so the day of rest, centered on the Eucharist, sheds it light on the whole week, and **motivates us to greater concern for nature and the poor.**”²⁴⁸

²⁴⁵ *Climate Sunday*, <http://tinyurl.com/mr2m2feb>.

²⁴⁶ FAQ, *Climate Sundays*, <http://tinyurl.com/4f7xzfcr>.

²⁴⁷ Andy Atkins, “As G7 begins, the world needs ‘climate Sundays’ and ‘wild Christians’ more than ever” (June 11, 2021), *The Tablet*, <http://tinyurl.com/3uktw6np>.

²⁴⁸ Francis, *Laudato Si*, sec. 237, encyclical letter, Vatican website, May 24, 2015, <https://tinyurl.com/bdhy3w8x>.

Indeed, one of the purposes of the seventh day Sabbath is to remind us to take care of the poor and our environment, as Pope Francis correctly pointed out. The Sabbath is a reminder that the less fortunate and even non-human creation has the right to dignity and rest—and this fact is inextricably bound up with the character of God that is preserved in the memorial of the seventh day. Sunday, however, has no Biblical input to such discussions.

Scripture is clear that our sins and cruelty have a direct effect on the earth (Gen. 6:12; Lev. 18:25-28; Is. 24:4-6), and we do not have to look far to find the evidence of this. In the book of Revelation we are explicitly told that those who have rejected the Spirit of God in the end are those who “destroy the earth” (Rev. 11:18).²⁴⁹ The way to heal the world is by presenting the truth of God’s character, the nature of His laws, and the natural consequences of accepting or rejecting Christ—all of which are revealed in the cross of Christ. Once this has been clearly shown, everyone must be allowed the liberty to choose their side. Seeing the Creator in the light of Jesus will change your thoughts and feelings toward His creation, and these thoughts and feelings will subsequently affect your actions. Susan Eastman, commenting on Paul’s statement that the non-human creation eagerly awaits the manifestation of the sons of God (Rom. 1:18-32), describes a lovely interpretation as to how God’s children could affect the world positively:

“As the children of God are redeemed by the gospel, they begin to regain a rightful dominion over the created world (Gen. 1.28-30; Ps. 8.5-8); in more modern terms, their altered lifestyle and revised ethics begin to restore the ecological system that had been thrown out of balance by wrongdoing ([Rom.] 1.18-32) and sin (Rom. 5-7).”²⁵⁰

The use of force is contrary to the character of God, and enacting Sunday laws will not save the planet, but will corrupt it. We cannot compel the conscience to try and save the planet (as previous Popes and environmentalists have advocated), but we can try to convince the mind.²⁵¹

²⁴⁹ To learn more about the effects of man has on nature and how the current path being trodden by the world is unsustainable, please see the book *Dominion and Destiny: The Future of Man and the Earth*, available for free here: <https://tinyurl.com/DominionAndDestiny>.

²⁵⁰ Susan Eastman, “Whose Apocalypse? The Identity of the Sons of God in Romans 8:19,” *Journal of Biblical Literature*, vol. 121, no. 2 (2002), p. 263-277.

²⁵¹ For more information on the relation between the Biblical environmentalism and the Sabbath, see Sean Sutton, “For God so Loved the _____” (May 25, 2024), *Father of Love*, <https://tinyurl.com/35zz6bee>.

“BRING BACK BLUE LAWS”

The idea of enacting Sundays for the “common good” is nothing new and is steadily gaining traction in America. Historically, these laws are known as “Blue Laws,” which are defined by Wikipedia as “laws restricting or banning certain activities on specified days, usually Sundays in the western world. The laws were adopted originally for religious reasons, specifically to promote the observance of the Christian day of worship, but since then have come to serve secular purposes as well.”²⁵² Throughout history Sunday laws, which are inherently religious, have slipped past the Establishment Clause by claiming to serve a secular purpose.

In a 2020 article from the Catholic *Crisis Magazine*, we see an article entitled “**Bring Back the Blue Laws**,” in which the COVID quarantines are linked with the idea of Sunday laws:

“Nevertheless, Americans in those early quarantine days—after the haze of their Netflix-binge had evaporated—woke up with a surprised appreciation for what earlier generations had considered normal: **Sunday laws**, otherwise known as blue laws. As America returns to normality, **we should consider these laws and their manifold benefits afresh**.”²⁵³

The revival of blue laws is not something that is confined to America only, as this idea is being promoted all around the world. In 2021 an article was written talking about the promotion of Sunday laws in the Philippines:

“Other barangays in Cebu city where the rate of Covid-19 infection is going up should follow what Barangays Guadalupe and Lahug did in **closing down on Sundays all establishments**... Perhaps, the government should rethink and **reimpose the ‘Blue Sunday Law**.”²⁵⁴

Canadian politician and Mayor of Guelph, Ontario, Cam Guthrie, voiced his idea of reimposing blue laws in connection with COVID:

²⁵² “Blue Laws,” *Wikipedia*, <http://tinyurl.com/2bn7u3sw>.

²⁵³ Casey Chalk, “Bring Back the Blue Laws” (June 17, 2020), *Crisis Magazine*, <http://tinyurl.com/yttudfap>.

²⁵⁴ Elias L. Espinoza, “Espinoza: Reimpose the ‘Blue Sunday Law’” (2021), *Yahoo! News*, <https://tinyurl.com/mvf462n2>.

“Just putting this out there for consideration: Once we kick #COVID—19’s butt, **I’d suggest that everything be closed on Sunday’s again** so that we can appreciate the importance of what taking a pause in our busy lives really means. I think our body, mind and soul would thank us.”²⁵⁵

Sunday laws are being considered by many countries around the world, including Papua New Guinea (2018),²⁵⁶ Malaysia (2020),²⁵⁷ Poland (2019),²⁵⁸ Samoa (2020),²⁵⁹ Germany (2020),²⁶⁰ Serbia (2020),²⁶¹ Antigua and Barbuda (2019),²⁶² Turkey (2021),²⁶³ Croatia (2023),²⁶⁴ the Netherlands (2023),²⁶⁵ etc.²⁶⁶

THE SOURCE OF SUNDAY LAW SENTIMENTS

The source of these sentiments should be obvious at this point—they stem from the mandates and agenda of Rome. The *Catholic Catechism* itself states that “**Christians should seek recognition of Sundays** and the Church’s holy days as

²⁵⁵ Cam Guthrie (@CamGuthrie), Twitter, March 21, 2020, 9:46pm, <https://tinyurl.com/bdhe4djd>.

²⁵⁶ “Sunday should be a day of rest” (2018), *The National*, <https://tinyurl.com/3b9kz22b>.

²⁵⁷ Elias L. Espinoza, “Sunday should be made ‘rest with family’ day – Hannah Yeoh” (2020), *The Borneo Post*, <https://tinyurl.com/axce5xcp>.

²⁵⁸ Daniel Tilles, “Poland’s Sunday trading ban to expand from start of 2020” (2019), *NotesFromPoland.com*, <https://tinyurl.com/k7pbn324>

²⁵⁹ “Samoa PM wants to ban Sunday trading” (2020), *Talenei.com*, <https://tinyurl.com/2ysdafcj>.

²⁶⁰ “Majority of Germans say shops should be closed on Sundays” (2020), *Evangelical Focus*, <https://tinyurl.com/47ca9fn8>.

²⁶¹ Snezana Rakic, “Trade unions urge ban on working on Sundays” (2020), *Serbian Monitor*, <https://tinyurl.com/3h8rd9w5>.

²⁶² Latrishka Thomas, “Lower House passes the Public Holiday (Amendment) Bill 2019” (2019), *Antigua Observer*, <https://tinyurl.com/mr3v7fuf>.

²⁶³ “Dispute flares up as Turkish tradespeople want malls closed on Sundays” (2021), *Daily Sabab*, <https://tinyurl.com/mrr6wtt9>.

²⁶⁴ “Croatia’s Sunday closing law set to take effect” (2023), *Christian Network Europe*, <https://tinyurl.com/3xapckcc>. Also see: “Croatia heading towards work-free Sunday” (2020), *Croatia Week*, <https://tinyurl.com/5n8rv5hv>.

²⁶⁵ “Swapfiets urges city councils to reinstate car-free Sundays & uses AI to envision outcome” (2023), *Trend Watching*, <https://tinyurl.com/yc5fes8z>.

²⁶⁶ The European Sunday Alliance recently (2024) issued a manifesto for “achieving a common day of rest for workers in the EU,” inviting “interested policy makers to support” their agenda. See European Sunday Alliance, “Manifest of the Steering Committee of the European Sunday Alliance on the Occasion of the EU Elections 2024,” <https://tinyurl.com/y9pm365s>.

legal holidays.²⁶⁷ This should not be surprising, as it has been the modus operandi of the Vatican to enforce her religious dogmas using the sword of the State. Pope John Paul II (1920-2005) concurred with the Catechism when he said in his encyclical, *Dies Domini*:

“... Christians will naturally strive to ensure that **civil legislation** respects their duty to **keep Sunday holy.**”²⁶⁸

Even in modern times, the Popes of Rome are seeking to introduce legislation around the world making Sunday a mandatory rest day. Pope Benedict XVI (1927-2022) is reported as saying:

“Society risks being enslaved to work and must recover the traditional day of rest [Sunday], Pope Benedict XVI said last night... He also told Catholic politicians and legislators that fundamental Catholic values were not negotiable and **they must feel bound to introduce and support laws based on these values.**”²⁶⁹

Several Catholics who are prominent in the civil sphere in America have picked up on their Church’s agenda. For instance, Roman Catholic Sohrab Ahmari has been using his platform as a contributing editor for *The Catholic Herald*, *First Things*, the *New York Post*, and *The Wall Street Journal*.

“Losing the Sabbath [read: Sunday] as **a day of rest and worship** has made us less free, our lives more harried and miserable. **It’s time to restore Sabbath blue laws,** I argue in *The Wall Street Journal*’s Saturday Essay...”²⁷⁰

Chad Pecknold, Professor at The Catholic University of America and Resident Theologian at the Basilica of Saint Mary, is likewise following John Paul II’s

²⁶⁷ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (2019), <https://tinyurl.com/4ndntt2m>, p. 528, #2188.

²⁶⁸ John Paul II, *Dies Domini*, sec. 67, encyclical letter, Vatican website, May 31, 1998, <https://tinyurl.com/58vy5bdt>.

²⁶⁹ Barney Zwartz, “Reclaim the day of rest, Pope urges” (2017), *The Age*, <https://tinyurl.com/2p2bkdnv>.

²⁷⁰ Sohrab Ahmari (@SohrabAhmari), Twitter, May 7, 2021, 10:06am, <https://tinyurl.com/3wwbd5n9>.

instruction to produce “civil legislation” which ensures the Christian’s “duty” to “keep Sunday holy”:

“These [Sunday] laws have been shown to be strongly related to religious practice, creating discrete changes in incentives to attend religious services... the repeal of these laws lowered religious participation... laws supporting Christian devotion are not contrary to the common good of Rome, but positively in its interest. So it is for us today.”²⁷¹

This should come as no surprise, as Pecknold has posted things on his Twitter like pictures of Pope John Paul II, saying “Pope St. John Paul II, pray for us!”²⁷²

MAKING SUNDAY COOL AGAIN

Roman Catholics, however, aren’t the only ones paying homage to the principles of Pope John Paul II.

“Kanye West’s²⁷³ latest stunt raised hell.

“The self-proclaimed ‘greatest artist that God ever created’ on Monday wore a T-shirt with an image of Pope John Paul II and the words ‘WHITE LIVES MATTER’ emblazoned on the back.

“After walking the runway for Demna’s Balenciaga collection during Paris Fashion Week Monday, West presented his own Yzy Szn 9 fashion event.

“His black T-shirt had the words ‘Seguiremos Tu Ejemplo,’ which translate to **‘We Will Follow Your Example,’ under the photo of the Pope.**”²⁷⁴

How is Kanye West following the Pope’s example? By “making Sunday cool again.” By hosting his own Sunday services that caters to the tastes of the youth:

²⁷¹ Chad Pecknold, “To Reverse Our Despair” (2022), *Postliberal Order*, <https://tinyurl.com/55d8fuf4>.

²⁷² Chad Pecknold (@ccpecknold), Twitter, May 7, 2021, 9:52pm, <https://tinyurl.com/3rcy9e29>.

²⁷³ For those who are unfamiliar with who Kanye West is, he is one of the world’s most listened to rappers.

²⁷⁴ Karu F. Daniels, “Kanye West wears Pope John Paul II ‘White Lives Matter’ shirt at Yeezy runway show” (2022), *New York Daily News*, <https://tinyurl.com/bdhtxycs>.

“Kanye West has brought a new meaning to church worship with Sunday service. A gospel music theme to then filled with his own music, dancing, and A-list celebrities... Sunday service kicked off in January of this year (2019). Every week, Kanye performs alongside a gospel choir and live band. He even delivers a sermon and has a guest sermon as well... Collaborators like Tyler the Creator, Kid Cudi, CyHi the Prynce, and Charlie Wilson have come through, and of course the Kardashian family are devout attendees... Other celebrities who have stopped by include Katy Perry, Orlando Bloom, Rick Rubin, Diplo, Courtney Love, Lil Dicky, Fonzworth Bentley, David Letterman, and Babyface... Kim [Kardashian—Kanye’s wife at the time] **swears that Sunday service isn’t religious, despite its name.** [In an interview she said] “There’s actually no praying... there’s no sermon, there’s no word, **it’s just music and it’s just a feeling.**”²⁷⁵

It seems that the “new meaning” Kanye has brought to Sunday services is that of a music concert—thus making Sunday service something that millions of fans would love to attend.

In October of that year, Kanye also released his “Gospel” album “Jesus is King,” which includes a song entitled **“Closed on Sundays”**—a reference to the fact that Chick-fil-A is always closed on Sundays. Just as King Nebuchadnezzar used music as a signal that it was time to worship the image he had erected (Dan. 3:7), music will likewise play a pivotal role in the Sunday law agenda.

SECULAR SUNDAY LAWS?

It is interesting that many leaders who are advancing the cause for Sunday legislation are now seeking to establish it based on civil principles, claiming that religion is not connected in the least. The fact of the matter is that all Sunday legislation in the history of mankind has always stemmed from religious claims. The history of Emperor Constantine in 321 A.D., Justinian’s *Corpus Juris Civilis*, and the encyclicals of the Popes show the true grounds of Sunday laws.

²⁷⁵ XXL, “Kanye West’s Sunday Service Explained”, YouTube video, April 19, 2019, <https://tinyurl.com/528bfffj>.

“... **Some now claim that Sunday legislation is not based on religious grounds.** This claim is contradicted by the facts of all the centuries. Every Sunday law sprung from a religious sentiment... Every prohibition which appears in Sunday legislation is based upon the idea that it is wrong to do on Sunday the things prohibited... **To say that the present Sunday laws do not deal with the day as a religious institution, is to deny every fact in the history of such legislation.** The claim is a shallow subterfuge.”²⁷⁶

Some government officials advocate Sunday legislation based on secular problems, such as COVID-19 and climate change, but some are openly advocating such laws to uplift religion and morality. One of the most striking comments made on this subject was by Arizona Senator (2015-2021), Sylvia Allen. In a Senate Appropriations Committee, while discussing a gun bill, she went so far as to say that, instead of arguing about gun bills, they should be debating a law where everyone is forced to go to church on Sunday:

“It’s the soul that is corrupt. And how we get back to a moral rebirth in this country, I don’t know... Probably we [Senators] should be debating a bill requiring every American to attend a church of their choice on Sunday to see if we can get back to having a moral rebirth.”²⁷⁷

PROJECT 2025

Lately, the talk of Sunday laws is being agitated and discussed in the context of *Project 2025*. What is this project? Essentially, it’s a plan developed by a right-wing think tank, the Heritage Foundation, with policies they want the next conservative President in 2025 to implement within the first 180 days in office, so they can “rescue the country from the grip of the radical Left”²⁷⁸ by “dismantling the rogue administrative state.”²⁷⁹

²⁷⁶ Abram Herbert Lewis, *A Critical History of Sunday Legislation from 321 to 1888 A.D.* (New York: D. Appleton, 1888), p. viii-ix, <https://tinyurl.com/359wnprx>.

Even the first Sunday law in 321 AD was enacted by Constantine so that “he might gently bring all men to piety.” Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*, bk. 4, ch. 18, p. 159.

²⁷⁷ End-Times-Prophecy, “US Senator asks for a Bill to Mandate SUNDAY Church Attendance!”, YouTube video, March 29, 2015, <https://tinyurl.com/4437j2hh>.

²⁷⁸ “About Project 2025,” *Project 2025*, <https://tinyurl.com/43t4adeb>.

²⁷⁹ Kevin Roberts (@KevinRobertsTX), Twitter, July 17, 2023, 10:38am, <http://tinyurl.com/2wnca7sv>. Roberts is the President of The Heritage Foundation.

“The 2025 Presidential Transition Project is being organized by The Heritage Foundation and **builds off Heritage’s longstanding ‘Mandate for Leadership,’** which has been highly influential for presidential administrations since the Reagan era. Most recently, **the Trump administration relied heavily on Heritage’s ‘Mandate’ for policy guidance, embracing nearly two-thirds of Heritage’s proposals within just one year in office.**”²⁸⁰

What is one of the goals on the agenda? I’m sure you already know the answer. The latest draft of the “Mandate for Leadership” explains:

“**Sabbath Rest.** God ordained the Sabbath as a day of rest, and until very recently the Judeo-Christian tradition sought to honor that mandate by moral and **legal regulation of work on that day.** Moreover, a shared day off makes it possible for families and communities to enjoy time off together, rather than as atomized individuals, and provides a healthier cadence of life for everyone. Unfortunately, that communal day of rest has eroded under the pressures of consumerism and secularism, especially for low-income workers.

“**Congress should encourage communal rest** by amending the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) to require that workers be paid time and a half for hours worked on the Sabbath. **That day would default to Sunday,** except for employers with a sincere religious observance of a Sabbath at a different time (e.g., Friday sundown to Saturday sundown)...”²⁸¹

Here we see Sunday legislation again lifting its head. Of course, this proposal may seem harmless, but we need to view this in light of prophecy, for this may be a stepping stone to something more dangerous. This agenda was drafted by Jonathan Berry, who “headed the regulatory office at the U.S. Department of Labor” and “served at the Department of Justice’s Office of Legal Policy.” “He also served as

²⁸⁰ “Project 2025 Publishes Comprehensive Policy Guide, ‘Mandate for Leadership: The Conservative Promise’” (2023), *heritage.org*, <https://tinyurl.com/3mnjryr2>.

²⁸¹ The Heritage Foundation, “Mandate for Leadership: The Conservative Promise” (Washington, DC: 2023), p. 589, <https://tinyurl.com/3dv8fa3z>.

The exemption clause at the end shows a mere *toleration* of belief instead of a recognition of *human rights*.

Chief Counsel to the President-Elect Trump Transition, advising on ethics and legal policy.”²⁸² Listen to what he has to say about this aspect of Project 2025:

“... it’s specifically the idea of **encouraging Sabbath [Sunday] rest through discouraging Commerce on the Sabbath [Sunday]**... It would be an encouragement, an inducement to rest—really to kind of coordinate commercial activity for the other six days of the week...”²⁸³

With all of this in mind, the idea that America may one day make religious laws forcing people to worship a certain way, as prophesied in Revelation 13, doesn’t seem so far-fetched anymore.

Revelation 13:11–12 (KJV) ¹¹ And I beheld another beast [**America**] coming up out of the earth; and he had two horns like a lamb, and **he spake as a dragon**. ¹² And he exerciseth all the power of the first beast before him, and **causeth the earth and them which dwell therein to worship the first beast**, whose deadly wound was healed.

At the end of the day, the question we need to ask ourselves is this: which Jesus are we worshipping? Do we worship the non-violent Jesus (Is. 53:9; Matt. 5:38-39) that upheld (Matt. 5:17), delighted in, and magnified His Father’s laws (Ps. 40:8; Rom. 7:22; Is. 41:21)? Does the Jesus we worship overcome evil with good (Rom. 12:21), wage war by revealing the truth (Rev. 2:16; 19:15 + Heb. 4:12) and by being the victim of violence (Rev. 5:6; 19:13; Col. 1:20)? Does our Jesus only accept intelligent worship freely given (Is. 1:18; Acts 18:4; Rom. 14:5)? Does He punish lawbreakers by giving them over to reap what they sow (Ps. 9:16; Gal. 6:7) in His wrath (Ezek. 22:31; Rom. 1:18-19; 24-27)? And does He torment His enemies with the spiritual fire of love (Rom. 12:20; Song 8:6-7; 1 John 4:18)?

Or have we been worshipping a different image of God—the image of the beast—unwittingly? Does the picture of Jesus in our minds misrepresent Him and His Father’s character and the nature of Their government? Have we attributed the character of Satan’s Kingdom to God’s? Do we worship a violent Jesus who changed his father’s laws (Dan. 7:25), who overcomes his enemies with evil—by taking their lives (Mark 3:4; Rev. 13:15)? Does the Jesus we worship wage war through violence

²⁸² Jonathan Berry, *The Federalist Society*, <https://tinyurl.com/33wuc9c8>.

²⁸³ BiblicalHope, “Excerpts from the Waldenses” YouTube video, 54:29-55:02, October 7, 2023, <https://tinyurl.com/y98kus37>.

(Rev. 13:7, 15) and use threats of death to get worship (Rev. 13:15)? Does he punish lawbreakers by persecuting and killing them in his wrath (Dan. 3:6; Esth. 2:1; Rev. 12:17)? And does he torment his enemies with literal fire like Satan and his followers during the Dark Ages (Rev. 9; Job 1:12, 16)? If our picture of Jesus looks more like the latter, we may have been duped into worshipping a counterfeit Christ—the beast and its image. It’s only a matter of time until we fully become like the one we worship.

	IMAGE OF GOD (TREE OF LIFE)	IMAGE OF BEAST (TREE OF KNOWLEDGE)
CHARACTER	NON-VIOLENT	VIOLENT
GOD’S LAW	UNCHANGED	CHANGED
OVERCOMES	BY GOOD-GIVING LIFE	BY EVIL-TAKING LIFE
WAGES WAR	BY BEING KILLED	BY KILLING
PROSELYTIZE	PERSUASION	COERCION
PUNISHMENT	INTRINSIC	IMPOSED
WRATH	STEPPING BACK	STEPPING IN
TORMENTS	SPIRITUAL FIRE	LITERAL FIRE

NATIONAL THEN INTERNATIONAL

Just as numerous *local Sunday laws* were enforced in various parts of the Roman Empire from the 4th to 6th centuries, so too are there numerous *local Sunday laws* that are on the books in various states of the United States. However, the 1,260-year tribulation of the Dark Ages did not begin until the last of the beasts’ enemies were destroyed and their Sunday laws were enforced universally throughout Christendom. In the same way, the Mark of the Beast cannot be said to be implemented until America enforces a *nationwide Sunday law*, when they, like the Pope and Justinian, actually *enforce* the things that were on the books and then take the final steps to execute all transgressors of these arbitrary laws—just like Nebuchadnezzar the Babylonian, Darius the Mede, Antiochus the Greek, the union of the Sanhedrin (Church) and Rome, and the union of the Roman Church with the Papal States. Indeed, once the Protestant Churches of America join hands with the State to legislate and enforce their religious dogmas, first in America, and then universally, an image of the Roman Catholic (Universal) Church will be fully formed. Then the terrible words of the prophet will finally be fulfilled:

Revelation 13:15–17 (KJV) ¹⁵ And he [Protestant America] had power to give life unto the image of the beast [a union of Church and State that has a false view of Jesus], that the image of the beast should both speak [legislate], and cause that as many as would not worship [obey, Rom. 6:16] the image of the beast should be killed. ¹⁶ And he causeth all, *both* small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand [actions], or in their foreheads [beliefs]: ¹⁷ and that no *man* might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name.

After studying the topic of the lamb-like beast and the Mark of the Beast, we could paraphrase the following passage concerning the final crisis in this way:

Revelation 13:11–17 (The Remedy Paraphrase) ¹¹ Next I saw a different beast arising out of the earth. It had two horns like lamb's horns but spoke like a dragon — which symbolized a new power, arising in a different part of the earth, that initially promotes lamblike principles of freedom but eventually practices dragonlike methods of coercion. ¹² As the first beast watched, **the second beast exercised all the tactics of the first beast and led the world to practice its methods, thus giving honor to the first beast whose fatal wound was healed.** ¹³ The beast required everyone to choose whom they would worship—symbolized by the miracle of calling fire down from heaven. ¹⁴ Because of the astonishing act of restricting religious freedoms and the economic coercion that it was given power to wield, it duped the entire world. **It commanded them to form a coalition of religious and political power to enforce its way, which was modeled after the first beast's ways.** ¹⁵ **It had the resources and ability to bring this coalition into a living reality—a fitting model honoring the first beast.** It even imposed a death penalty for all who refused to practice its methods. ¹⁶ **It forced everyone—weak or powerful, rich or poor, free or slave—to make a choice. Some chose to believe that the methods of the beast were godly, and these were marked in their minds to be like the beast. Others chose to go along with the beast for convenience and gain, and they were marked by the work of their hands.** ¹⁷ No one could buy or sell except for those who chose the methods of the beast and thus marked themselves as “loyal” by embracing its character and being numbered as its followers.

END OF THE COSMIC CONTROVERSY

10.1 MYSTERY OF GOD, MARY MAGDALENE, & THE 144,000

In the end, all will eat the fruit of one of two “trees”—they will manifest one of two characters because of their views of God. God will allow the Mark of the Beast to go forth in order to reveal the difference between the nature of His Kingdom and Satan’s. While one group sees God as Caesar or the medieval Pope who used violence and force to punish heretics for the “common good,” another group will worship a God that looks exactly like the lovely, non-violent, non-coercive Jesus.

CHRIST MANIFEST IN THE FLESH

The 144,000 will have a clear understanding of the character of God because they have fully accepted the “testimony” that Jesus, the True Witness, bore concerning His Father. These have been sanctified by the truth of Christ, the Word (John 17:17), and have thus “washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb and made them white.” Revelation 7:14 (cf. Eph. 5:26). These have allowed the blood (Life/Spirit²⁸⁴) of Christ to enter the sanctuary of their soul and cleanse their heart of all sin and false ideas about God’s character.²⁸⁵

When self has been completely dethroned from the heart and crucified, then Christ will perfectly reproduce His character of selfless love in His children, and thus shall Christ be formed within (Gal. 4:19), and the “mystery among the Gentiles,” or unbelievers, “which is **Christ in you, the hope of glory**” (Col. 1:27 KJV) shall be manifested before all the universe. Just as God was fully manifested in the body of

²⁸⁴ Genesis 9:4; 1 John 5:8.

²⁸⁵ Malachi 3:1-3; 1 Peter 2:5; Matthew 21:12.

Christ 2,000 years ago by faith, so will He be fully manifested in the body of Christ, His Church, in the end (Rom. 8:3-4; 2 Cor. 4:7-11; Gal. 2:20; Phil. 2:13; 1 John 4:2).

However, when the light of God's glorious character is seen in the face of the 144,000, the wicked will seek to destroy them. When Christ was manifest in the flesh (1 John 4:2; Gal. 1:15-16) of Abel, Daniel and his friends, Mordecai, etc., it always resulted in the wrath of the Dragon and a subsequent manifestation of his Satanic character. Right before Jesus went to the cross, we see a most remarkable demonstration of what the last generation Church—the 144,000—will experience at the end of time.

MARY MAGDALENE, A TYPE OF THE 144,000

Right before the record of the last supper, we read that Jesus told His disciples that “in two days... the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified” (Matt. 26:2). The disciples, however, couldn't believe that Christ would go so low and allow Himself to die the most humiliating and terrible of deaths (because that's not what they would do). In like manner, few today consider the fact that Christ is crucified afresh (Heb. 6:6) and suffers whenever humanity suffers as a result of rejecting His guiding Spirit (Is. 63:9). Because the disciples did not want to consider the idea of being humble and obedient unto death, they were blind to what was happening. However, we read of one person who understood the significance of Christ's words and what He was going through.

John 12:3 Then Mary took a twelve-ounce jar of expensive perfume made from essence of nard, and she anointed Jesus' feet with it, wiping his feet with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance.

Here we see Mary Magdalene, “a woman who was living an immoral life on the town” (Luke 7:37 REB), giving all she had to Christ. She became totally emptied of self because she understood something of what Christ was to suffer (John 12:7), and her gratitude brought out one of the greatest acts of love the world has ever seen from a mere mortal. This woman is a symbol of the 144,000, who will behold Christ and Him crucified, understand something of His continual sufferings, and have such gratitude towards their Savior that they will die to self and be filled with the fullness of Christ.

THE INDIGNATION OF THE SON OF PERDITION

The fragrance that filled the house was a fitting symbol of Christ's divine love. However, it was not a pleasant smell to the unconverted hearts of the religious leaders, for we read that Simon the Pharisees said, "If this man were a prophet, he would know what kind of woman is touching him. She's a sinner!" Luke 7:38. Even "**The disciples**", the self-proclaimed followers of Christ, "**were indignant**" towards Mary (Matt. 26:8), just as Cain was indignant with Abel.

Afterward, Judas, who feigned care for the poor but only sought enrichment of self (John 12:6), responded dramatically:

Matthew 26:14–15 (KJV) ¹⁴ **Then** one of the twelve, called **Judas Iscariot**, **went unto the chief priests**, ¹⁵ and said *unto them*, What will ye give me, and **I will deliver him unto you?** And they covenanted with him for thirty pieces of silver.

The manifestation of Christ's Spirit in Mary caused the apparent followers of Christ to be indignant towards her and led Judas to work behind the scenes to orchestrate the death of Christ. As it has been, so shall it be in the end.

When the 144,000, like Mary, manifest the character of God because of their gratitude and understanding of the cross, the "followers of Christ," or unconsecrated churches, will be indignant towards them. Likewise, the son of perdition, the Papacy—Judas's antitype (John 17:12; 2 Thes. 2:3)—will work behind the scenes to encourage the union between the Church and the State to "crucify" them for breaking their man-made Sabbath laws, just as the Jews began persecuting Christ for breaking man-made Sabbath laws (Mark 2:23–3:6; John 5:1–16). As in ages past, the wicked will believe destroying God's faithful is for the "common good" of all. But they are blinded to Satan's deceptions and shall reap ruin. In Revelation, the consequences of a worldwide rejection of Christ's Spirit are described as the Last Plagues.

10.2 THE FIRST PLAGUES— CONSEQUENCES OF EGYPT’S SIN

When the wicked crucified Christ 2,000 years ago, the sins of the people ricocheted back on them through the earth and their enemies; the national apostasy of Israel brought on famine (Acts 11:27-28²⁸⁶), pestilence, and their national destruction by the sword. When the Roman Church-State outlawed the Sabbath, they spiritually crucified the Lord of the Sabbath, as His Spirit is in the Sabbath. When this was done, the earth was likewise corrupted and responded in kind with famine and plague. Their enemies likewise brought the sword on them for hundreds of years. In Christ “all things hold together” (Col. 1:17 RSV), but outside of Christ everything falls apart. This is the pattern that we see over and over throughout history. The world chooses to stop eating from the Tree of Life (Christ’s testimony of God) and partakes of the tree of knowledge (Satan’s testimony of God), and the natural result is death and destruction from every angle, for they had rejected the only Source of life and protection. This pattern is also strikingly demonstrated in the history of Israel’s freedom from Egypt.

After Israel had been in captivity to the Egyptians for 400 years, they had adopted various aspects of their religions. Evidently they forgot the Sabbath, as Moses helped implement Sabbath reforms:

Exodus 5:4–5 (KJV) ⁴ And the king of Egypt said unto them, Wherefore do ye, Moses and Aaron, let the people from their works? get you unto your burdens. ⁵ And Pharaoh said, Behold, the people of the land now *are* many, and **you make them rest [shâbath, H7673] from their burdens.**

The Lord warned Pharaoh that the result of refusing to allow His people to be freed would result in the plagues (Ex. 5:3). But instead of listening to this warning, Pharaoh chose to reject the Tree of Life and instead eat from Satan’s tree of force and coercion by implementing *Sabbath laws* by forcing God’s people to violate the Sabbath (Ex. 5:6–9). This is why Revelation says that the Lord of the Sabbath was spiritually “crucified” in Egypt (Rev. 11:8)—because the Egyptians rejected Christ’s presence and persecuted Him in the person of His people. And when they were suffering the consequences of their decision, Christ was suffering with them, for “In all their

²⁸⁶ Josephus (*Antiquities*, 20:2:5) and Tacitus (*The Annals of Imperial Rome*, 12:43) likewise record the famines which took place leading up to the complete destruction of Jerusalem.

affliction he was afflicted” (Is. 63:9 KJV). Yes, Christ was there suffering with this rebellious people, but “we did esteem” them “stricken, smitten of God and afflicted.” Isaiah 53:4 (KJV). God did not torture and kill His Son on the cross, but He allowed Jesus to suffer the violent consequences of Israel’s sins. In like manner, God did not torture His Son in the person of the Egyptians, but He allowed His Son to suffer the consequences of their sins with them.

However, concerning the plagues in Egypt the Psalmist declared that God “cast upon them the fierceness of his **anger, Wrath**, and indignation, and trouble...” Psalm 78:49 (KJV). But *how* did God cast His “anger” and “wrath” upon them? Is it the same way we show our anger and wrath? Or are God’s ways higher than our ways, and His thoughts higher than ours (Is. 55:9)?

The word for God’s “anger” is the Hebrew word “aph,” which is the same root word that describes God’s “longsuffering” (anaph) toward those who reject Him. This word means an intense and heavy breathing (grief) through the nostrils, like one who is sobbing over a lost loved one. We see this in the life of Christ when He went to heal on the Sabbath day, but the man-made rules of the Pharisees forbade people to even do acts of service and healing on the Sabbath. When Christ was encountering them, the Scripture records that “He looked around at them **angrily** and was **deeply saddened** by their hard hearts...” Mark 3:5. His anger, or His grief, is also demonstrated when He allows the wicked to walk the path which He knows is not best for them (see Ex. 4:10, 14; Num. 11:4, 10, 31–32; 1 Sam. 8:19–20 + Hos. 13:9–11), for this brings Him much grief. Concerning God’s wrath, Paul wrote in Romans 1 that “**God’s wrath**” has been manifested against the wicked when He “**delivered them**” to their sinful lifestyles, because their sins bring upon themselves “the appropriate penalty for their” sins. Romans 1:18, 24, 27 (ISV) (also see Deut. 31:16–17; Ps. 78:58–62; 89:46; 106:40–42; Is. 54:7–8; Ezek. 22:31; Wis. 11:16).²⁸⁷

In like manner, when Egypt explicitly rejected the presence of the Creator (Heb. 1:2) and Sustainer (Heb. 1:3) of all nature, He was forced to “give them up” to destruction.

Psalm 78:48–50 (KJV) ⁴⁸ **He gave up** their cattle also to the hail, And their flocks to hot thunderbolts. ⁴⁹ He cast upon them the fierceness of his anger,

²⁸⁷ For some good, accessible information on the wrath of God, please see Jay A. Schulberg, *Acts of Our Gentle God* (Father of Love, 2019), <https://tinyurl.com/GentleGod> (particularly chapter 13), and Kevin J. Mullins, *Did God Kill Jesus Instead of Killing Us?*, <https://tinyurl.com/DidGodKillJesus> (particularly chapter 3). For a more detailed discussion on this topic, please see Boyd, *Crucifixion of the Warrior God*, vol. 2, ch. 15, “Divine Akido: The Cross as the Revelation of God’s Wrath,” <http://tinyurl.com/2u9jeaz6>.

Wrath, and indignation, and trouble, **By sending [releasing, H4917] evil angels among them.** ⁵⁰ He made a way to his anger; **He spared not** their soul from death, But **gave their life over to the pestilence [plague, H1698];**

Note how it says that God “spared not” the Egyptians from the consequences of their actions and allowed evil angels to come among them. When verse 48 says that God cast upon the wicked “hot thunderbolts,” the word used is “Resheph,” which was not only a common noun, but also a proper name: “**Resheph was a belligerent, aggressive god who used diseases to attack people, but who could also heal. In Egypt, Resheph was originally venerated as the deity who supported the Pharaoh in battles, but then he was summoned mainly because of illness and everyday needs.**”²⁸⁸ Egypt had worshipped and sacrificed to this false god, “But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, **they sacrifice to devils, and not to God.**” 1 Corinthians 10:20. Entrenched in demon worship, Egypt was ultimately left to the destructive powers and “protectors” they venerated when they spurned Christ’s Spirit.

Deuteronomy 32:37–38 ³⁷ Then he will ask, **‘Where are their gods,** the rocks they fled to for refuge? ³⁸ Where now are those gods, who ate the fat of their sacrifices and drank the wine of their offerings? **Let those gods arise and help you! Let them provide you with shelter!**

Unfortunately, their trust in Resheph for shelter from the wages of their sin was misplaced.

When Israel rejected Christ, the sins of the nation affected the earth and brought forth a great earthquake. In like manner, when the oppressive Church-State system of the Dark Ages enforced a Sunday law throughout all Christendom, the result was crop failures, famine, and pestilence—each leading one to another, from spiritual cause to effect. When Egypt likewise made laws outlawing the observance of the Sabbath, the result was the same, but more pronounced.

There are many theories as to exactly *how* the plagues in Egypt occurred. Most Christians believe that God supernaturally brought death and destruction upon Egypt, but this is inconsistent with the way God has dealt with humanity throughout history. We have seen that God, when rejected, allows the wicked to reap what they

²⁸⁸ Maciej M. Münnich, *The God Resheph in the Ancient Near East* (Mohr Siebeck, 2013); also see Willem van der Horst, *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible* (Brill, 1999), p. 333.

sow, slowly withdrawing His presence and restraining power over the various destructive forces of nature and their enemies, both physical and spiritual. Looking at history, the judgments of God occur when God withdraws Himself and allows a chain of events to occur, in which the wicked will be punished by reaping what they had sown. When we consider the cumulative nature of the plagues, we will see the chain of cause and effect at work:

1. Water to blood
2. Frog invasion
3. Biting insects (“lice”)
4. Flies
5. Livestock diseased
6. Boils
7. Hail
8. Locusts
9. Darkness
10. Death of firstborn

In the first plague we find a diseased Nile, which would cause a mass exodus of frogs to swarm the land in droves. Soon after this, many of the frogs presumably dehydrated and died, leading the Egyptians to gather “them into great heaps, and a terrible stench filled the land.” Exodus 8:14. When these frogs were removed from their ecosystem, the unchecked populace of insects and flies would have speedily reproduced and be drawn to the frog carcasses. It would not be surprising to find that a number of these insects carried diseases with them and passed them on to the livestock and humans in Egypt, causing boils.²⁸⁹ Another factor that could cause disease among both animals and humans is drinking water that was polluted with bacteria or toxins.

But how could a series of events like this begin? How could the waters of the Nile “naturally” turn to blood? Firstly, it is possible that the authors of the Scriptures oftentimes described things *as they appeared*. This is known as “phenomenal language.” An example of this is when Jesus declared that “the stars will fall from the sky” in the end days. Matthew 24:29. Few would understand this passage to mean that Jesus taught that the stars in the sky would dislodge and plummet to earth. Most would

²⁸⁹ Such as the fly *Stomoxys calcitrans* potentially carrying *Bacillus anthracis* (anthrax) which can cause boils. Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *A History of Israel: From the Bronze Age through the Jewish Wars* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1998), p. 98.

understand that He is describing how an event, such as a meteor shower, would appear to us. To human sight, the waters turned as red as blood, so it is declared that **the rivers “turned [haphak] to [lo] blood [dawn]...”** Exodus 7:17 (KJV). The same words are used to describe a time when **the moon shall be “turned [haphak]... into [lo] blood [dawn]...”** Joel 2:30-31 (KJV). No one believes that the moon will literally turn to blood, but rather that it simply appears as red as blood.

Another reason to believe that the Nile did not turn to literal blood is seen by the fact that “the Egyptians digged round about the river for water to drink...” Exodus 7:24 (KJV). Here it is evident that the Egyptians were digging “seep wells.”

“Essentially a seep well is a hole dug in the ground, near a water source that goes below the natural water table. The water from the water table seeps through the earth and into the hole that you dug. If the hole is dug the correct distance away from the original water source, your water is naturally purified.”²⁹⁰

This seems to clearly explain what the Egyptians were doing, but there’s one problem—the technology to filter drinkable water out of blood wouldn’t exist for thousands of years, and a seep well wouldn’t cut it. A seep well would only work if the waters were polluted—it wouldn’t work if it was literal blood.

But what could cause such a catastrophe that would make the rivers appear as blood? There are many theories, one of which is the Santorini volcanic eruption, one of the biggest volcanic eruptions in human history which “erupted with power equal to two million Hiroshima-type atomic bombs,”²⁹¹ which some claim occurred near the time of the Exodus.

“This theory argues that the plagues were really **the fallout of volcanic eruption** on the island of Santorini in the south of Greece around 1620-1600 BCE. Microbiologist Siro Trevisanato, author of *The Plagues of Egypt: Archaeology, History and Science Look at the Bible*, argues that ancient Egyptian medical texts support this idea.

“Winds would have carried the volcanic ash to Egypt at some point over the summer, and **the toxic acids in the volcanic ash would have included the mineral cinnabar, which could have been capable of turning a river**

²⁹⁰ “Seep Well,” *The Survival University*, <http://tinyurl.com/n92828hv>.

²⁹¹ “Thera/Santorini Eruption” (1989), *Jet Propulsion Laboratory*, <https://tinyurl.com/4e8zvhsn>.

a **blood-like red color**, Trevisanato holds. The accumulated acidity in the water would have caused **frogs** to leap out and search for clean water. **Insects** would have burrowed eggs in the bodies of dead animals and human survivors, which generated larvae and then adult insects. Then, the volcanic ash in the atmosphere would have **affected the weather**, with **acid rain** landing on people's skin, which in turn **caused boils**. The **grass would have been contaminated, poisoning the animals** that ate it. The humidity from the rain and the subsequent **hail**²⁹² would have created **optimal conditions for locusts** to thrive. Volcanic eruptions could also explain the several days of **darkness** [from ash blotting out the sun]...

“What evidence is there for this? Pumice, which is stone made from cooled volcanic lava, has been found during excavations of Egyptian ruins despite there not being any volcanoes in Egypt. Analysis of the rock shows that it came from the Santorini volcano, providing **physical evidence that the ash fallout from the eruption at Santorini reached Egyptian shores.**”²⁹³

Another plausible scenario that could explain the waters turning red involves “a bloom of toxic freshwater algae known as *Oscillatoria rubescens*, that is known to have existed 3,000 years ago and still causes similar effects today. The algae multiply in slow-moving warm waters with high levels of nutrition and when they die, they stain the water red.”²⁹⁴ When the “Red Tide” would occur, the fish would die for several reasons, but “Bullfrogs, however, have a natural defense in the form of a protein known as saxiphilin,”²⁹⁵ so the frogs would not die as quickly as the fish and could therefore escape the polluted waters (until they died of dehydration).²⁹⁶ Whether a

²⁹² According to Dorothy Vitaliano, “... the seventh plague, hail, and lightning are often associated with volcanic eruptions. Tiny ash particles can serve as condensation nuclei for hail, and strong electrical charges are common in the ash-filled air.” Jeffrey A. Lee, “Explaining the Plagues of Egypt” in *Skeptical Inquirer*, vol. 28, no. 6 (2004), p. 54, <http://tinyurl.com/5n7mahmy>.

²⁹³ Olivia B. Waxman, “Did the 10 Plagues of Egypt Really Happen? Here Are 3 Theories” (2019), *Time*, <https://tinyurl.com/59vvpuyuz>.

²⁹⁴ Joe Schwarcz, “The Ten Plagues: Natural Disasters or Divine Intervention?” (2019), *McGill*, <https://tinyurl.com/33j5cz55>.

²⁹⁵ “A Bullfrog’s Powerful Defense Against Toxic Red Tides” (2019), *Berkeley Labs*, <https://tinyurl.com/53kdv3p3>.

²⁹⁶ Environmental stress can also cause tadpole metamorphosis to accelerate. This, in conjunction with less predators, could have caused the mass frog exodus.

volcanic eruption, algal bloom, or something else was the physical cause of the polluted waters, the following results are essentially the same.²⁹⁷

Regardless of how this chain of events played out, it seems clear that a chain reaction did occur. This is an important lesson for us today. How many of us are unconscious of the butterfly effect that our habits have on ourselves, our neighbors, and the environment? As I was researching the topic of how algae blooms can cause water to appear as blood, I quickly realized that this is still a problem today. A quick search for “red algae blooms” or “red tides” on Google brings an endless supply of modern-day apocalyptic images of bloody waters. These blooms typically kill off mass amounts of marine life by producing toxins, depleting oxygen, blocking sunlight, or clogging the gills of various fish. This is not only tragic for the animals, but it also has detrimental effects on the economy of various communities. For instance, a new study found that Florida’s economy lost about “\$2.7 billion due to the red tide blooms that occurred in 2018...”²⁹⁸ This is not something abstract, but it is a real financial strain for those affected. But what exactly causes these blooms?

Simply put, algae blooms occur at excessive rates when they are “overfed” with nitrogen and phosphorus—the two main components in animal manure.

“... It’s estimated that **every minute, nearly 2 million pounds of excrement are produced by animals raised on CAFOs** [Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations] in the U.S.

“Unlike human waste, manure from CAFOs is **not treated** and typically gets flushed into underground pits or lagoons that are several acres wide. It is stored there until it is applied as fertilizer on fields. But the quantity of waste produced on factory farms **cannot easily be absorbed, resulting in over-application and runoff** of the manure—and all of the chemicals, toxins and bacteria it contains—into local waterways. It is also common for the pits or lagoons to leak, break or overflow, contaminating groundwater. Animal agriculture is the leading polluter of U.S. rivers and streams, the second-largest source of wetlands contamination, and the third-largest source of lake pollution.

²⁹⁷ The harmful algae bloom (HAG) however, would not cause hail and darkness, so some suggest that the plagues could have been the result of the algae bloom in conjunction with the Santorini eruption or some other phenomenon. Vitaliano explores this theory in her work *Legends of the Earth; Their Geologic Origins* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973), p. 252-259.

²⁹⁸ Robyn White, “Florida Lost \$2.7 Billion in One Year Due to Red Tides” (Jan. 29, 2024), *Newsweek*, <http://tinyurl.com/5bdm2yy4>.

“As a result, CAFOs have severe impacts on aquatic health as **excessive nutrient concentrations from manure, such as nitrogen or phosphorus, can make water uninhabitable or cause harmful algal blooms**. Rural communities rely heavily on groundwater wells for drinking water, and the Environmental Protection Agency’s 2000 National Water Quality Inventory found that 29 states specifically identified CAFOs as contributing to drinking water quality impairment. Cleanup expenses from CAFOs have cost municipal water systems over \$1.1 billion over the past 10 years.”²⁹⁹

The tragic practice of factory farming has led to massive profits for a few, but at what cost? Not only has this industry led to immense suffering of animals and the environment, but even our fellow man suffers because of it—particularly people in communities of color and poverty. The spraying of untreated animal feces in these communities has led to “everything from poisoned wells and diminished property values to shortened lifespans, as well as higher rates of physical and mental health problems for residents.”³⁰⁰

Right before the waters turned to blood (in a potential algae bloom), the Bible says that Pharaoh made the people stop resting and told their taskmasters to “**Load them down with more work**” (Ex. 5:9). The work they were loaded down with was brickmaking, which involved making clay from the soil around the Nile, a process which likely had unforeseen ecological impacts on the land if it was not given time to rest. Is it possible that Pharaoh’s exploitative laws which affected the Hebrews also affected the land itself? Could the unceasing brick production—like unceasing CAFOs—have caused nutrient-rich soil and fertilizer to run off into the Nile, subsequently triggering an algae bloom? If so, then Pharaoh’s greedy oppression and exploitation of his slaves and the land ricocheted back on his own head. In this paradigm, God’s request for Pharaoh to free the slaves and give them (and the land) rest was not only for their good, but his own good as well! Regardless of what triggered the algae blooms, we must always keep in mind the teaching of Christ—when the oppressed suffer, He suffers (Matt. 25:40); if we help perpetuate industries of exploitation and injustice, we are perpetuating the sufferings of Christ in these

²⁹⁹ “The Water, Air, and Climate Impacts of Factory Farming,” *ASPCA*, <http://tinyurl.com/m88sc7zv>. Also see Ann Alexander, “One More Nasty Consequence of Factory Farming: Runaway Algae” (August 11, 2016), *Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC)*, <http://tinyurl.com/23dv77fa>; Kyle Rabin, “Toxic Algae Blooms and Agriculture: 5 Things to Know About Their Connection” (2017), *Water Footprint Calculator*, <http://tinyurl.com/yc7dcjv4>.

³⁰⁰ Jamie Berger, “How Black North Carolinians pay the price for the world’s cheap bacon” (April 1, 2022), *Vox*, <http://tinyurl.com/2njem3nh>.

people.³⁰¹ Let us not forget this lesson of cause and unseen effect that God wants us to learn from these plagues.

Some may suggest that the plagues in Egypt were *only* the result of natural disasters and that God had nothing to do with this, but this would be an erroneous view that discounts many facets of the Biblical narrative. Firstly, let us consider the fact that the Bible records that each plague seems to be initiated when Moses or Aaron utilizes his rod. It is worth noting that this rod had been used to give signs to Pharaoh that the message of liberation was from the one true God.

Exodus 7:10 So Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and did what the Lord had commanded them. **Aaron threw down his staff before Pharaoh and his officials, and it became a serpent!**

Was this simply an arbitrary demonstration to show God’s power? Or was there a deeper symbol in this act? Jay Schulberg, in his succinct book entitled *Acts of Our Gentle God*, offers a fascinating explanation concerning the spiritual meaning behind the use of the rod:

“Moses was to go before Pharaoh as God’s representative. **God’s purpose in this demonstration was for it to be more than a mere display of power; it was an illustration to identify the real destroyer. When Moses, as God’s representative, held the rod in his hand, it symbolized the forces of nature under God’s control. No harm could come to Egypt as long as God’s protective hand held back the destructive forces of nature. When Moses cast down the rod, it became a serpent, the symbol of evil and destruction. This symbolized the forces of nature out of God’s control and under the control of Satan—the destroyer...**

“If at any time after the plagues had begun, Pharaoh would have turned from his defiant course and let the Israelites go, God would have taken

³⁰¹ It should also be pointed out that many farmers in the factory farming industry are just as much victims of circumstance as those outside the system; they deserve our compassion and empathy. Many of these individuals are stuck in this system and can’t get out of it for financial reasons and don’t know how to get out or what they would do even if they did get out. One great example was the chicken farmer Craig Watts, whose struggle was featured in the 2017 documentary, *Eating Animals*. Thankfully he, along with many others, has been able to get out of the factory farming industry by converting his poultry house into an indoor mushroom growing facility.

control of the forces of nature again, and the plagues would have ended. The stubborn ruler did not do this, and Egypt was left in ruin. God’s role in the plagues of Egypt becomes clear when we consider the symbolic message that God gave in the rod and the serpent.”³⁰²

What happened when Aaron released the serpent? It ate the other serpent—what a striking illustration of the self-destructive nature of sin!³⁰³

God had been Egypt’s true Protector, holding back the devastating forces of nature, but He intermittently removed this shield at specific times which would be declared by Moses and Aaron in advance in order to show that these events were not *merely* natural disasters, but that they were indeed judgments from God. For instance, once the waters became contaminated, it seems that God had been suppressing the destructive elements in it while upholding the life-giving properties of the water, until the appointed time when He released the destructive elements within the water to do its work. This could be why the waters which were even in vessels (Ex. 7:19)³⁰⁴ likewise turned to “blood”—they were already polluted with toxins, but God had held back the chemical reactions from taking place, so when He removed His life-giving and cleansing Word from the water, it would have turned red as blood and become incredibly bitter. The God who has the power to transform the molecular

³⁰² Jay A. Schulberg, *Acts of Our Gentle God* (Father of Love, 2017), p. 28-29, <https://tinyurl.com/GentleGod>.

³⁰³ Boyd compares this imagery in relation to the destruction of Pharaoh at the Red Sea crossing. Pharaoh was symbolized as a Dragon (Ezek. 29:3-5; 32:2), just as, in the Ancient Near Eastern conception, the Red Sea was also symbolized as an anti-creational, cosmic opponent of God (cf. *chaoskampf*), often depicted as a Dragon/Serpent and often referred to as *Yam* (see Ps. 74:13-14; 77:16, 19-20; 106:9; 136:13-14; Is. 51:9-10; Hab. 3:14-15; etc.). Through this lens the Scriptures show that “God waged this battle not by engaging in violence but by pitting one form of evil (the Red Sea, raging waters, Rahab, *Yam*) against another form of evil (Pharaoh/Egypt, ‘the gods of Egypt’ [Exod 12:12])... once God withdrew the ‘angel of God’ and the ‘pillar of cloud’ that had been restraining him, Pharaoh blindly sent his army right into the mouth of the cosmic dragon as they pursued the Israelites. At this point, Yahweh withdrew his restraint of *Yam* and allowed ‘the sea’ to ‘return back to its place’ (Exod 14:27). In other words, the anti-creational chaos monster was permitted to do what it always yearns to do—namely, devour all it can devour (cf. Hab. 3:14-5)... the narrative that culminated with a dragon swallowing a dragon at the Red Sea began in Pharaoh’s court with a dragon swallowing other dragons.” Boyd, *Crucifixion of the Warrior God*, vol. 2, p. 1174, 1176, 1177 (for full discussion, see pages 1168-1185). Also see Gregory Boyd’s more accessible and condensed form of the 2 volume *Crucifixion of the Warrior God*, entitled *Cross Vision: How the Crucifixion of Jesus Makes Sense of Old Testament Violence* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2017), ch. 14, “Dragon-Swallowing Dragon Warfare,” <https://tinyurl.com/4ayh9nf3>. Ebens adds a depth of meaning to Boyd’s interpretation in his work *Mirror Principle* (Father of Love, 2023), ch. 24-25, <https://tinyurl.com/Mirror-Principle>.

³⁰⁴ The word “vessels” in the text is supplied by the translators, however.

makeup of water in earthen vessels to wine by His command (John 2:6-9) can easily inhibit or permit chemical reactions of contaminated water at His command.

But what of the last plague, the death of the firstborn? Various theories seeking to explain this plague have been brought forward, such as the idea that the first-born male children would have had first pickings to resources, such as grain—which could have been poisoned or tainted from the previous plagues. Regardless of *how* this occurred physically, the God of heaven shows the ultimate source of this death:

Exodus 12:23 (KJV) For the Lord will pass through to smite the Egyptians; and when he seeth the blood upon the lintel, and on the two side posts, the Lord will pass over the door, and will not suffer **the destroyer to come in unto your houses to smite you.** (cf. Heb. 11:28)

Who destroyed the children? The Dragon or the Lamb? The Destroyer or God? Who is explicitly identified as the Destroyer in Scripture? Christ declared that the purpose of Satan, the Thief, “is to steal and kill and destroy.” John 10:10. We also read in Revelation’s 5th Trumpet that Satan, the angel of the bottomless pit, is known “**in Hebrew is *Abaddon*, and in Greek, *Apollyon*—the Destroyer.**” Revelation 9:11. Satan is the Destroyer, Christ is the Restorer. The intertestamental Book of Jubilees also describes the death of the firstborn in Egypt as occurring “**when all the powers of Mastêmâ [Satan] had been let loose to slay all the first-born in the land of Egypt**, from the first-born of Pharaoh to the first-born of the captive maid-servant in the mill, and to the cattle.” Jubilees 49:2.

But doesn’t the verse we just looked at, Exodus 12:23, says that “the Lord will pass through to smite” the firstborn? True, but who destroyed Israel? God had said, “**I will not pity, nor spare, nor have mercy, but destroy them.**” Jeremiah 13:14 (KJV). Though God is described as the who would actively kill them, all He really did was hand them over to “Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and... their enemies... and **he shall not spare them, neither have pity, nor have mercy.**” Jeremiah 21:7 (KJV). This is one of many examples in the Bible where “God and God’s agents... are... the subject of the same destructive verbs.”³⁰⁵ Thus God smote the firstborn in Egypt the same way He “smote” His true Firstborn, Jesus (Mark 14:27)—by *allowing* the Destroyer to smite them. In both places God allowed the Innocent to suffer at the hands of the wicked to *reveal* the true character of the Destroyer so the world can be reconciled to God.

³⁰⁵ Terence E. Fretheim, *Creation Untamed: The Bible, God, and Natural Disasters* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), p. 53.

Christ, the Lamb of God, had wanted to protect both the Egyptians and Hebrews by covering them with His blood, but they would not let Him. This comes out more prominently in the Greek Old Testament (LXX), where it says that “the blood shall be for a sign to you on the houses in which ye are, and **I will see the blood, and will protect you**, and there shall not be on you the plague of destruction. . .”³⁰⁶ The blood of the Lamb is the life of Christ (Gen. 9:4; Lev. 17:11, etc.), and Christ’s life is righteous. Therefore, being “covered” with the blood is symbolic of receiving the righteousness of Christ by faith! But we can only receive the righteousness of Christ if we (1) confess our hidden enmity against Christ and (2) see the selfless love of Christ—both of which are demonstrated in the slaying of the Lamb and the cross. This is why the feast of Passover, where the Lamb would be slayed, and Unleavened Bread where leaven, a symbol for sin, would be removed from the house (heart), is described as a special sign (like the Seal of God):

Exodus 13:9 **This annual festival [Passover] will be a visible sign to you, like a mark branded on your hand or your forehead.** Let it remind you always to recite this teaching of the Lord: ‘With a strong hand, the Lord rescued you from Egypt.’

When the 144,000 are covered with the righteous life, or blood, of Christ by faith and have received the Seal of God, God won’t allow the Destroyer to torment them, for they have taken refuge in the secret place of the Most High (Ps. 91:1).

Psalm 91:3–11 (KJV) ³ Surely he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, *And* from the noisome pestilence. ⁴ He shall cover thee with his feathers, *And* under his wings shalt thou trust: His truth *shall be thy* shield and buckler. ⁵ Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night; *Nor* for the arrow *that* flieth by day; ⁶ *Nor* for the pestilence *that* walketh in darkness; *Nor* for the destruction *that* wasteth at noonday. ⁷ **A thousand shall fall at thy side, And ten thousand at thy right hand; *But* it shall not come nigh thee.** ⁸ **Only with thine eyes shalt thou behold *And* see the reward of the wicked.** ⁹ Because thou hast made the Lord, *which is* my refuge, *Even* the most High, thy habitation; ¹⁰ **There shall no evil befall thee, Neither shall *any* plague come nigh thy dwelling.** ¹¹ **For he shall give his angels charge over thee, To keep thee in all thy ways.**

³⁰⁶ Brenton’s *Septuagint*, Ex 12:13.

In the end, all who choose the service of anyone besides God shall be destroyed by that power. Just as Israel was ultimately destroyed by their spiritual enemy—the Romans—which they had chosen instead of Christ, just as the Egyptians were destroyed by their spiritual enemy—Satan—which they had chosen instead of Christ, so too shall the whole world, in the end, be destroyed by their spiritual enemy which they have chosen to obey instead of Christ. As such, Christ is ultimately compelled to give up all to the leader they choose, and it will be revealed that the one whom they worshipped as a healer and protector, is nothing of the kind.

Whatever the physical “causes” of the plagues, the spiritual cause and lesson remain: when we reject God and His ways, He is forced to “give us up” to reap what we have sown. Some see the involvement of naturalistic explanations in these plagues as an attack on the supernatural work of God, but this need not be, for the God of Israel is the Creator. The idea that God could have destroyed the Egyptians by allowing them to reap the natural results of what they had sown into the earth cannot diminish the message for us today—the only place of safety and life is with Christ, the Tree of Life. The only reason we are not currently suffering from the implosion of all nature is because the life-giving and upholding Spirit of God is still on the earth. However, if the result of rejecting God’s Spirit locally in *Egypt* brought on the plagues that desolated their nation, what would happen if *the whole world* rejected God’s Spirit?

10.3 THE LAST PLAGUES— CONSEQUENCES OF MANKIND’S SIN

Revelation 14:9–10 (KJV) ⁹ And *the* third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, If any *man* worship the beast and his image, and receive *his* mark in his forehead, or in his hand, ¹⁰ the same shall drink of **the wine of the wrath of God**, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation...

Revelation 16:1 (KJV) And I heard a great voice out of the temple saying to the seven angels, Go your ways, and pour out **the vials of the wrath of God** upon the earth.

Many assume that the last plagues are the breaking point for God, a time when He finally will let loose all His pent-up anger and wrath. This, however, is not the case for several reasons. Firstly, is God the type of Person who would punish those who don’t want to be in a relationship with Him? In the realm of relationships,

this is called abuse, and in the realm of politics, this is called a dictatorship. According to the testimony of Jesus concerning God's justice, God is a supporter of religious liberty; He gives everyone the freedom to choose which side they prefer, and He will not externally interfere or coerce the voters with threats.

Secondly, if we look at the cycles of 7 which precede the 7 Plagues (7 Seals and 7 Trumpets), we will see Satanic agencies active in each while God is the passive agent which restrains and loosens the forces of darkness.

THE 7 SEALS & THE DEMONIC ELEMENT

In the 7 Seals, we see the four horsemen bearing the colors of White, Red, Green, and Black. The first horseman is described as having "a bow; and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and to conquer." Revelation 6:2 (KJV). I used to think this was a reference to Jesus since white typically represents purity and Jesus is also pictured on a white horse in Revelation 19. There, however, he is pictured as having a sword, not a bow;³⁰⁷ many diadems (*diadēma*), not a single crown (*stēphanōs*). Likewise, in the context of the Seals, the Lamb is already described as the winner (Rev. 5:5), but this horseman is still trying to win. Is it possible that this figure on a white horse is symbolic of Satan and his masquerading messiahs who disguise themselves as angels of light (2 Cor. 11:14-15)? This seems to be the case, for Christ, in His Olivet Discourse, outlined the first four horsemen of **[1] counterfeit Messiahs** (Rev. 6:2), **[2] war** (Rev. 6:4), **[3] famine** (Rev. 6:5-6), and **[4] death** (Rev. 6:8):

Matthew 24:4-9 ⁴Jesus told them, "Don't let anyone mislead you, ⁵ for **[1] many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Messiah.' They will deceive many.** ⁶ And you will hear of **[2] wars** and threats of wars... There will be **[3] famines** and earthquakes in many parts of the world. ⁸ But all this is only the first of the birth pains, with more to come. ⁹ "Then you will be arrested, persecuted, and **[4] killed**. You will be hated all over the world because you are my followers.

³⁰⁷ "... it may be relevant to observe that throughout the Old Testament there is some tendency to put the bow and arrow in relation to the *enemies* of Israel. The most significant passage in this regard is Ezekiel 38-39, the account of Gog and his armies. Much later in the book, John will cite Gog by name..." Vernard Eller, *The Most Revealing Book of the Bible: Making Sense Out of Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974), p. 86.

God is not *causing* these tragedies, but He is *permitting* them. This is explicitly pointed out in the second Seal:

Revelation 6:4 (RSV) And out came another horse, bright red; **its rider was permitted** [*didōmi*] **to take peace from the earth**, so that men should slay one another; and **he was given** [*permitted, didōmi*] **a great sword.**

Indeed, John often used the word for “permitted” to describe “the divine permission granted to evil powers to carry out their nefarious work—the denizens of the abyss (ix. 1, 3, 5), the monster (xiii. 5, 7), and the false prophet (xiii. 14, 15)... It follows that **all four riders represent evils which are not directly caused by the will of God, but only tolerated by his permission...**”³⁰⁸ Indeed, “God does not will the action to happen, but **God wills the other side to show its colors.** Disclosure is a matter of necessity (1:1; 4:1; 11:5; 17:10; 20:3; 22:6).”³⁰⁹

THE 7 TRUMPETS & THE DEMONIC ELEMENT

Satanic “DNA” is found throughout the Trumpet sequence, likewise incriminating Satan, not God, as the perpetrator of these sufferings. The 5th Trumpet makes this fact painfully clear:

Revelation 8:13–9:1 (KJV) ^{8:13} And I beheld, and heard an angel flying through the midst of heaven, saying with a loud voice, Woe, woe, **woe, to the inhabitants of the earth** by reason of the other voices of the trumpet of the three angels, which are yet to sound. ^{9:1} And the fifth angel sounded, and I saw **a star fall from heaven unto the earth:** and to him was given [*permitted, didōmi*] the key of the bottomless pit.

Here is a clear reference to Satan’s fall to earth and the heavenly sympathy for those who dwell where the Serpent has landed:

³⁰⁸ G.B. Caird, *The Revelation of St. John* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1993), p. 81, <http://tinyurl.com/28kydxtc>. Another reason to believe these horsemen represent Satanic rather than divine action is the fact that the martyrs under the altar symbolized in the fifth seal cry out *because of lack of divine action*. If the first four seals represent God’s work of vengeance against the wicked, why do those in the fifth seal ask why He has yet to avenge their blood (Rev. 6:10)?

³⁰⁹ Sigve K. Tonstad, *Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2019), p. 125.

Revelation 12:9, 12 (KJV) ⁹ And **the great dragon was cast out**, *that* old serpent, called the devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: **he was cast out into the earth**, and his angels were cast *out* with him... ¹² Therefore rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them. **Woe to the inhabitants of the earth** and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath *but* a short time.

This fallen star which opens the bottomless pit and leads an army of demonic spirits is clearly the active cause of this Trumpet's "plague" (Rev. 9:20). If we needed even more evidence of the satanic cause of the destructive Trumpets, we learn that the fallen star which leads this army is, as we have seen, the Destroyer (Rev. 9:11; John 10:10).

	IS. 14:12-20	REV. 9	REV. 12
SUBJECT	STAR	STAR	SATAN
ORIGIN	HEAVEN	HEAVEN	HEAVEN
ACTION	DESCENT	DESCENT	DESCENT
DESCENT TO	EARTH/PIT	EARTH/PIT	EARTH
CHARACTERISTIC	DESTROYER	DESTROYER	PERSECUTOR

The 6th Trumpet likewise shows the role of evil angels in the end, for we read that the angel which blew the sixth trumpet was commanded to "¹⁴ **Release the four angels who are bound** at the great Euphrates River.' ¹⁵ **Then the four angels... were turned loose** to kill one-third of all the people on earth... ¹⁹ Their power was in their mouths and in their tails. For **their tails had heads like snakes**, with the power to injure people." Revelation 9:14-15, 19. Just as Satan, the ultimate counterfeit Christ, was *permitted* to take peace from the earth (Rev. 6:4), these serpentine angels that been previously restrained will eventually be *turned loose* and allowed to manifest Satan's Kingdom of darkness.

This "loosing" shows us how angels of God "cause" destruction at the command of God:

Revelation 7:1-3 ¹ Then I saw **four angels** standing at the four corners of the earth, **holding back the four winds** so they did not blow on the earth or the sea, or even on any tree. ² And I saw another angel coming up from the east, carrying the seal of the living God. And he shouted to those four angels, who had been given power to harm land and sea, ³ "Wait! **Don't harm**

the land or the sea or the trees until we have placed the seal of God on the foreheads of his servants.”

How do these angels of God “hurt” the earth, sea, and trees? By *releasing* the winds—the forces of destruction—when God commands them to. And what happens after chapter 7, when God’s people are sealed? After this we see destruction coming upon the earth, sea, and trees (Rev. 8:7-11). However, even at this point God still restrains the power of Satan from harming any of His children who trust in Christ, for He only allows the fallen angel and his minions dominion over those who have sided with him—“only the people who did not have the Seal of God on their foreheads.” Revelation 9:4.

It is also worth pointing out that these trumpets caused by demonic activity are described as *plagues* (Rev. 9:20). This brings up the question: if Satan and his henchmen are responsible for the death, destruction, and plagues of the 7 Seals and the 7 Trumpets, who will be responsible for the subsequent plagues?

THE 7 LAST PLAGUES—GOD’S UNMIXED WRATH

The Last Plagues are rightly described as the wrath of God. The only problem is the modern, Roman interpretation of wrath. If we view God like the ruler of Rome, then His wrath is manifested by obliterating all dissenters. But according to the testimony of Jesus, His wrath and judgments are manifested when He allows the wicked to reap what they sow and suffer the self-destructive consequences of their sins that ricochet back on them—all for the purpose of revelation. This definition of wrath has many examples throughout Scripture, including Revelation.

Ezekiel 22:31 (KJV) Therefore have I poured out mine indignation upon them; **I have consumed them with the fire of my wrath: their own way have I recompensed upon their heads**, saith the Lord God. (cf. Rom. 1:18–19; 24–27; Deut. 31:16–17; Ps. 89:46; 106:40–42; Is. 54:7–8).

Revelation 13:10 (KJV) **He that leadeth into captivity shall go into captivity: he that killeth with the sword must be killed with the sword...**

Revelation 16:6 **Since they shed the blood of your holy people and your prophets, you have given them blood to drink. It is their just reward.** (cf. Rev. 11:18; 18:6; 22:18-19)³¹⁰

Just as the first plagues progressed as God gradually withdrew His hand of protection, so too shall the angels of God which restrain the destructive forces of Satan, man, and nature, let loose their hold on these things and give the wicked up to the natural result of separating themselves from the Source of protection and life. This is why the plagues that are poured out are described as the **“bowl filled with the wrath of God.”** Revelation 15:7. God will, in His “wrath,” give over those who reject Him to reap the consequences of the path they have chosen, just as He allowed the Egyptians to reap destruction and be vomited from the earth which they defiled and corrupted by their sinful, destructive lifestyle.

With this understanding, not only are the last plagues manifestations of the wrath of God, but the previous Seals and Trumpets were likewise manifestations of His wrath. The only difference is that in the last plagues His wrath is *unmixed with mercy* while in the previous Seals and Trumpets His wrath was *mixed with mercy*—God was still limiting how far the powers of darkness could go (Rev. 6:6; 7:1; 9:4), but in the end He will give them free reign.

“In the initial **seal judgments**, for example, **the sea is completely protected** from the destructive agent (Rev. 7:3). In the **trumpet judgments**, less protection is given, and the agent is allowed to turn **a third of the sea into blood, killing a third of its life** (Rev. 8:8-9). In the **bowl judgments**, however, ‘the elements of restraint and limitation... have all disappeared.’ At this point, God responds to people’s obstinate refusal to repent by letting destructive cosmic forces have their way, with the result that **‘every living thing in the sea died’** (Rev. 16:3, italics added).”³¹¹

³¹⁰ Some may be tempted to read these passages through the Old Testament lens of the *lex talionis*, an eye for an eye, principle (law of retaliation). However, Jesus repudiated this principle and replaced it with the principle of not responding to violence with violence (Matt. 5:39-45). These passages aren’t saying that if you hurt someone, God will hurt you; instead, they are saying that harming someone will naturally lead to you being hurt (a principle we have seen play out from Babylon until the end of time).

³¹¹ Boyd, *Crucifixion of The Warrior God*, vol. 1, p. 609-610.

PROGRESSION OF GOD'S END-TIME "WRATH"		
SEALS 1/4 Destroyed → <i>Most Restraint of Satan</i> (Rev. 6:8)	TRUMPETS 1/3 Destroyed → <i>Less Restraint of Satan</i> (Rev. 8:7-8)	BOWLS ALL Destroyed <i>No Restraint of Satan</i> (Rev. 16:3)

The plagues are a punishment from God, but He is punishing by what He permits—and He permits these things for the Satanic side of the controversy to fully unmask itself before the onlooking universe.

As God is rejected by the world, He is forced to remove His upholding hand from earth. Then the last plagues shall be poured out on the earth, causing it to revert back to its original state before creation, when it was “**formless [H8414] and empty [H922], and darkness covered the deep waters...**” Genesis 1:2.³¹² The physical darkness that existed before creation testified of the spiritual darkness caused by Satan’s lies at the beginning of the cosmic controversy. In like manner, once the whole world has fully accepted Satan’s lies and implemented his form of government, the earth will likewise revert to complete desolation as the curse “consumes the earth” (Is. 24:6).

Jeremiah 4:22–23, 26 ²²“**My people are foolish and do not know me,**” says the Lord. “They are stupid children who have no understanding. **They are clever enough at doing wrong, but they have no idea how to do right!**” ²³ **I looked at the earth, and it was empty [H922] and formless [H8414]. I looked at the heavens, and there was no light...** ²⁶ I looked, and the fertile fields had become a **wilderness.**³¹³

³¹² According to Stephen N. Haskell, the seven last plagues represent the time when “God’s overruling Spirit is withdrawn from one element after another, until utter destruction results.” Stephen N. Haskell, *The Story of the Seer of Patmos* (South Lancaster, MA: South Lancaster Printing Company, 1905), p. 274.

³¹³ According to Isaiah, the fallen angel, Lucifer, is responsible for making “the world as a wilderness.” Isaiah 14:17 (KJV).

THE 7 PLAGUES & THE DEMONIC ELEMENT

When the sequence of the Trumpets and Plagues are compared, the similarities are striking.

	TRUMPETS	PLAGUES
1 ST	EARTH	EARTH
2 ND	SEA TURNS TO BLOOD	SEA TURNS TO BLOOD
3 RD	RIVERS & FOUNTAINS	RIVERS & FOUNTAINS
4 TH	SUN	SUN
5 TH	DARKNESS & TORTURE	DARKNESS & AGONY
6 TH	EUPHRATES & WAR	EUPHRATES & WAR
7 TH	LOUD VOICE IN HEAVEN	LOUD VOICE IN HEAVEN

If the 7 Seals and Trumpets were caused by Satan and his agents, should we expect the last plagues to be any different? Let's look at the plagues and see if we can glean any insight.

Throughout most of Revelation the passive (instead of active) voice is used without an agent, thus leaving us to wonder who is the cause of what. In the 1st Plague, for example, we see that the wicked are inflicted with “**horrible, malignant sores**” (Rev. 16:2). This verse is in the passive voice, leaving us to speculate as to who caused these sores. However, this is reminiscent of Job's afflictions, where we find an example of the *active voice*: “**Satan struck Job with terrible boils**” (Job 2:7). “Struck” points us to the active agent: Satan. Could this first plague be the result of Satanic influences on mankind? Those who worship the beast don't think so—they believe God is the active cause of their suffering, thus “**they slandered the God of Heaven**” (LSV) *as though God was afflicting them* with “their pains and sores” Revelation 16:11.

In the 2nd Trumpet we saw that 1/3rd of the sea was turned to blood when God removed His protecting hand in part (Rev. 8:8-9), but in the 2nd Plague we see what happens when God fully removes the restraint placed upon the forces of destruction—all the sea and everything in it dies (Rev. 16:3).

Waters turning “to blood” is not all that unique, whether it be from algae blooms, the dumping of toxic chemicals and dyes, or some other agency. What is unique, however, is that essentially all the waters appeared as blood. The waters turning to blood today are usually the work of selfish man corrupting the earth under the influence of the Prince of selfishness. Could the time come when God will allow

mankind to destroy one of our main sources of life? This doesn't sound like a stretch to the ecologically minded reader, as, in a 2016 study, Boris Worm and colleagues concluded that "the societal consequences of an ongoing erosion of [ocean] diversity [due to overfishing] that appears to be accelerating on a global scale... is of serious concern because it projects *the global collapse of all taxa [species] currently fished by the mid-21st century.*"³¹⁴ As Paulien notes:

"Death and destruction are at work in the world on a large scale. This leads me to believe that **the plagues are not the direct working of God. They are the outworking of Satan's way of running things. He is like the thief who comes to steal and to kill and to destroy. God is the source of abundant life instead** (John 10:10). To the degree that this is an ecological disaster, the author of Revelation wants us to understand that **there is a demonic incitement behind the deterioration of the environment. The decline of the environment is the way things go when Satan is in charge.**"³¹⁵

The 3rd Plague is poured out on "**the rivers and springs, and they became blood.**" Revelation 16:4. The location of this plague is identical to the 3rd Trumpet's location, which likewise fell on "**the rivers and on the springs of water.**" Revelation 8:10. Unlike this Plague, the Trumpet informs us that the rivers and springs were corrupted when the star that fell from heaven (Satan) "fell on one-third of the rivers and on the springs of water." Is the purpose of the 3rd Plague for God to show that

³¹⁴ Boris Worm, Edward B. Barbier, Nicola Beaumont, *et. al.* "Impacts of Biodiversity Loss on Ocean Ecosystem Services," *Science*, vol. 314, no. 5800 (November 2016), p. 790, <https://tinyurl.com/59r5cwfp>. Worm likewise observed that "exploitation has depleted large predatory fish communities worldwide by at least 90% over the past 50–100 years." Ransom A. Myers and Boris Worm, "Extinction, survival or recovery of large predatory fishes," *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B*, vol. 360, is. 1453 (January 2005), p. 13-20, <https://tinyurl.com/6yy2aj4d>; cf. Boris Worm, "Averting a Global Fisheries Disaster," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, vol. 113, is. 18 (2016), p. 4895-4897. Aside from overfishing, scientists say that "With continued high emissions, by 2100, most species (87%) are projected to experience a high risk of adverse climate impacts..." Daniel G. Boyce, Derek P. Tittensor, Cristina Garila, *et. al.* "A Climate Risk Index for Marine Life," *Nature Climate Change*, vol. 12 (June 2022), p. 854-862, <https://tinyurl.com/2yc9m47z>. Though I don't yet understand the nuances of global warming, I do see that man is having a tremendously negative impact on our environment and is quickly destroying it. Overfishing, the Great Pacific Garbage Patch, mass coral bleaching, oil spills, noise pollution, PFAS (forever chemicals), and the staggering decline of biodiversity is evidence enough of this fact.

³¹⁵ Jon Paulien, *Facebook Commentary on Revelation Chapter 16*, p. 4-5, <https://tinyurl.com/PaulienRev16>.

He is a bigger destroyer than Satan by destroying all of the waters when Satan only destroyed a third? Or is the 3rd Plague the result of God allowing Satan to run the show to further expose Satan's destructive character and kingdom?³¹⁶

The pouring out of the bowl of God's wrath in the 4th Plague results in men being **scorched with fire** and heat (Rev. 16:8-9). The cause of this plague is not definitely stated, but the language is reminiscent of nuclear war or global warming. If the sinful and greedy actions of man are, in fact, directly destroying the earth, it makes sense that Revelation says God will “destroy **those who destroy the earth**” (Rev. 11:18). Since God is often described as doing what He allows, it seems that all God has to do to destroy the earth is to let us destroy it ourselves. Notwithstanding, we see that those affected by this plague again “**slandered the Name of God**” (Rev. 16:9 LSV), evidently viewing Him as the cause of their destruction instead of their own actions under the influence of Satan. Those who suffer these plagues, like many today, “ruin themselves by their own stupid actions and then blame the LORD.” Proverbs 19:3 (GNT).

After experiencing this plague, they “repented not to give him glory” or, “speak well of God.”³¹⁷ If they are right that God smites those who reject Him with fire, is it a wonder that they don't speak well of God? Jesus' disciples once asked Him if He wanted them to “**command fire to come down from heaven**, and consume” the people who rejected Him, but He “turned, and rebuked them, and said, **Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of**. For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save *them*.” Luke 9:54-56 (KJV). I wonder if the people scorched with fire in this plague would react differently if they knew this story.

The 5th Plague is poured out on “**the seat of the beast**; and his kingdom was full of **darkness...**” Revelation 16:10 (KJV). Is this darkness from “**the Father of lights**” (Jam. 1:17 KJV), in whom “is no darkness... at all” (1 John 1:5)? Or is it the result of **the Prince of darkness** (John 14:30; Eph. 6:12) and his agents? In

³¹⁶ After this plague we hear the voice of “the angel who had authority over all water.” Revelation 16:5. This is interesting because the apocryphal Book of Enoch also describes angels, in the context of the flood, that “were over the powers of the waters.” According to the Book of Enoch, the flood occurred because God commanded these angels to “**let loose all the powers of the waters** which are beneath in the earth **in order to bring judgement** and destruction on all who [abide and] dwell on the earth.” Enoch 66:1. This is in harmony with the Scriptural account of the flood that says man had already corrupted the earth by his sinful lifestyle (Gen. 6:11-13; Is. 24:3-6), and the only thing holding everything together was the Spirit of Christ (Gen. 6:3; Col. 1:17). When these told God to “Depart from us,” “what can the Almighty do for them” (Job 22:15-17 KJV) except leave them to their own devices (Is. 54:7-9) and command the angels that restrained disaster (Rev. 7:1) to leave them alone (Hos. 4:17)? Could some of the plagues operate in a similar fashion?

³¹⁷ Tonstad, *Revelation*, p. 228.

Revelation 17:8, we see the beast described as coming “out of the bottomless pit,” the Abyss. Could this Abyss be the equivalent of the “throne of the beast”? This would be significant since the fallen angel—the Destroyer—opens the Abyss in the 5th Trumpet, releasing smoke that brings darkness (Rev. 9:1-2). In this case the Abyss—the throne of the beast—would be the source of darkness! So when darkness is poured out on the Papacy in the 5th Plague, the source of this darkness is her own throne!

If the evidence we’ve look at so far doesn’t convince us of the satanic activity in the plagues, the 6th Plague leaves little room for us to doubt this reality:

Revelation 16:12–16 (RSV) ¹²The sixth angel poured his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up, to prepare the way for the kings from the east. ¹³ And I saw, issuing from the mouth of the dragon and from the mouth of the beast and from the mouth of the false prophet, three foul spirits like frogs; ¹⁴ for they are **demonic spirits** [active subject], **performing signs, who go abroad to the kings of the whole world, to assemble** [active verb] **them for battle on the great day of God the Almighty.** ¹⁵ (“Lo, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is he who is awake, keeping his garments that he may not go naked and be seen exposed!”) ¹⁶ And **they assembled them** at the place which is called in Hebrew Armageddon.

In this passage we see that “they [active subject] assembled [active verb] them”—this clearly identifies the active agent of the 6th Plague. “They” are clearly the “demonic spirits,” and the group which they assembled are “the kings of the whole world.” Thus, we can see throughout the Seals, Trumpets, and Plagues that the demonic element is the *cause* of the world’s sufferings, not God.

As it was in the beginning, so shall it be in the end. The same way the first plagues unfolded will be the same way the last plagues shall be poured out. When the world, like Egypt, rejects the Tree of Life in the Sabbath through legislation and persecution, the curse of sin shall devour the earth (Is. 24:6), and it will seek to vomit out its inhabitants (Lev. 18:25). When all have made their decision concerning which tree they want to partake of, Christ will—in His “wrath”—command the guardian angels of the wicked to “let them alone,” since “They are joined to their idols.” Hosea 4:17 (KJV). Once the protection of God is removed, the Destroyer will have complete rule over the human family, and “there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation *even* to that same time,” but God’s people “shall be delivered, every one that *shall* be found written in the book.” Daniel 12:1 (KJV).

LOCATION	EVENT	RESULT
EGYPT	SABBATH LAWS	LOCAL: FIRST PLAGUES
ISRAEL	SABBATH LAWS	LOCAL: "NATURAL DISASTERS," SWORD, FAMINE, PLAGUE
EUROPE	SABBATH LAWS	LOCAL: SWORD, FAMINE, PLAGUE
WORLDWIDE	SABBATH LAWS	UNIVERSAL: LAST PLAGUES

10.4 FINAL EVENTS & THE CONTROVERSY FINISHED

5TH PLAGUE:

DARKNESS UPON THE SEAT OF THE BEAST

There seems to be a shift here between the first four and last three plagues, just as there was in the Seal and the Trumpet sequences. The Seals have *four* horsemen followed by *three* other seals. The first *four* Trumpets are followed by the *three* "woes." In the plagues we also see a shift—the first *four* seem literal³¹⁸ while the last *three* seem spiritual.

As we have seen, the 5th Plague is poured out on "the seat of the beast; and his kingdom was full of darkness; and they gnawed their tongues for **pain**..." Revelation 16:10 (KJV). This seems to be symbolic because darkness doesn't cause physical

³¹⁸ "On the one hand, the book of Revelation normally prefers a figurative reading. The very first verse of the book tells us that the vision upon which Revelation is based was 'signified.' God placed it in symbolic language to express the deeper meaning of His purposes for the end of human history. So the seals and trumpets (Rev. 6-9) should probably be read in a symbolic way because they contain language that points to a figurative approach (Rev. 8:8; 9:7, 17)..."

"But when reading these texts [about the 7 plagues] in the Greek, you get the impression that something more direct and literal is in view. If a symbolic reading does not bring convincing clarity to the meaning of the text and a literal reading does, the literal reading can be preferred, but this would be the exception in Revelation, not the rule." Jon Paulien, *Armageddon at the Door: Is Your Armor On?*, (Hagerstown, MD: Autumn House Publishing, 2008), p. 92.

pain.³¹⁹ The last two plagues likewise describe the spiritual Battle of Armageddon³²⁰ and fall of spiritual Babylon—all in highly symbolic language.

Darkness is often symbolic for coming catastrophes and omens of destruction in the Old Testament (Is. 59:9-10; Ezek. 30:18; 32:7-8; Joel 2:2). Since this darkness is poured out on the throne of the beast (Rev. 16:10)—the source of his authority—this plague could be pointing to the time when the authority of the Papacy and her spiritual allies is brought into question and challenged by some catastrophe (probably the previous four plagues). This questioning of the authority of Rome (darkness on its seat) would be an omen of its coming destruction.³²¹ And since this “darkness” comes from the throne of the beast itself, the catastrophe that challenges Rome’s authority is self-inflicted. The previous four plagues were the result of Satan’s methods being fully embraced by humanity, and they were advocated by the Roman Church. But instead of alleviating these pains, Rome’s advice only makes things worse! Thus the Papacy is exposed as the deceiver she is, and her “garment of light” (2 Cor. 11:14-15) is stripped away.

6TH PLAGUE: EUPHRATES DRIES UP

The realization of the people concerning the lies of spiritual Babylon is also symbolized by the 6th Plague, the *drying up of the Euphrates* (Rev. 16:12). Just as literal Babylon sat upon the Euphrates River, so does the harlot with the name “Babylon the Great” sit upon “many waters” (Rev. 17:1; Jer. 51:13), which represent “masses

³¹⁹ The pain, however, may be from the sores instead of the darkness (Rev. 16:11). Regardless, this darkness still seems to be mainly symbolic, for how does literal darkness fall upon the beast’s kingdom when his kingdom is chiefly ideological, not geographical?

³²⁰ Armageddon begins with the letter alpha, but has a breathing mark that adds an “h” sound to it, making it Har-Magedon. “Har” means mountain and “mageddon” is probably a reference to the city of “Megiddo” in northern Israel. There is no mountain named Megiddo, but *Mount Carmel* does overlook Megiddo. If this is what John had in mind, then Har-Magedon suggests an end-time replay of the showdown between the worshippers of God and Baal. This interpretation is supported by a number of thematic elements found in Revelation (Rev. 13:13) and makes the Battle of Armageddon seem to be primarily a spiritual battle (2 Cor. 10:3-5, Eph 6:10-17), as this is what the controversy between Christ and Satan is all about—it is a war for the heart and mind. For more information, see “Armageddon,” *Anchor Bible Commentary* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1992), vol. 1, p. 394-395, <https://tinyurl.com/44e95rfm> and Paulien, *Armageddon at the Door*.

³²¹ Though this plague seems to be symbolic, it could be a combination of physical and spiritual where the physical darkness would be symbolic of the spiritual darkness.

of people” (Rev. 17:15).³²² Historically, the Euphrates River supplied “that great city Babylon” (Rev. 18:10; 17:18) with water, and therefore life. Ancient Babylon was conquered by Cyrus, a King from the East (Rev. 16:12), who is said to have dried up the Euphrates by diverting its flow—thus he was able to enter and conquer Babylon.³²³

Since the Euphrates also acted as the middle ground between Israel and her enemies, this river symbolizes those in between the people of God and the religious authorities—the secular civil and political powers of the earth. Thus, the drying up of the Euphrates in the 6th Plague symbolizes the point in time when the masses—which had previously supported the apostate churches—stop supporting Babylon, the end-time coalition of religious authorities.

7TH PLAGUE: THE FALL OF BABYLON & THE 2ND COMING OF CHRIST

After the first four plagues, the authority of the Church-State system comes into question (5th Plague). This leads the secular and civil authorities to stop supporting this worldwide theocratic system (6th Plague). It is at this point the 7th Plague is poured out “**into the air**” (Rev. 16:17)—the universal dominion of **the Prince of the power of the air** (Eph. 2:2). Just as the plague poured out on the seat of the beast points to the time when the character of the kingdom of the beast is exposed, so does this final plague signal the fact that Satan’s Kingdom has been utterly and completely exposed. Thus we hear “a mighty shout came from the throne in the Temple, saying, ‘It is finished!’”—*all has been revealed*.

After God declares this truth, there is “a great earthquake” that causes “The great city of Babylon split into three sections...” Revelation 16:18-19. Spiritual Babylon

³²² In Revelation, John sometimes *hears* a description of something, and then *sees* something else—thus two symbols are juxtaposed and equated. John *hears* of the Lion of the Tribe of Judah (5:5), then he *sees* the slain Lamb (5:6). He *hears* of the 144,000 (7:4), then he *sees* an innumerable multitude (7:9). He *hears* of the Lamb’s wife (21:9), then *sees* the New Jerusalem (21:10), which is symbolic of God’s people (21:12, 14, 16). The Lion is the Lamb, the 144,000 is symbolic of all of the redeemed, the Bride of Christ is His Church. In Revelation 17 John likewise *hears* an angel say that the whore sits on many waters (17:1), and then he *sees* this woman sitting atop the beast with 10 horns (17:3). Both the waters (Euphrates River) and the 10 horns are symbolic of the masses of the world in the end. Thus the drying up of the Euphrates is the buildup to the time when the 10 horns not only stop supporting Babylon the Great, but they turn on and destroy her.

³²³ Herodotus, *The Histories*, trans. A.D. Godley, bk. 1, ch. 191.

had unified the world into a confederacy against God (like at the Tower of Babel), but now it falls completely apart at the shattering revelation of the truth, and the only thing unmoved by this earthquake is the Kingdom of God.

Hebrews 12:26-28 ²⁶**When God spoke** from Mount Sinai **his voice shook the earth**, but now he makes another promise: “Once again I will shake not only the earth but the heavens also.” ²⁷This means that **all of creation will be shaken and removed, so that only unshakable things will remain.** ²⁸Since we are receiving a **Kingdom that is unshakable**, let us be thankful and please God by worshiping him with holy fear and awe.

Thus, the earthquake in the 7th Plague seems to be predominantly spiritual, since a physical earthquake does little to ideological and religious systems (though it wouldn't be a surprise if this spiritual shaking may be accompanied by a physical shaking).³²⁴

But what event specifically “shakes” the whole world and leads to the fall of Babylon? During the 7th Plague we read that “every island disappeared, and all the mountains were leveled.” Revelation 16:20. This is a direct parallel to the 6th Seal,

³²⁴ In light of the symbolic emphasis of the last three plagues, the “terrible **hailstorm**” with “hailstones weighing as much as seventy-five pounds” in the 7th Plague (Rev. 16:21) seems to most likely be symbolic as well. In support of this are the striking thematic parallels to Psalm 18. Both the 7th Plague and Psalm 18 mentions hail (Rev. 16:21; Ps. 18:12-13) in connection to [1] a voice from the temple (Rev. 16:17; Ps. 18:13), [2] thunder (Rev. 16:18; Ps. 18:13), [3] lighting (Rev. 16:18; Ps. 18:14), [4] an earthquake (Rev. 16:18; Ps. 18:7), [5] mountains being moved (Rev. 16:20; Ps. 18:7), and [6] God's wrath (Rev. 16:1, 19; Ps. 18:7). Psalm 18 also references a drying up of waters (Ps. 18:15), which is reminiscent of the drying up of the Euphrates (Rev. 16:12). Psalm 18 is all about how God will deliver His people out of the hands of the wicked in a **time of trouble**, so the symbolism of the hail and the other elements of the 7th Plague seems to denote the same.

Job also mentions “the storehouses of hail” that God had been *restraining*, or holding back, until “**the time of trouble**, for the day of battle and war.” Job 38:22-23. This is in the context of God's response to Job's questions about why bad things happen. God replies by pointing out the infinite complexity of the created order (Job 38-39) and how He is continually holding back the forces of destruction, such as the waters (Job 38:8-11), or *yam* (an Ancient Near Eastern name for the anti-creational sea-monster which, in the Biblical narrative, is symbolic for Satan), and the Leviathan and Behemoth (Job 40, 41) (the mythical creatures which Revelation 13's two beasts are likely based on). Like these cosmic forces, God had been holding back this “hail” until the time of trouble in the end.

Tonstad, on the other hand, suggests that this hail could be an instance of phenomenal language. “It is modest, however, if we imagine that the objects falling from heaven in the twenty-first century are not ‘large hailstones’ but bunker-busting **bombs**...” Tonstad, *Revelation*, p. 233. This theory lines up with the fact that the civil powers will soon turn against Babylon and burn her with *fire*, as we will see.

when “all of the mountains and islands were moved from their places.” Revelation 6:14. This is significant, as the 6th and 7th Seals describe the Second Coming of Christ (Rev. 6:14-17; 8:1)! Thus in the 7th Plague we hear of “voices, and thunders, and lightnings” (Rev. 16:18)—all of which come from the throne of God (Rev. 4:5; 8:5; 11:19).

JUDGMENT OF THE GREAT WHORE

The view of Christ coming in the distance is the earth-shaking revelation (earthquake) that causes the fall of Babylon (7th Plague). At this point the masses of humanity not only stop supporting spiritual Babylon (symbolized by the drying up of the Euphrates in the 6th Plague), but when they realize they have been deceived and manipulated by the popular churches concerning God’s character and laws, the enmity that had been in their hearts towards Christ shall be redirected towards the religious authorities—they will actively help execute judgment against it.

This has been the case throughout all human history. Those who used the power of the State to enforce religious laws were typically destroyed by the very power which they manipulated. Darius (the State) was deceived into enforcing a religious decree, and he subsequently threw his deceivers into the lion’s den which they had prepared for Daniel. Haman manipulated Xerxes (the State) to create religious laws, and in the end Xerxes had him hung on the gallows he had prepared for Mordecai. The Sanhedrin convinced Rome (the State) to enforce their arbitrary laws by crucifying Jesus, and Rome eventually turned on and executed them. The Roman Church convinced Clovis, King of the Franks (the State), to use their power to persecute God’s people, and after 1,260 years she received her “deadly wound” from the same French power. As it has been, so shall it be.

After all the world realizes they have been manipulated by a corrupt form of Christianity, they will use the sword of the State to destroy her. This is *how* the corrupt Church will be “judged” and “punished” by God:

Revelation 17:1, 16 (ISV) ¹ Then one of the seven angels who held the seven bowls came to me and told me, “**Come, and I will show you how the notorious prostitute... will be judged...**” ¹⁶ **The ten horns and the beast you saw will hate the prostitute. They will leave her abandoned and naked. They will eat her flesh and burn her up with fire.** (cf. Lev. 1:9)

No longer will they support the churches like they used to, but they will violently destroy them. Just as Adam (the State) threw the woman (the Church) under the bus for his fall (Gen. 3:12), the deceived masses will throw those who deceived them (the corrupt churches—the Beast and False Prophet, Rev. 16:13-14) into the lake of fire (Rev. 19:20; 17:16)³²⁵—not the fire of God’s love, but the fire of their indignation. This is God’s judgment against the “whore” (Rev. 17:1, 16): as she has judged, so will she be judged (Matt. 7:2)—as she has rendered, so shall it be rendered to her (Rev. 18:6; Deut. 19:16-19).

Obadiah 15 For the day of the Lord is near upon all the nations. **As you have done, it shall be done to you, your deeds shall return on your own head.**

As the masses destroy the collapsing Babylonian system, civilization likewise collapses into anarchy and chaos (Rev. 16:19).

PROGRESSION OF LAST 3 PLAGUES		
5TH PLAGUE Masses Question Babylon’s Authority → (Rev. 16:10)	6TH PLAGUE Masses Stop Supporting Babylon → (Rev. 16:12)	7TH PLAGUE Masses Destroy Babylon (Rev. 16:19; 17:16)

³²⁵ The fact that the “**lake of fire**” is metaphorical (for complete annihilation) should be obvious from the fact that the beast and the false prophet represent “impersonal, institutional systems of persecuting governments and false religions [that are] incapable of sentient pain.” Edward Fudge, *The Fire that Consumes: A Biblical and Historical Study of the Doctrine of Final Punishment* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011), p. 369 (cf. p. 246-247).

Later (Rev. 20:13-14) Scripture tells us that “death and the grave” (both non-sentient and abstract realities) “were thrown into the lake of fire” (v. 14). *How do you throw something intangible into a tangible fire?* This occurs when death and the grave will no longer participate in reality, for death itself shall cease to exist and never be resurrected. When anyone or anything is “thrown into the lake of fire,” this tells us that these things will no longer exist. Therefore, this event is explicitly called “**the second death**” (v. 14)—the death from which there is no resurrection. For more information on the lake of fire and finality of the fate of the wicked (as opposed to eternal conscious torment) please see Le Roy Edwin Froom, *The Conditionalist Faith of Our Fathers: The Conflict of the Ages Over the Nature and Destiny of Man*, 2 volumes (Washington D.C.: Review and Herald, 1959), vol. 1, ch. 21-22 (<https://tinyurl.com/3tzbs7x8>); Fudge, *The Fire that Consumes*, ch. 23 (<https://tinyurl.com/33kzpkf7>); Boyd, *Crucifixion of the Warrior God*, vol. 1, appendix 4 (<https://tinyurl.com/mtjem9vy>).

WRATH OF THE LAMB

In the darkest midnight of earth's history, the Light of life shall suddenly dawn, and "the Lord himself will come down from heaven with a commanding shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet call of God. First, the believers who have died will rise from their graves. Then, together with them, we who are still alive and remain on the earth will be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. Then we will be with the Lord forever." 1 Thessalonians 4:16–17 (cf. 1 Cor. 15:51–52; John 14:2–3; 17:24).

When Christ returns for His Bride, which is "holy and without fault" (Eph. 5:27), She shall experience the greatest joy of all, for She shall finally be with the One who is "altogether lovely," Her beloved and Her friend (Song 5:16 KJV). However, just as fire purifies gold, it simultaneously destroys impurities.

As Christ, the Groom, returns home from His long journey (Mark 13:34), and His face is visible, all will see Him whom we had cheated on (for all have sinned), and our past sins will instinctually rush to the forefront of our minds. When this happens, we will react one of two ways, depending on our view of our Husband.

Those who view God as "The God of compassion and mercy... slow to anger and filled with unfailing love and faithfulness," who is eager to "forgive iniquity, rebellion, and sin" (Ex. 34:6–7), One who knows them fully yet refuses to judge and condemn them (John 8:10–11; 12:47–48; Rom. 8:1), these will experience great joy and peace at His arrival, for they had been considering Him as He truly is (1 John 3:2). And because they understood His loving character, His goodness has led them to repentance (Rom. 2:4). Though they had been unfaithful to Him in the past, they have forsaken their illicit relationships and come back to the One who truly loves them unconditionally and knows what is best for them.

However, imagine if you believed that your Husband is "a harsh man" (Matt. 25:24, CSB) who will beat or kill you if you cross Him. Are you likely to come clean and ask for forgiveness? If so, the only reason why you would confess is out of a sense of self-preservation to appease His wrath. But if this is the motivation for repentance, there is no change of heart, and you will continue to keep falling back into illicit unions. As such, imagine being "caught in the act" of cheating on your Husband when He gets home. And not only that, but you believe your Husband is a killer! Wouldn't you, beholding Him whom you had pierced, say "to the mountains and the rocks, 'Fall on us and **hide us from the face of the one who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb.** For the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to survive?'" Revelation 6:16–17. Yes, when this occurs "there will be

deep mourning among all the peoples of the earth” (Matt. 24:30), “all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him” (Rev. 1:7 KJV).

This mental anguish will be the fruit of believing the lies of the Serpent and having a false view of God. When Adam and Eve ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they believed that God was the Source of life *and* death; thus, when He came to the Garden they sought to hide their faces from Him (Gen. 3:8), just as all the wicked will hide their faces from Christ in the end.

When Christ comes with an unveiled face, all will behold the glorious character of our God, and this will either cause extreme joy and bliss, or severe anguish and torment of soul. If righteous men experience mental vexation in the presence of wicked men (2 Pet. 2:8), how much greater will the torment be when the wicked are in the presence of Christ? The mental anguish the unrepentant sinner will feel shall be so severe that the fire of God’s love (Song 8:6; Prov. 25:21-22)³²⁶ shall eat them up and consume them (compare Hebrews 10:26–27 and John 2:17). Yes, when sinners beheld the glory of God in some degree, they experienced mental anguish in some form, often becoming “as dead men,” having great fear (see Matt. 28:2–5; Luke 5:8–10; John 18:6; Dan. 10:5–8; Is. 6:1–5; Ezek. 1:26–28; Rev. 1:17). Thus those who reject the Tree of life and receive the Mark of the Beast, “**shall be tormented with fire [love³²⁷] and brimstone³²⁸ in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb.**” Revelation 14:9–10 (KJV).³²⁹ God’s love is the

³²⁶ Since God’s law is also a transcript of His loving character, it is fitting that the law is likewise described as being as “fiery” (Ex. 20:1 + Deut. 32:2; Ezek. 28:14). Zechariah 5:1–4 also described the violators of God’s law, described as a flying scroll, as being consumed by their sins.

³²⁷ Song of Solomon 8:6–7 ⁶Place me like a seal over your heart, like a seal on your arm. For love is as strong as death, its jealousy as enduring as the grave. **Love flashes like fire**, the brightest kind of flame. ⁷**Many waters cannot quench love**, nor can rivers drown it. If a man tried to buy love with all his wealth, his offer would be utterly scorned.

Romans 12:20 (KJV) Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing **[by showing them love] thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head.**

³²⁸ The word “Brimstone,” *theion* (G2303), conveys the “sense of flashing,” and comes from the word *theios* (G2304), which means “divinity.” Could the “brimstone” which torments the wicked actually be the flashing forth of Christ’s divinity which brings mental torment to sinners, just as the glimpses of God’s glory caused mental anguish to others throughout history?

³²⁹ Instead of seeing this torture as self-inflicted and organic, another interpretation assigns the action of torturing to Satan and his demons since the book of Revelation depicts the “fallen star” and his cohorts as the agents of torture (Rev. 9:4-5) who utilized “fire and smoke and burning sulfur” in the process (Rev. 9:17).

The next verse says that “**The smoke of their torment will rise forever and ever.**” Revelation 14:11. Does this mean they will consciously be tormented for all eternity? The language used by John is reminiscent of how Abraham only saw “columns of smoke” rising at the site of Sodom and Gomorrah after they were destroyed (Genesis 19:28), which was destroyed with

unquenchable fire that will consume the wicked, but the righteous will forever dwell in this “fire” (Is. 33:12-15) that flows from the throne of God (Dan. 7:9).

JUDGMENT GIVEN TO THE SAINTS DURING THE MILLENNIUM

God willed that Cyrus, His anointed shepherd “king from the east” (Is. 44:27; 45:1; 41:2, 25), would dry up the Euphrates to conquer Babylon because He desired to free His oppressed people (Jer. 50:33-34) and rebuild Jerusalem (Is. 44:24-28). In the end Christ, the Anointed Shepherd King from the east [“rising of the sun”] (Luke 4:18; John 10:11; Matt. 24:27; Rev. 16:12; 7:2; Luke 1:78), will conquer spiritual Babylon by drying up the spiritual Euphrates in order to free His oppressed people and lead them to the New Jerusalem.

When finally united with their Savior and taken to heaven (1 Thes. 4:17), the redeemed will live and reign with Christ for 1,000 years—a celestial Sabbath. During this time God will open the record of history so they can examine God’s dealings with man. As the saints ponder the works and methods of God, they shall also contrast His love, mercy, and justice with Satan’s works of selfishness, malevolence, and tyranny throughout history. In this way shall “judgment,” or *the ability to make correct judgments*, be “given unto” the saints (Rev. 20:4; Dan. 7:22).

“eternal fire” (Jude 7). Obviously, those inhabitants only suffered until they died—they didn’t suffer eternally. It was also said of Edom, on “the day of the Lord’s revenge,” that “the ground will be covered with fire. This judgment on Edom will never end; the smoke of its burning will rise forever.” Isaiah 34:8-10. The *result* of the judgment on Edom will never be reversed, and the smoke arising forever is symbolic of this *finality*. “Isaiah pictures the historical annihilation of Edom because of its sin. Once destroyed by God’s judgment, Edom would never rise again. Likewise, the judgment of unbelievers at the end of time will be as absolute and complete.” Gregory K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), p. 761.

The rest of 14:11 states that “**they will have no relief day or night**, for they have worshiped the beast and his statue and have accepted the mark of his name.” This phrase “day and night” is written in the genitive case, describing the *quality* of time, *not duration*, as the “genitive implies nothing as to duration.” Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Nashville: Broadman, 1934), p. 495. This verse does not imply that the duration of their suffering lasts forever, but that the suffering is not limited to the daytime or nighttime, just as Edom’s fire was not “quenched night nor day.” Isaiah 34:10 (KJV). The fire was not limited to a day or night shift, but once everything was destroyed the fire went out. Likewise, the suffering of the wicked in the end is not limited to daytime or nighttime, but once everyone’s life has expired, the suffering will end.

SUFFERING FINALLY ATTRIBUTED TO ITS SOURCE— THE GUILTY SCAPEGOAT

This time of “examining the records” of history will occur during the 1,000 years, as Satan wanders the wilderness of the earth, being “bound”—chained in his circumstance of isolation and inability to deceive anyone in the universe.³³⁰ Indeed, Satan will wander the desolate earth just as the Scapegoat wandered in the wilderness after the Day of Atonement.³³¹ On this feast the High Priest would “**lay both of his hands on the goat’s head and confess over it all the wickedness, rebellion, and**

³³⁰ That this binding is symbolic of Satan’s inability to deceive any more seems evident from the fact that he is “bound,” “that he should deceive the nations no more” (Rev. 20:3), and when he is “released,” he “shall go out to deceive the nations” (Rev. 20:8). The emphasis is on restricting his opportunity to deceive, which would happen if there was no one to deceive. God does not withdraw the right of freedom of speech, but He does withdraw the opportunity, or privilege (if you could call it that), He had given to Satan to exercise this right. He can still say whatever he wants, but no one is there to listen. Cf. Tonstad, *Revelation*, p. 292.

³³¹ Some say the Scapegoat is a symbol of Christ, but I object to this idea for the following reasons: (1) Christ, as the Lord’s goat (Lev. 16:8:9), was sacrificed for our sins while the scapegoat, who was not the Lord’s goat, was not; (2) the scapegoat receives and retains the guilt of Israel (symbolic of showing the origin of sin), but Christ will appear the second time “without sin” (Heb. 9:28); (3) the scapegoat “receives,” or is attributed with, the iniquities of Israel through the work of the High Priest, who is Christ, so He cannot be both; (4) the Hebrew name for the scapegoat is “Azazel” (H5799, אֲזָאֵל), and the word used to describe the goats used in the Day of Atonement ceremony is “saiyr” (H8163) and has been translated as “devil” and “satyr.” See Lev. 17:7; 2 Chron. 11:15; Is. 13:21; 34:14.

The apocryphal Book of Enoch likewise informs us that the leader of the fallen angels, Azazel, “hath taught all unrighteousness on earth...” 1 Enoch 5:6. Robert Henry Charles, ed., *Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913), p. 193. It seems that this work identifies Azazel with the Biblical Satan (compare 1 Enoch 10:4-6, 54:3 with 2 Peter 2 and Jude 6), though these terms are used to describe different entities at times. “In some extrabiblical texts, Azazel appears to function possibly as an analogue for Satan himself (Grabbe, “Scapegoat,” 156–58; Helm, “Azazel,” 222–24; Maclean, “Barabbas,” 320). In the *Apocalypse of Abraham* (13:4–9; 14:5–6; 20:5; 23:7; 31:5), Azazel appears as a competitor for God’s glory. He is portrayed as the one who persuaded Adam and Eve to disobey God, who tried to lead Abraham astray, and who received soiled priestly garments (Orlov, *Dark*, 4–7; 49; 66).” Charles Meeks, “Azazel,” ed. John D. Barry et al., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

Several early church fathers, such as Origen, likewise viewed Azazel as symbolic of Satan, writing that “the serpent... was the cause of man’s expulsion from the divine paradise... Further, the averter [scapegoat] in Leviticus, which the Hebrew text calls Azazel, is none other than he...” Origen, *Contra Celsum*, bk. 6, sec. 43, p. 360. Also see Origen, *Homilies on Leviticus 1-16*, trans. Gary Wayne Barkley, in “The Fathers of the Church” (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1990), vol. 83, p. 187 and Origen, *First Principles*, trans. G. W. Butterworth, bk. 3, ch. 2, sec. 1 (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 2013), p. 275-276. Likewise, Irenæus quotes a “divine elder and preacher of the truth” who stated that Azazel was “that fallen and yet mighty angel.” Irenæus, *Against Heresies*, bk. 1, ch. 15, sec. 6.

sins of the people of Israel. In this way, he will transfer the people’s sins to the head of the goat. Then a man specially chosen for the task will **drive the goat into the wilderness.**” Leviticus 16:21. What does it mean that the sins of the people will be “transferred” onto Satan?

“In the sanctuary service of the Old Testament, God revealed the plan of salvation in symbol. **Day by day** sins were confessed into the sanctuary, where **God assumed responsibility** for dealing with this terrible problem, even to the extent of **permitting His own Son to bear the guilt** and consequences actually accruing to human account.

“The last act on the Day of Atonement represents God’s last dealing with sin. Everything that occurs in the courtyard represents events that take place on earth. That which occurs in the Sanctuary represents those events that take place in heaven and are unseen by human eyes, where we follow the Lamb’s activities by faith.

“The ‘Azazel’ event occurs in the courtyard, meaning it will be visible. Confessing the sins of the righteous over Azazel, the scapegoat, meant something. It was not simply ritual. (See 2 Thess. 2:3-5.) It symbolized an event to mark God’s last effort on behalf of the human race, when **the eyes of the world and the universe fix upon him who was responsible throughout those years when God assumed the blame. He will be exposed in a unique and unprecedented way.**

“From that point, the scapegoat is led out to the wilderness, representing the millennium, where he is abandoned to die. This marks the finale of earth’s experiment with sin.”³³²

In the beginning, Adam had blamed both Eve (the guilty—Scapegoat) and Christ (the Innocent—Lord’s goat) as being responsible for his sins (Gen. 3:12). Christ condescended and took responsibility for humanity’s suffering since He has allowed this suffering to occur, but in the end all the universe will realize that the Serpent is the one who is responsible and guilty for introducing sin, suffering, and death into the universe.

Yes, all will consider Satan and ask, “Can this be the one who shook the earth and made the kingdoms of the world tremble? **Is this the one who destroyed the world** and made it into a wasteland? Is this the king who demolished the world’s

³³² Marilyn Campbell, *Adventist Supplement to Light Through the Darkness: A Vindication of God* (2015), p. 29.

greatest cities and had no mercy on his prisoners?”” Isaiah 14:16–17. Just as Eve, Adam’s temptress, had to bear the guilt of her sins and live the rest of her days with the knowledge of what she had done, so will Satan, the true source of all temptations and sins, have to bear the ultimate guilt of responsibility and live the rest of his days contemplating the evil he fashioned.

THE “3RD COMING” & THE LAST BATTLE

After this period of 1,000 years, Christ and the saints shall return to earth in the New Jerusalem City (Rev. 21:2),³³³ and the wicked dead shall be resurrected from the grave (Rev. 20:5), thus “loosing” Satan from the “chains” of inactivity. It makes sense that God would lock up the Destroyer, but *why on earth would He let Satan go?* Is this an arbitrary display of power and sovereignty on the part of God, akin to how Adolf Eichmann was “godlike” when he displayed his power by “*arresting* and then *releasing* people, of banning institutions and then allowing them to resume”?³³⁴ Or could this releasing on the part of God be an act of *revelation*? In the beginning the Serpent bewailed God’s apparent restriction (Gen. 3:1), but in the end God demonstrates (once again) that Satan’s charges are simply lies and misrepresentations. Yes, in the end God will give Satan all the freedom he wants, and with this freedom he will work out his own undoing.³³⁵

As soon as the wicked are resurrected, Satan picks up his work of temptation and deceit where he left off, going forth to deceive and rally those who, from the dawn of time, had rejected God and His methods, gathering them from all the earth, preparing them for a final attempt to take the Kingdom of God by force and violence.

Revelation 20:7–9 **When the thousand years come to an end**, Satan will be let out of his prison. ⁸ He will go out to deceive the nations—called Gog and Magog—in every corner of the earth. **He will gather them together for battle**—a mighty army, as numberless as sand along the seashore. ⁹ And I saw them as they went up on the broad plain of the earth and **surrounded God’s people and the beloved city...**

³³³ In 20:7-9 we see the wicked attack the New Jerusalem, but the descent of this city is not mentioned until 21:2. This is a striking example of John’s tendency to reverse the logical order of events—a literary device known as *hysteron-proteron*.

³³⁴ Bettina Stangneth, *Eichmann before Jerusalem: The Unexamined Life of a Mass Murderer* (London: The Bodley Head, 2014), p. 9.

³³⁵ Tonstad, *Saving God’s Reputation*, p. 155.

Being resurrected is a gift from God—He is giving life back to you so you can live again. But what do the wicked do with this gift? They throw it away and try to kill the One who gave it. Would God have forgiven them if they truly repented at this point? I think so, for His “mercy endures forever.” But these people have the same hearts they had when they fell asleep, so the further revelation of God’s glory will do what it did during their lives—harden their hearts and cause them to manifest indignation. Just as the Jews were enraged by the revelation of God in Christ, so too will the wicked seek to crucify the Son of God enthroned in the New Jerusalem.

God does not want the wicked to suffer and die again, but they must be given another chance to either completely accept or reject Him. But why?

THE GREAT WHITE THRONE JUDGMENT

When those who had rejected God attack the Holy City, they will then find themselves standing before “a great white throne” (Rev. 20:11) with Christ sitting on it. All shall then stand before God, and the “record books” of their hearts (2 Cor. 3:2–3) shall be “opened” and read by all the universe (Rev. 20:12). The actions of all, whether loving or selfish, have been recorded in their hearts, and their consciences shall bear witness either for or against them in that day (Rom. 2:14–16; 9:1; 2 Cor. 1:12).

Just as Satan had sown enmity in his heart against Christ since his fall, so too have the wicked been storing up enmity in their hearts from the time they first rejected the voice of Christ’s Spirit. The record book of Satan’s heart, full of enmity, was fully read by all the heavenly intelligences when he brutally murdered the Son of God on the cross, and thus the satanic Kingdom was uprooted from their sympathies. When the resurrected wicked attack the Holy City of Christ, they will likewise be revealing the record of their enmity towards Christ before all the universe, and will also be uprooted from the sympathies of all the universe.

Those who have rejected the guiding Spirit of Christ have had their sins “inscribed with an iron chisel—engraved with a diamond point on their stony hearts” (Jer. 17:1), which has seared their conscience (1 Tim. 4:1–2) to the voice of God. When the eyes of Christ, which are like flames of fire (Rev. 1:14; 2:18; 19:12), look upon each soul, all the wicked shall remember the words which Christ’s Spirit has spoken to their heart, and each shall be “convicted by their own conscience” (John 8:9) when they remember their sins and realize they have rejected the way of life. All of these shall judge themselves “unworthy of everlasting life...” Acts 13:46.

In other words, when the unsanctified soul stands before God as an open book (like an exposed criminal standing before their victim) “a kind of history of its [their] evil deeds, of every foul and disgraceful act and all unholy conduct” shall come rushing back to their mind. “Then the conscience is harassed and pricked by its own stings, and becomes an accuser and witness against itself. This, I think, was what the apostle Paul felt when he said, ‘Their thoughts one with another accusing or else excusing them... in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men, according to my gospel, by Jesus Christ’ (Rom. 2:15, 16). From which we understand that in the very essence of the soul certain torments are produced from the harmful desires themselves that lead us to sin.”³³⁶ Thus the words of Christ shall be fulfilled:

John 12:47–48 (KJV) ⁴⁷ And if any *man* hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not: for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world. ⁴⁸ He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath *one* that judgeth him: **the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day.**

John 3:19 (GNT) **This is how the judgment works: the light has come into the world, but people love the darkness rather than the light...**

However, those who have confessed their enmity towards Christ (spiritual sickness), made Him the Lord of their life by faith (trusted the Great Physician), and have allowed His blood, or life (Remedy), to purge their “conscience from dead works to serve the living God” (Heb. 9:14), shall not experience any condemnation which the wicked shall experience when they look into the loving (fiery) eyes of their Beloved. Yes, these are they which are in Christ Jesus, “who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit,” and shall experience no condemnation (Rom. 8:1), just as Mary Magdalene (John 8). Instead of going on to write their sins in their heart by their rejection of Christ’s Spirit, these have allowed Christ to write His law of selfless love “not with ink, but with the Spirit,” or finger (Matt. 12:28; Luke 11:20), “of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart.” 2 Corinthians 3:3.

³³⁶ Origen, *First Principles*, bk. 2, ch. 10, sec. 4, p. 177-178.

FATE OF SATAN

Christ's glory at the Second Coming will expose the lies of the false churches that will deceive the masses, and the masses will subsequently turn on their deceivers, and they will destroy them "with fire" (Rev. 17:16) as they throw them into the "lake of fire" (Rev. 19:20). In like manner, at the final revelation of God's glorious, loving character at the "Third Coming" (after the millennium) all the wicked shall understand that God's ways are pure and that Satan's are corrupt. Devastated by the revelation that Satan has deceived them, they will turn on their ultimate spiritual captor (Satan) and his ways shall return upon his own head.

As we have seen throughout the prophetic history of Earth's "greatest" kingdoms, all those who manipulate others into carrying out their evil devices are eventually destroyed by those they use. Just as the Babylonian guards were slain by the fire they kindled for Daniel's friends, just as the Medians were thrown into the lion's den they wanted to throw Daniel into, just as Haman was hung on the gallows he made for Mordecai, just as the Papacy was dethroned by the French State (sword) which she had dethroned her enemies with, just as the apostate churches (Babylon) who will use the masses (Euphrates/ten horns) to kill all "heretics" will be destroyed by the masses at the Second Coming—so too will the people whom Satan had once used to carry out his satanic decrees destroy him when he is seen in his true light as the one responsible for all sin and suffering. Thus God's justice shall be satisfied.

Ezekiel 28:6–10 (KJV) ⁶ therefore thus saith the Lord God; Because thou hast set thine heart as the heart of God; ⁷ behold therefore, **I will bring strangers upon thee, the terrible of the nations: and they shall draw their swords against the beauty of thy wisdom, and they shall defile thy brightness.** ⁸ **They shall bring thee down to the pit, and thou shalt die the deaths of *them that are slain in the midst of the seas.*** ⁹ Wilt thou yet say before him that slayeth thee, I *am* God? but thou *shalt be* a man, and no God, in the hand of him that slayeth thee. ¹⁰ **Thou shalt die the deaths of the uncircumcised by the hand of strangers:** for I have spoken *it*, saith the Lord God.

"Then the devil, who had deceived them, was thrown into the fiery lake of burning sulfur" (Rev. 20:10)—not by God, but by those whom the Serpent had deceived.³³⁷

³³⁷ The rest of this passage says that the Dragon, Beast, and False Prophet "will be tormented day and night **forever** and ever." As Tonstad notes, "The Christian tradition was too willing to

Thus the Serpent swallows his own tail, and evil destroys itself. Christ, however, has no delight in this, but suffers greatly in the loss of this prodigal child, as Adrian Ebens rightly points out:

“The rage that Satan inspired in men will come back upon him. He will be drowned in the harvest of the seeds of violence he planted in men. God is not mocked, as Satan sowed so shall he reap. **But even in this process Christ is crucified. He created Lucifer and loves him. It is torture to see him come to his end. Every breath of Satan comes from Christ and therefore Christ suffers with him to the end.**”³³⁸

Not only will Christ suffer as Satan suffers, but Christ will also suffer as all who have rejected Him come to their end.

FATE OF THE UNREPENTANT

Not only will the wicked turn on Satan, but they will also experientially know the terrible result of the wages of sin which God’s dear Son experienced on the cross: the sense of utter separation from God (Is. 59:2), the only Source of love, life, joy, and peace. The wicked had declared: “We will not have this Man”—Jesus, the only Avenue of life—“to reign over us” (Luke 19:14), and they now see the bitter end of their choice, which God must respect. By beholding the love of God, which is like unto fire (Song 8:6; Prov. 25:21-22), with a rebellious spirit, the wicked shall suffer such mental and spiritual anguish that “there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matt. 8:12), until they finally expire.

In the 13th chapter of the apocryphal work of 2 Esdras, we seem to find a Biblically accurate depiction of the fate of the wicked who had sought to attack the Holy City. As Christ sees “the violence of the multitude that came” to destroy Him and His city, He “neither lift up his hand, nor held sword, nor any instrument of war,” but breathed fire from His mouth (2 Thes. 2:8; Is. 11:4; Ps. 68:2), and this fire

cast God as the tormentor and make forever mean conscious torment that has no end (20:10)... As in the OT, ‘forever’ is often a figure of speech for finality and closure, not for duration (Jer. 15:14; 17:4; Gen. 19:28; Isa. 34:10). A reading that imagines God keeping the devil and his followers on life support to torment them fails to capture the implosion in this chapter as well as the restoration and healing in the chapters to come.” Tonstad, *Revelation*, p. 295. Also see my comments on Revelation 14:11 which says that those who receive the Mark of the Beast “have no relief day or night” (page 214).

³³⁸ Adrian Ebens, *Mirror Principle*, p. 237, <https://tinyurl.com/Mirror-Principle>.

“burnt them up every one (Rev. 20:9), so that upon a sudden of an innumerable multitude nothing was to be perceived, but only dust and smell of smoke...” 2 Esdras 13:3–5, 9–11. The author then goes on to explain the meaning of the scene:

2 Esdras 13:37–38 ³⁷ And this **my Son [Jesus]** shall rebuke the wicked inventions of those nations, which for their wicked life are fallen into the tempest; ³⁸ *and shall lay before them their evil thoughts, and the torments wherewith they shall begin to be tormented, which are like unto a flame: and he shall destroy them without labour by the law which is like unto fire.*

This is just as Christ had declared: “the wages of sin is death”, and “evil shall slay the wicked” (Ps. 34:21 KJV). At this revelation of God’s loving character, all the wicked shall suffer mental vexation—like coals of fire on their heads (Song 8:6; Rom. 12:20)—which shall eventually cause their heart to break, just like what Christ experienced on the cross.

“... I would like to focus on the intrinsic result of what it means for a sinner to come into God’s fully disclosed, other-centered presence after the Fall. **Have you ever struggled to look someone in the eye after you had wronged them? Why is that? It’s because you feel guilt and shame for what you have done; and when you look them in the eye, you become keenly aware of your misdeed, and then your guilt and shame intensify.** The guilt and shame intrinsically connected to your sin would be so much more intensified, that, once again, if left to bear your guilt alone, it would crush out your life. The proof of this is the Cross of Christ. **When Jesus took your sin upon himself, he bore in himself the intrinsically connected shame and guilt that are produced by sin. And what did it do to him? It killed him.**”³³⁹

This experience will not be the same for any two people, for everyone will suffer according to their former relationship with Christ. If someone dies whom you do not know, you will suffer relatively little (if any) for a short time. However, if the love of your life dies, you will suffer immensely for a prolonged period. Thus, those who will

³³⁹ Herb Montgomery, “Intrinsic or Imposed? Thoughts on the Fire of God,” in *Servant God: The Cosmic Controversy Over God’s Trustworthiness* (Loma Linda, CA: Loma Linda University Press, 2013) p. 349.

suffer the most (besides Satan and his angels) are the “Christians”—especially the unconverted ministers—those who had formerly prophesied and cast out devils in the name of Christ, and done many wonderful works (Matt. 7:22–23), but never really *knew* Him.

Luke 12:47–48 (KJV) ⁴⁷ **And that servant, which knew his lord’s will, and prepared not *himself*, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many *stripes*.** ⁴⁸ **But he that knew not, and did commit *things* worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few *stripes*...**³⁴⁰

The mental anguish Satan experiences during this time is described as a fire “from the midst” of himself that shall “devour” him. Ezekiel 28:18. Thus is signified the fact that “evil causes its own destruction.”³⁴¹

The punishment of the wicked is not something arbitrarily decided by God, but is the organic result of the state of each person’s heart. Some will suffer agony and torment of mind for many days, while some will suffer for a relatively short time. But in the end, all will eventually be destroyed by their evil thoughts “which are like unto a flame.” At this point, “the slain of the Lord shall be at that day From *one* end of the earth even unto the *other* end of the earth” (Jer. 25:33 KJV), and the aftermath of this universal tragic event is depicted as if “blood flowed from the winepress in a stream about 180 miles long and as high as a horse’s bridle” (Rev. 14:20).³⁴²

In the sanctuary service, we see that the animals were slain as a sin offering and were subsequently burnt to ashes after they died. In like manner, when the wicked are all dead, the earth “*shall* burn as an oven,” and “the elements shall melt with fervent heat” (2 Pet. 3:10 KJV), “And all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly,

³⁴⁰ Origen described the sufferings of the wicked to someone with a bad fever, which varies “in kind and duration according to the degree in which the combination of noxious elements supplies material and fuel for them...” Origen, *First Principles*, bk. 2, ch. 10, sec. 4.

³⁴¹ Moshe Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21-37* in the “Anchor Bible” commentary (Garden City, NY: Doubleday 1997), p. 587.

³⁴² Scripture seems to suggest that the army of the resurrected wicked will turn on each other during this time (Ezek. 38:21; Zech. 14:13), and the part about the blood being as high as the horse’s bridle seems to be an allusion to the Book of Enoch, which says that this “stream of blood” is caused by infighting and self-destruction: 1 Enoch 100:1-3 ¹ And in those days in one place the fathers together with their sons shall be smitten And brothers one with another shall fall in death Till the streams flow with their blood. ² For a man shall not withhold his hand from slaying his sons and his sons’ sons, And the sinner shall not withhold his hand from his honoured brother: From dawn till sunset they shall slay one another. ³ And the horse shall walk up to the breast in the blood of sinners, And the chariot shall be submerged to its height. (Charles, ed., vol. 2, p. 271).

shall be stubble: And the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts, That it shall leave them neither root nor branch... And ye shall tread down the wicked; For they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet In the day that I shall do this, saith the LORD of hosts.” Malachi 4:1, 3 (KJV). Thus shall be fulfilled the prophet’s description of the fate of the wicked:

Job 20:6–9 ⁶Though the pride of the godless reaches to the heavens and their heads touch the clouds, ⁷ yet **they will vanish forever**, thrown away like their own dung. **Those who knew them will ask, ‘Where are they?’** ⁸ **They will fade like a dream and not be found. They will vanish like a vision in the night.** ⁹ **Those who once saw them will see them no more. Their families will never see them again.**

Psalms 37:10 **Soon the wicked will disappear. Though you look for them, they will be gone.**

Satan had declared that there were no natural consequences for disobeying God’s laws, but in the end, it will be self-evident to all who have ever existed that death—the wages of sin—is not something arbitrarily inflicted upon the rejectors of God’s mercy, but it is the natural result of refusing to partake of the Tree of life by trusting God. God had given Satan freedom to develop his system of government and the result will be completely manifest before all intelligent beings. All doubts that had been sown by the Arch-deceiver have now been uprooted, and the methods of God’s Kingdom—His laws, justice, mercy, etc.—have been wholly vindicated by His Son.

Because God allowed the controversy between Christ and Satan to play out, sin and rebellion will never arise again. Indeed, all things shall be forever settled in the minds of the universe; everyone will implicitly love and trust God because they have tasted and seen that He is good (Ps. 34:8). And because all will trust God wholeheartedly, “Affliction shall not rise up the second time.” Nahum 1:9 (KJV).

After the wicked suffer the wages of their sins and finally cease to exist, God will then “wipe every tear from” the eyes of the Redeemed after they weep for those whom they lost. Then “there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever.” Revelation 21:4.

GOD'S GOVERNMENT VINDICATED

After the plagues have fallen and the wicked have destroyed themselves along with Satan, all will see the result of rejecting Christ's protection. All the universe will know that God's laws are not arbitrary, but are truly for the protection and "common good" of the universe. Yes, it will be evident that obedience brings natural blessings while disobedience naturally brings curses and destruction—thus the laws of the Creator shall be fully vindicated. When "**The wicked is snared in the work of his own hands,**" God will be "**known by the judgment which he executeth,**" (Ps. 9:16 KJV) and all intelligent beings will confess that God is completely trustworthy, and His ways are righteous:

*"Great and counterintuitive are your actions,
Lord God Almighty! Right-making and trustworthy
are your ways, King of the nations! Lord, who will
not fear you and speak well of your name? For you
alone are faultless. All nations will come and
worship before you, for your notion of "right act"
[judgment] has been revealed." Revelation 15:3–4*

343

PARADISE RESTORED

After the earth has been consumed by fire, God does for the earth, *adamah*, what He has done for righteous mankind, *adam*, and His Son—He resurrects it and gives it an incorruptible and glorified "body." Romans 8:20-23; 1 Corinthians 15:42, 51-55; 2 Peter 3:13; Revelation 21:1. Then heaven and earth are married. Yes, the heavenly dwelling of God, "the holy city, new Jerusalem," comes "down from God out of heaven like a bride beautifully dressed for her husband," and it can finally be declared that "God's home is now among his people! He will live with them, and they will be his people." Revelation 21:2-3. Paradise is finally restored.

³⁴³ Trans. Tonstad, *Revelation*, p. 219-223.

The controversy over God’s character is finally settled in the minds of all intelligent beings. The lies of Satan have been thoroughly exposed; all the results of his lies reversed. Believing his lies led to the loss of Paradise and the tree of life; his lies caused our alienation from God and made us afraid of His face; his slanders incited us to rebel against God and sin, which caused us (and the earth) to suffer the curse of degradation and death.

However, because of the revelation of the slain Lamb, the universe knows that God’s law of love is the foundation upon which all life functions, and to step outside of His law inevitably means certain death. Instead of being afraid of God and hiding in the bushes, we are now drawn to Him and will finally “see His face” without fear. And more than that, we live with Him! No more curses shall exist, and all who keep His commandments will have right to the tree of life (Rev. 22:1-4), and as such, death shall no longer exist, for “death and hell were cast into the lake of fire” (Rev. 20:14), they suffer the same fate of the wicked—“the second death”—a death from which there is no coming back from—they will cease to exist and will never return, for they have been swallowed up in the reality of God’s love.

GENESIS 3 REV. 21—22

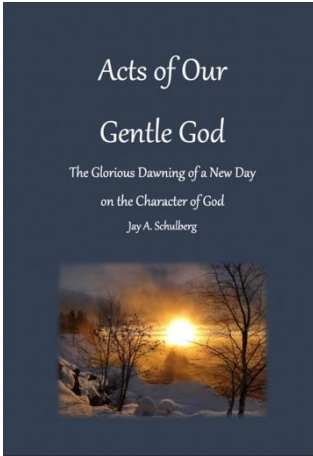
<i>God Seen as Arbitrary (3:1)</i>	Glory of God Restored (21:23)
<i>God’s Presence Evoking Fear (3:8)</i>	Seeing God Without Fear (22:4)
<i>Curse on the Earth (3:17)</i>	No More Curse (22:3)
<i>Cut Off from Tree of Life (3:24)</i>	Access to Tree of Life (22:2)
<i>Returned to Dust (3:19)</i>	No More Death (21:4)

After this controversy has been unfurled, God’s character and trustworthiness shall finally be vindicated in the eyes of all intelligent beings, and all creation will submit to God’s Spirit, allowing the Creator to work in and through them. Thus, God shall “be all in all” (1 Cor. 15:28 KJV), for everyone shall know and confess the truth that *God is love*.

“¹ Then the angel showed me a river with the water of life, clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb. ² It flowed down the center of the main street. On each side of the river grew a tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, with a fresh crop each month. The leaves were used for medicine to heal the nations. ³ No longer will there be a curse upon anything. For the throne of God and of the Lamb will be there, and his servants will worship him. ⁴ And they will see his face, and his name will be written on their foreheads. ⁵ And there will be no night there—no need for lamps or sun—for the Lord God will shine on them. And they will reign forever and ever.” Revelation 22:1–5



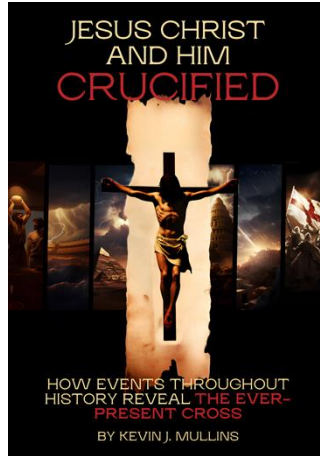
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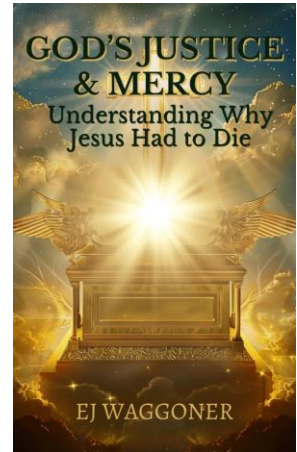
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