

The Coming Tribulation: a History of the Apocalypse

Part 4: The Great Tribulation

Revelation 11:15 - 15:8

(also available on-line at ichthys.com)

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Contents of the Series: The Coming Tribulation

Part 1: Introduction (Revelation 1:1-20)

Part 2A: The Seven Churches (Revelation 2:1-3:22)

Part 2B: The Heavenly Prelude (Revelation 4:1-7:17)

Part 3A: The Tribulation Begins (Revelation 8:1-11:14)

Part 3B: Antichrist and his Kingdom

Part 4: The Great Tribulation (Revelation 11:15-15:4)

Part 5: The Second Advent and Armageddon (Revelation 15:5-19:21)

Part 6: Last Things (Revelation 20:1-22:5)

Part 7: Preparing for Tribulation (Revelation 22:6-21)

Contents of Part 4:

I. The Seventh Trumpet (the Third Woe): Revelation 11:15-19

II. The Woman and the Dragon: Revelation 12:1-6

III. War in Heaven: Revelation 12:7-12

IV. The Dragon's Persecution of Believing Israel: Revelation 12:13-17

V. The Beast out of the Sea: Revelation 12:18 - 13:3

1. The Biblical Symbolism of the Beast out of the Sea

2. The Kingdom of the Beast

VI. The Beast's Prophet and the Worldwide Anti-Christian Religion: Revelation 13:4-18

1. The Anti-Christian Religion and its Worldwide Expansion: Revelation 13:4-10

2. The False Prophet: Revelation 13:11-15

3. The Mark of the Beast: Revelation 13:16-17

4. The Number of the Beast: Revelation 13:18

VII. The Great Persecution: Revelation 14:1 - 15:8

1. The Martyrdom of the 144,000: Revelation 14:1-5

2. The Three Angelic Proclamations: Revelation 14:6-13

a. The Way of Salvation Proclaimed: Revelation 14:6-7

b. The Coming Judgment on Babylon Proclaimed: Revelation 14:8

c. The Need for Fortitude in Persecution Proclaimed: Revelation 14:9-13

3. The Harvest of the Martyrs: Revelation 14:14-16

4. The Vintage of the Persecutors: Revelation 14:17-20

5. The Vindication of the Martyrs: Revelation 15:1-8

Introduction: Having examined the career of antichrist up until the mid-point of the seven year tribulational period, we return to the book of Revelation and resume our verse by verse treatment of the history of the apocalypse. The establishment of the beast as the effective ruler of this world under the guidance and support of his father the devil and his session in God's temple in Jerusalem representing himself as God (2Thes.2:4) marks the end of the Tribulation's first phase. With this "revelation" of antichrist, we are brought to the threshold of the most terrible time in world history, the Great Tribulation.

And it shall be a *time of distress* such as has never occurred since people first existed on the earth until that time.

Daniel 12:1b

For at that time there will be a *Great Tribulation* such as has never occurred from the beginning of the world until now, and [such as] will never again occur thereafter.

Matthew 24:21 (cf. Mk.13:19)

The Great Tribulation will unquestionably be a devastating experience for all the inhabitants of the earth, but it will fall especially hard upon believers in Jesus Christ. For the principal and truly eponymous event of that period, that is, the intense tribulation that will characterize those three and a half years, will be the unprecedented persecution of the Church and the martyrdom that accompanies that persecution. Key to the solidification of his world kingdom will be the beast's pseudo-religion. As was the case to a somewhat lesser degree in historical Rome, adherence to the cult worship of the ruler will be the litmus test of loyalty to the state. But while Roman emperors made use of this admittedly evil device primarily for pragmatic reasons relating to the solidification of their power, antichrist and his father the devil will also be intent upon eradicating faith from the earth through the elimination of the faithful. This has always been a central design of Satan's plans, for if all to whom the promises of God have been made could be removed (either through death or apostasy), then God's promises would have to fail. If there is no one left for Christ to return to, then the devil wins. Such, at any rate, runs Satan's twisted thinking. With the whole world under antichrist's control, the forcible conversion of all of the inhabitants of the earth to the beast's devil worshiping religion becomes not only theoretically possible, but is also the perfect satanic final solution: all who refuse to convert will be put to death so that, either way, faith will perish from the earth. And such would be our fate, except for the mercy, the goodness, and the power of our God, who is coming to rescue us through the return of His Son our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

And they will say on that day, "Behold! This is our God! We waited in hope for Him to deliver us. This is our Lord. We waited in hope for Him. Let us rejoice and be glad in His deliverance!"

Isaiah 25:9

Strengthen the hands that are weak. Bolster the knees that are giving way. Say to those with anxious hearts, “Be strong! Don’t be afraid! Behold! Your God will come, as an Avenger. [Your] God will come, as a Rewarder. He will come, and He will deliver you”.
Isaiah 35:3-4

We must ever look forward to that ultimate deliverance. But we must also remember that the Great Tribulation is aptly named, and that just as many fell through apostasy during the Tribulation’s first half, many will fall in martyrdom during those final three and a half years. We must remember, learn well the lessons the Bible has – not without good reason – stored up for us in advance, and make every effort to prepare spiritually for whatever may betide.

I. The Seventh Trumpet (the Third Woe): Revelation 11:15-19

(15) Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven saying, “The world Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ has [now] come, and He will rule forever and ever. Amen”. (16) And the twenty-four elders were sitting in front of the throne, and they fell on their faces and worshiped God, (17) saying, “We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, the One who is and the One who was, even because you have taken up your great power and begun to reign! (18) Although the nations thronged together in their wrath, your wrath has come, even the time for the dead to be judged, for giving to your servants the prophets and to the holy ones, even to those who fear your Name both great and small, the reward [that is due them], and for destroying those who are destroying the earth!”. (19) And the temple of God which is in heaven above opened, and the ark of His covenant appeared in His temple. And there occurred flashes of lightning and thunderous voices and an earthquake, and large hail [fell].
Revelation 11:15-19

1. The Seventh Trumpet (Revelation 11:15a): With the sounding of the seventh trumpet, the Great Tribulation begins. Seven is the number of perfection and completion (cf. Ps.12:6; 119:164; Prov.6:16; 9:1),¹ and as we saw in part 3A of this series, while the first six trumpets announce and commence warning judgments of ascending intensity and longevity during the Tribulation’s first half, the seventh trumpet opens the longest and most intensive warning judgment of all, namely, the Great Tribulation itself. For the Great Tribulation is the ultimate admonition to prepare to meet with God, for He is coming at the end of that final three and a half years in the Person of the conquering Messiah who will mete out vengeance to His adversaries even as He brings deliverance to His people (cf. 2Thes.1:3-12). That is why all of the other events and proclamations in this paragraph, Revelation 11:15-19, directly connect the sounding of the seventh trumpet and the Great Tribulation’s commencement to that glorious future day. For the Tribulation as a whole is, as we have seen, the opening twilight of the Great Day of the

¹ For further references and discussion see J.J. Davis, Biblical Numerology (Grand Rapids 1968) 116ff.

Lord whose dawn will come in blazing glory with the Second Advent of the Morning Star, the Messiah, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the true Light of the World (Num.24:17; Matt.2:2-10; 2Pet.1:19; Rev.2:28; 22:16; cf. Jn.1:4-9; 3:19-21; 8:12; 9:5; 12:36; 12:46).²

2. The Proclamation of the Kingdom (Revelation 11:15b): The traditional translation of this verse “the kingdom of this world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ”, common to all the major versions (with which the author is familiar) and popularized by Handel’s “Messiah” is, while possible, very unlikely from both a linguistic and a theological perspective. Linguistically, the traditional translation depends upon taking the genitive phrase “of our Lord and of His Christ” as the predicate of the sentence, and, while this is not impossible, it is somewhat rare and certainly uncharacteristic of John’s writing. But in its particular word order, directly *after* the first genitive phrase, “of this world”, deriving such a meaning would be suspect for most later Greek prose and altogether incongruous with John’s style. On the other hand, the translation given above, “The world Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ has [now] come”, is entirely in keeping with John’s Hebraic compilation of genitives. The above translation is to be preferred on theological grounds as well (although it may seem at first glance as if there is no great difference of meanings between the two translations). For while the imminent arrival of the Kingdom of heaven in the person of the Messiah is a central theme of Revelation, that Kingdom’s arrival cannot correctly be understood as in any way an equivalent to the current *kosmos* of evil. Satan’s rule over planet earth has never been absolute or uncontested, and to equate the two kingdoms in any way (as the traditional translation of necessity does) is a mistake. Simply put, there is no sense in which the devil’s kingdom of evil could ever “become” the Kingdom of the Messiah. Satan’s kingdom is on the point of being entirely *replaced* by the Messiah’s coming millennial Kingdom, not “morphed” into it in any way or in any sense.³ When the Kingdom of heaven does arrive with the second advent of our Lord in glory, Satan’s kingdom will come to an end. It will not “become” anything except extinct. What we have here is not a transfer of power but a complete *replacement* of the old with the new heralded here through this proclamation of the imminent arrival “in the flesh” of the Kingdom (now spiritually operational) at the revelation of its King, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, whose rule will endure forever and ever (exactly the same point made in very similar language at Rev.12:10ff).⁴

² On the symbolism of the Day of the Lord, see Part 1 of this series, section IV.1.b, “The ‘Day of the Lord’ Paradigm”.

³ See part 5 of The Satanic Rebellion: Background to the Tribulation: “Judgment, Restoration and Replacement”, section IV, “Things to Come: Judgment, Restoration and Replacement Phases II and III”.

⁴ i.e., our Lord is *already* the true ruler of this world by virtue of His victory on the cross (cf. Matt.28:18-20): for details see part 4 of The Satanic Rebellion: Background to the Tribulation: “Satan’s World System”, section II.8, “Satan is now on the defensive”.

3. The Worship of the Angelic Elders (Revelation 11:16-18): The seventh trumpet *is* the Great Tribulation, the final twilight of the devil's rule soon to be dissolved by the brilliant light of the Day-Star's dawning as our Lord returns and takes up His millennial rule in Jerusalem. Each of the sections of Revelation chapter 11:15-19 speak to this same central point, even as each adds additional details. The proclamation of verse 15b puts into words the underlying meaning of the 7th trumpet, namely, the imminent judgment upon the world, its evil, and present evil ruler with the victorious return of the rightful King. At the end of this final 42 month period, Christ will return to portion out judgment upon the nations who have thronged together to oppose Him, and will wreak vengeance upon all those who have persecuted His Church and oppressed His people Israel. In the synoptic picture presented in the hymn of the 24 elders, therefore, we find the establishment of the Kingdom whose imminent advent on the far side of the Great Tribulation the 7th trumpet announces ("you have taken up your great power and begun to reign"), the destruction of the nations at Armageddon at the second advent ("the nations thronged together in their wrath, [but] your wrath has come"; cf. Ps.2:1-2), and the culmination of all of history in the last judgment ("the time for the dead to be judged"), with the rewarding of the resurrected Church in the newly established millennial Kingdom receiving additional emphasis as an encouragement for all who will endure the dark days of the Great Tribulation immediately preceding that time ("for giving to your servants the reward [that is due them]"). Finally, the vengeance about to fall upon all involved in committing, aiding, or abetting the Great Persecution comes in for special mention. Christ's impending return will result in the literal destruction of "those who are destroying the earth", a phrase with primarily moral and spiritual implications, referring in particular to all who have been responsible for the martyrdom of those who remain faithful to Jesus (rather than referring exclusively to any physical or environmental damage to planet earth proper; cf. in Rev.19:2, the whore Babylon "who was destroying the earth by her excessive prostitution", that is, destroying it in a moral and spiritual sense; cf. Is.14:18; Hab.2:17; Rev.6:7-8). This includes Babylon, the beast, the devil, his angels, the nations and those from the nations who participated in Satan's evil plan to eradicate the faithful and the seed of Israel from the earth. So we see that just as they did prior to the opening of the book with its seven seals representing the beginning of the Tribulation proper (Rev.5:8-10; albeit in this earlier instance they do so in company with the four living creatures), here too the twenty-four elders are performing a special hymn of worship to memorialize the importance of the 7th trumpet, the event which marks the beginning of the Great Tribulation even as it heralds the imminent arrival of the Kingdom and its King who will vindicate His own on the dawning of the Great Day of the Lord.

4. The Appearance of the Ark (Revelation 11:19a): As we have had occasion to see several times in the past, the earthly ark of the covenant along with its "mercy seat", constructed under the supervision of Moses, together symbolize God's throne which takes the form of a battle

chariot (Ezek.1:4-28; 10:9-22; cf. Ps.132:7).⁵ The earthly ark no longer exists (cf. Jer.3:16), but the appearance of a heavenly ark here is highly significant. As the temple opens, the rolling out of this war chariot of God symbolizes the imminence of the Messiah's return to do battle on behalf of His people, meting out retribution upon all the enemies of God. For, as we have seen before, the ark is itself a picture of Jesus Christ (with the acacia wood covered in gold representing His true humanity and resplendent deity respectively), so that what we have here is a powerful symbol of the conquering Messiah poised to return to earth at the head of His heavenly hosts for the vindication of His saints and for the destruction of His foes. Therefore the message behind the appearance of the ark is substantially the same as that of the sounding of the 7th trumpet, of the heavenly proclamation of verse 15b, and of the hymn of the twenty-four elders. For all of these events and symbols focus our attention upon the coming judgments of Armageddon as our Lord returns in glory to vanquish His enemies and in victory to establish His millennial Kingdom on earth.

The fourfold emphasis upon this same essential point unquestionably means that we are to take special note: the beginning of the Great Tribulation (announced by this final trumpet blast), for all the horrific suffering those three and a half years will entail, is in truth merely a prelude to the end of the devil's control of planet earth and to the beginning of the reign of the Son of God following His glorious and decisive victory at the second advent. This is an extremely important point to digest, especially for all those to whom it may fall to endure those dark days. For the message is clear: the darkest period of human history and the period of greatest Satanic persecution is, from God's perspective, merely a brief overture that serves to usher in the end of the reign of evil and darkness upon the earth and the beginning of the reign of truth and light in the person of the Son of Man, the true Morning Star, our blessed Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

5. The Heavenly Signs (Revelation 11:19b): With the sounding of the 7th trumpet and the beginning of the Tribulation's final phase, the "Great Tribulation", there will occur a series of signs of unmistakably divine origin which serve to punctuate the significance of the opening of this final phase of Satan's rule on earth and its impending replacement by the millennial Kingdom of the Messiah. These signs are almost identical to those which heralded the beginning of the Tribulation proper (as we saw in our treatment of Revelation 8:5) as well as to those which will signal the imminence of Christ's return on the eve of the battle of Armageddon (Rev.16:18). But while each of these three sets of heavenly signs includes thunder and lightning and a worldwide earthquake, there is an intensification factor as the end approaches. Here, on the threshold of the Great Tribulation proper, we see the addition of a worldwide hailstorm of powerful effect (Rev.11:19). Prior to Armageddon, the earthquake which occurs as part of the seventh bowl judgment will be of previously unprecedented magnitude, while the hail will be even more massive in its size and devastating in its effects (Rev.16:18-21). The thunder, lightning, earthquake and hail which here signal the arrival of the Great Tribulation will serve notice worldwide to everyone on earth – both for those who care to take warning and for the

⁵ See especially Part 2B of this series, "The Earthly Tabernacle and Temple as a Type of the Heavenly Temple:" in section I.

majority of humanity remaining under the sway of the beast who do not – that the terrible time of testing has now arrived.

6. The Character of the Great Tribulation: It should be safe to assume that anyone reading this series will understand both from its prior installments and from their own previous Bible study that the second half of the final seven years before our Lord’s return, the “Great Tribulation” as our Lord Himself calls it, will be a period of suffering and disaster unprecedented in all of prior human history (Matthew 24:21; Mk.13:19; cf. Dan.12:1).

The vastly increased level of worldwide trouble and tribulation that serves to qualify this period as the “Great Tribulation” is perspicuous from a comparison of the competing trends which we have previously studied from the Tribulation’s first half with those of the Great Tribulation (to be covered in our study below):

The First Three and a Half Years

	Satanic	< >	Divine
Spiritual level:	The Great Apostasy	< >	Worldwide Evangelism
Temporal level:	The Rise of Antichrist	< >	Worldwide Warning Judgments

The Great Tribulation

	Satanic	< >	Divine
Spiritual level:	The Great Persecution	< >	Worldwide Witness of the Martyrs
Temporal level:	The Rule of Antichrist	< >	Worldwide Judgments of Wrath

The primary differences between the Tribulation’s first and second halves from a thematic point of view should become readily evident by comparing the two charts above. From the earthly perspective, while the first three and a half years – terrible as they will be – will be consumed by the prologue to the devil’s plans, the final phase of the Tribulation, the “Great Tribulation”, will see the fulfillment of the earthly rule of his antichrist, and the logical extension of his ultimate purpose, namely, his brazen attempt to destroy faith and the faithful from off of the earth. From the divine side of things as well the Great Tribulation will be an intensified phase inasmuch as judgments of wrath must of necessity be more severe than judgments of warning. And while it will be painful for true believers in Jesus Christ to experience the severe ostracism of their former fellow believers who fall into antichrist’s trap during the Great Apostasy, the persecution

and martyrdom of the Great Persecution during the Tribulation's final phase will be, beyond all argument, even more difficult to bear and endure.

The second thing to notice about the trends of the Great Tribulation is that all four revolve around the one, central theme of those final years, namely, the Great Persecution of the Church. Satan's primary purpose in installing antichrist and promoting his worldwide rule is precisely the elimination of the remnant of faith on earth, for thereby he vainly hopes to frustrate God's promises to believing humanity and so prove Him a liar (thus "winning" the conflict which now dominates human and angelic affairs, the rebellion which occasioned the creation of mankind in the first place). The massive martyrdom which this persecution will produce and the subsequent divine wrath that it will bring down upon the unbelieving world are likewise results of this one central plank in the devil's planning as carried out by his antichrist, that is, the unleashing of a monstrous and worldwide persecution of believers designed to eradicate from the earth all who stay loyal to Jesus Christ come what may. It is important for believers to note, however, that although this will be a period of extreme testing, it cannot begin until God Himself gives the signal (i.e., the 7th trumpet), and, as it is with everything else that has ever happened in human history, even this most terrible of times is designed to accomplish the will of God (cf. Is.45:4; 46:11 Ezek.38:4). We believers, all who may be called upon to endure those dark days, must never forget that even such trials as the Great Tribulation serve to demonstrate God's grace to us in testing, just as they offer us an opportunity to demonstrate our faith in Him and our unshakeable love for His Son, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. And the greatest opportunity to do so will come during the persecution and martyrdom of the Great Persecution where faith and truth will find themselves more directly opposed by satanic forces than ever before in human history.

But these [believers] have defeated [the devil] through the blood of the Lamb and the Word of their testimony. For they did not love their lives, [even] to the point of death.
Revelation 12:11

During the Great Tribulation, the essence of evil will be laid completely bare with all the artifice of the first three and a half years stripped away in the intensity of the crucible of the Great Persecution. But, especially if we find ourselves involved in these events, we must not lose sight of the fact that this final fury of the devil will remain entirely subject to the power and grace of God, as He works His will in judgment, replacement, and restoration, culminating in the return of our King Jesus Christ. Marana Tha! O our Lord, return [we pray]! (1Cor.16:22).

II. The Woman and the Dragon: Revelation 12:1-6

(1) And a great sign appeared in the sky, a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon [was] beneath her feet. And on her head was a crown of twelve stars. (2) And she was pregnant, and she cried out in the pain and pangs of childbirth. (3) And another sign appeared in the sky. And behold, a great red dragon with seven heads and ten horns, and on its heads were seven crowns. (4) And its tail swept away a third of the stars of heaven

and threw them to the earth. And the dragon took his stand in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she did give birth he might devour her child. (5) And she gave birth to a male child who is going to shepherd the nations with an iron rod. And the child was snatched up to God and to His throne. (6) And the woman fled into the desert, where she has a place prepared there by God, so that they might take care of her for 1260 days.
Revelation 12:1-6

The Woman in the passage above symbolizes Israel, and these verses trace her history in synoptic form in a breathtakingly beautiful way from the patriarchs to the earliest days of the Great Tribulation, the period now under study. As the origin of both the written and the living Word of God, the Woman is clothed with the sun, the symbol of day and of light, while the moon, which rules the night and the darkness (the time and the realm of evil and evil one: Lk.22:53; 1Thes.5:4-10), lies in submission at her feet. The twelve stars in the crown on her head symbolize the twelve sons of Israel and the eponymous tribes which spring from them (Gen.37:9; cf. Gen.15:5; 22:17; 26:4). But by far Israel's most significant and glorious offspring is the Messiah Himself, our Savior Jesus Christ, whose human lineage is traced through Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Rom.9:5; cf. Rom.9:7). Jesus is the Seed of the woman (Gen.3:15), the true Seed of Abraham (Gal.3:16), and the Son of David destined to rule all the nations with an iron scepter (Ps.2; Rom.1:3; cf. Is.4:2; 11:1; 53:2; Jer.23:5; 33:15; Zech.3:8; 6:12). Thus the Messiah, the true Christ, is *the* Son of the Woman Israel, and all of the pangs, the pains, and the purpose of this archetypical Woman's history are focused upon, concentrated upon, and culminate in the birth of the archetypical Son, Jesus Christ the Son of God, the Son of Man, the One through whom alone salvation comes (Gen.3:16; Mic.5:3-5; cf. 1Tim.2:15).

Directly opposed to the impending birth of the Messiah, the God-Man Jesus Christ, we next see another sign in the sky representing the chief fallen angel, Satan, depicted here symbolically as a great red dragon (Greek *drakon*, δρακων). The term "dragon" in the original Greek refers to a serpent (cf. Gen.3:1-15), albeit one of exceptional size, and the addition of the adjectives "great" and "red" bring home the monstrous nature of the sight.⁶ This particular dragon, moreover, has seven heads and ten crowns, and thus symbolically reflects the devil's world rule which the Messiah is destined to replace, with the seven heads and ten crowns specifically representing the revived empire of Rome which will be Satan's (and antichrist's) final stepping stone to the long sought after goal of total world domination which will finally be achieved during the Great

⁶ Red, the color of blood (cf. Rev.6:4 which also uses as in this passage the Greek adjective *pyrros*; cf. Is.63:2), is suggestive here of the sin of bloody murder in particular (Is.1:15-21; cf. NIV Study Bible note in loc. Is.15:18).

Tribulation just heralded by the 7th trumpet (cf. Rev.13:1; 17:3-9).⁷ As in the case of the Woman, the description given here of the dragon's actions is synoptic of the devil's history, beginning with Satan's original rebellion and his seduction of a third of the angels, the stars of heaven (and anticipating the one third of believers who will fall away from God to follow the beast during the Great Apostasy),⁸ moving then immediately to his most direct opposition to God in his attempt to destroy the Messiah who embodies the plan of God in every way (cf. Matt.2:1-15; 4:1-11; Lk.22:3; Jn.13:27). Following the failure of his attempt to thwart the plan of God by destroying the Messiah and after our Lord's subsequent ascension to heaven (where He waits at the Father's right hand until His enemies are made a footstool for His feet at His glorious return at the end of this final period of Great Tribulation: Ps.110:1; Eph.1:20-23; Heb.10:12-13; cf. 1Cor.15:25), the dragon will concentrate his efforts on attempting to destroy the Woman and all of her spiritual offspring "who obey God's commandments and hold fast to the testimony of Jesus" (Rev.12:17).

What we have here in synoptic form, therefore, are the key developments in God's plan for victory over Satan and his rebellion set against the backdrop of the devil's efforts to oppose and frustrate that plan. By taking us from Satan's prehistoric seduction of the fallen angels to his opposition to the first advent of the Messiah to the devil's final attempt to destroy all who remain faithful to Him, we have been brought by these verses full circle to the point where the Great Tribulation and the Great Persecution which it embodies begin. These verses thus serve as a prologue and an introduction to the events of the Great Tribulation (i.e., everything that happens after the mid-point of the seven years has been reached following the sounding of the 7th trumpet which announces the final phase of God's pre-millennial plan), and especially to the event which in spiritual terms dominates those final years, the Great Persecution.

III. War in Heaven: Revelation 12:7-12

(7) And war broke out in heaven. Michael and his angels fought with the dragon and the dragon and his angels fought [back], (8) but they did not prevail against him, and they could no longer find any place [of refuge] in heaven. (9) And [so] the great dragon, the ancient serpent, the one called Devil and Satan, was thrown down; even he who deceives the entire world was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. (10) And I heard a loud voice in heaven saying,
"Now our God's deliverance and might and kingdom have come, even the power of His Christ. For the accuser of our brothers, the one who accuses them day and

⁷ See The Coming Tribulation: Part 3B: Antichrist and his Kingdom, section III, "The Kingdom of the Beast".

⁸ For a discussion of the symbolism and a treatment of the stars in this passage as both apostate believers and fallen angels, see The Coming Tribulation: Part 3A: From the Seventh Seal to the Two Witnesses, section II.1.a, "The Great Apostasy: Definition". See also part 4 of Satanic Rebellion: Satan's World System, section III.3, under "Titles of Rank: 2) Elders".

night in front of our God, has been thrown down. (11) But these [believers] have defeated [the devil] through the blood of the Lamb and the Word of their testimony. For they did not love their lives, [even] to the point of death. (12) Because of this, rejoice, O heavens and those residing in them! [But] woe to the earth and the sea, for the devil has come down to you, having [great] anger, because he knows that he has [only] a short time [remaining]!”

Revelation 12:7-12

Antichrist, the visible prime-mover of earthly events during the Tribulation, is not even mentioned in the verses above, nor anywhere else in chapter twelve. Instead, it is the dragon, Satan, who is clearly seen as the opponent of the plan and people of God historically and specifically during the Great Tribulation. Just as the allegory of the woman and the dragon served to concentrate our attention on the true albeit invisible nature of the conflict that dominates all human events, so here we are given to see at the very outset of the Great Tribulation that angelic events are at the heart of everything which will transpire during those horrific three and a half years. For Satan’s ejection from heaven along with his followers will be a crucial turning point in the history of his rebellion against God. From that point forward, the dynamics of the conflict will change so radically and fundamentally that no other period in human history will be comparable. That is in no small part why, from the divine point of view, the Great Tribulation is largely inseparable from “the Day of the Lord” which brings it to a close at our Lord’s return. For once Satan has devoted all of his resources to this final furious assault upon the people of God, God’s wrath, God’s judgment, and God’s deliverance cannot be long delayed.

War in heaven: The fight described here between Michael and Satan and their respective forces, resulting in the expulsion from heaven of Satan and his angels, is the first event of the Great Tribulation proper.⁹ The way in which the outbreak of the “war” is described in this verse indicates that “Michael and his angels” are the initiators of this attack, and we may be certain that they commence these hostilities on divine authority. It may seem strange to some that up until this point in human history God has allowed the devil to present himself in the heavenly assembly and to continue to bring accusations against the elect (1Kng.22:19-22; 2:1; Job 1:6-19; 2:1-7; 15:8; 38:7; Ps.29:1ff.; 89:5-7; Jer.23:18 & 22; Zech.3:1; 1Pet.5:8; Rev.12:10). Clearly, God has always had the power to cast the devil out of heaven, whether by immediate means or, as here, through the agency of his elect angels. But everything which has yet transpired in heaven and on earth has all been according to the ineluctable plan of God “whose judgments are unsearchable and whose ways are beyond finding out” (Rom.11:33). God’s plan to repair the breach in the moral fabric of the universe rent by creature rebellion has always involved the

⁹ The “flight of the woman, Israel” does not occur until after the devil is cast down to earth as the following verses make clear (cf. especially Rev.12:13). Revelation 12:6 is therefore to be understood as prospective, giving us a preview of the escape to the desert of all those in Israel who responded to the ministry of Moses and Elijah, with the details being provided in Revelation 12:13-17.

allowance of true creature free will on the one hand together with an irrefutable demonstration of the justness and rightness of God and His perfectly holy, good and loving character on the other. In all of the time and opportunity given to Satan and in all of the devil's assaults upon the righteous throughout time, God's will has ever triumphed, and all of the evil done by creatures, human and angelic alike, has only served to demonstrate the quality of the faith of those who have chosen for God together with the faithfulness and mercy of the One in whom they have put their faith. The process of judgment, restoration and replacement has been proceeding apace throughout human history,¹⁰ but with the sounding of the 7th trumpet, the final warning which marks the true "beginning of the end" (cf. Rev. 12:10), we enter a new phase of God's plan, the second phase to be precise, wherein God will **judge** the devil's kingdom on earth, **restore** the earth to an environment of blessing (i.e., the Millennium), and **replace** the present de facto ruler of this world with His own Anointed One, the true Messiah, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.¹¹

Thus the period of Great Tribulation which starts immediately following the sounding of the 7th trumpet and at the same time as Satan's expulsion from heaven is in essence theologically indistinguishable from the Day of the Lord which follows hard upon its heels. For this is the beginning of the **judgment** that is answered by **restoration** and **replacement** through Christ's millennial kingdom and reign. In the casting down of Satan and his angels we see the process of judgment beginning, immediately after the concluding sign of warning, the 7th trumpet, has been given.¹² All of the trends of the Great Tribulation which follow are either part of the process of judgment (i.e., the seven bowl judgments of wrath and the remaining sequence of seven major judgments on Babylon, at Armageddon, and etc.) or provocations thereto (i.e., the blasphemous rule of antichrist and the Great Persecution), and are essentially inextricable from the blessed restoration and replacement that is to follow immediately when the powerful and cleansing wind of judgment has swept away all that is fetid and foul and ushered in the crisp and bright new day of righteousness in the Messiah's kingdom of a thousand years.

The last three and a half years of Satan's reign thus constitute the final darkness before the dawn when the Morning Star rises and bathes the earth in the glorious light of His presence and His truth. What we have here in verses seven through twelve is the first step in this process of judgment, restoration and replacement in the exclusion of Satan and his fallen angels from

¹⁰ These themes are treated in detail in the Satanic Rebellion series. See especially part 5, "Judgment, Restoration and Replacement".

¹¹ See part 5 of The Satanic Rebellion: Background to the Tribulation: "Judgment, Restoration and Replacement", section IV, "Things to Come: Judgment, Restoration and Replacement Phases II and III".

¹² i.e., this is the end of the "truce" which has been in place since God's initial judgment of the universe in response to Satan's coup d'état. See part 4 of the Satanic Rebellion series, section III.1, "The current heavenly truce".

heaven and their consignment to the earth for this last, terrible period of human testing and suffering.

It is surely in no small part the devil's restriction to planet earth for the remainder of the time allotted to him that makes the Great Tribulation so horrific, a time like no other in the history of the human race (Dan.12:1; Matt.24:21-22). No longer will Satan split his time between heaven and earth, accusing our brothers and sisters before the Lord even as his minions assault us on earth. From this point forward, all of the devil's efforts will be focused upon the earth – if only because this is where he and his will have been confined until the Great Day of the Lord sweeps them away. So while a number of factors contribute to the “greatness” of the Great Tribulation such as the removal of Holy Spirit restraint and the subsequent unleashing of lawlessness, and such as the one world rule of antichrist and the subsequent breakdown of all human restraint, the confinement of Satan and his minions to the earth is, nevertheless, not the least of the reasons why the Great Tribulation will be so consummately horrific.¹³

[But] woe to the earth and the sea, for the devil has come down to you, having [great] anger, because he knows that he has [only] a short time [remaining]!”
Revelation 12:12

Michael's victory and the devil's expulsion is nonetheless cause for great rejoicing as well (Rev.12:12a), for it marks a tangible beginning of the end of the reign of evil and the devil's reign of terror, made possible through the victory of Jesus Christ on the cross and now entering into the phase of final glorious fulfillment.

[For by means of the cross, God] has stripped [demon] rulers and authorities [of their power] and subjected them to public humiliation, having triumphed over them in [Christ].
Colossians 2:15 (cf. Rom.16:20; Heb.2:14; 1Jn.3:8b)

Satan's casting out of heaven is a first visible step in the eventual exclusion of all evil from the coming eternal kingdom wherein righteousness dwells, and one which is well documented elsewhere in prophetic scripture at that:

(12) ***How you have fallen from heaven***, O morning star, O son of the dawn! You have been cut down to the earth, O you who laid the nations low. (13) For you said in your heart, ‘I will ascend heavenward. I will set my throne above the stars of God. And I will take my seat on the mount of assembly on the sides of the north. (14) I will ascend above the heights of the clouds. I will be like the Most High God’. (15) But indeed you will be brought down to Sheol, to the sides of the pit.
Isaiah 14:12-15

¹³ See part 2B of this series for the former, parts 3A and 3B for the latter set of developments mentioned here.

In all your ways you were perfect from the day of your creation until unrighteousness was found in you. In your extensive conspiring, you were filled with wickedness, and you sinned. So I cast you from the mountain of God as one profaned, and I blotted out [your memory] from among the stones of fire, O covering cherub. Your heart became haughty because of your beauty, [and so] you destroyed your wisdom on account of your splendor. ***So I cast you to the earth***, and I made a spectacle of you before kings.
Ezekiel 28:15-17

The seventy-two returned and said with joy, “Lord, even the demons obey us in your Name!” And Jesus said to them, “***I was watching Satan fall from heaven like a star***”.
Luke 10:17-18

Michael: A brief aside is perhaps necessary at this point concerning Michael and his angels and the battle fought with Satan and his angels. While scripture does have much to say about the angelic realm, it says less than we may perhaps desire to know and yet everything we need to know.¹⁴ Lacking physically material bodies such as we possess, angels apparently cannot be wounded or killed (though they may be incarcerated). So the exact nature and detail of the combat that will transpire when the 7th trumpet sounds is beyond our ability to know. We are given only the result, that is, the total defeat of the devil and his forces and their complete exclusion from the heavenly realm. We have posited before that the ultimate tally of saved humanity will eventually equal twice that of the fallen angels (the first half constituting the Church, and the second the echelon of millennial believers).¹⁵ Therefore such massive numbers and the completeness of the victory and defeat certainly indicate that the struggle will be a monumental one, especially given the extraordinary power of angelic kind. Furthermore, the significance of the expulsion of the fallen angels from heaven, an “estate” which they have held since before the re-creation of the heavens and the earth and the creation of mankind, is immense. This event will be real, and the mere fact that we are unable to see it and can barely imagine its specifics in no way diminishes that significance. For the world of angels, the change will be profound for both victors and vanquished, and will also of course not be without serious consequence for the earth and for humanity.

One thing that we can surmise about this decisive battle between elect and fallen angels is that, while the numbers involved will be immense, not all of angelic kind will participate. Michael,

¹⁴ We have dealt extensively with these matters before. See especially Bible Basics: Part 2A: Angelology, and part 4 of the Satanic Rebellion series, section III, “Satan's Order of Battle”.

¹⁵ See part 5 of The Satanic Rebellion: Background to the Tribulation: “Judgment, Restoration and Replacement”, section II.7, “The Seven Days of Human History”.

by rank an archangel, is one of a college of seven such “general officers”.¹⁶ Positing an equal share of the total elect “host” under the command of each officer would leave Michael in charge of a force less than one third the size of Satan’s entire command (i.e., one seventh of two thirds versus a full third for the devil). Although a large number of demons will certainly be involved in earthly activities, the same will be true at least to some degree of Michael’s forces as well (cf. Dan.12:1). What all this means is that instead of the elect angels fighting an easy battle with overwhelming numbers on their side, Michael’s victory will require extraordinary strategy and tactics, and exceptional courage and bravery. Even though this victory has been prophesied for nearly two millennia here at Revelation 12:7-9, the brazenness of the attack with such inferior numbers and the astounding nature of the defeat still seems to come as a surprise to the devil and his cohorts, and this humiliation will be no small contributing factor to the “wrath” Satan will subsequently vent upon the world in the short time remaining to him (Rev.12:12b). Although we are not privy to the details, a clear principle does emerge from Michael’s most impressive victory. Armed with this prophecy, Michael and his forces are even now using the time allotted to prepare for the unequal fight to come, and will as a direct result of this diligence be astoundingly successful in conquering a complacent foe who has clearly drawn false confidence from superior numbers. Finally in this regard it is very likely that Michael’s forces are the elite of the elect warrior angels (we may think of them as the “Marines” or the “Rangers” among angelic kind). For as we have seen previously, the number of the elect angelic clans totals six, not seven.¹⁷ It certainly fits the context and everything else we may discern about angelic organization, therefore, to posit that while each clan possesses an archangel (in addition to four elders; see the previous note), Michael holds a special command composed of elite warriors who have distinguished themselves in the fight against the rebellion thus far by their martial valor, courage, integrity, and zeal for the Lord (compare David’s cadre of heroes marked out for special mention: 2Sam.23:8-39; 1Chron.11:10-37; cf. 1Sam.22:1-2). It certainly behooves us as loyal followers of Jesus Christ to remember that in the spiritual conflict in which we are engaged what we do for the Lord is not only of critical importance – it certainly does not go unnoticed now, nor will it be unrecognized on that great day to come. Let us therefore continue to encourage one another with the truth that, like David’s mighty men and like Michael’s elite, we too have a great opportunity to likewise write our names on the Lord’s scroll of valor for exceptional conduct in the spiritual conflict in which we are engaged. And let us remember as well that, although the darkest of times may lie ahead, the battlefield of the Great Persecution will also offer those who fight upon it unprecedented opportunities for glorifying Jesus Christ and winning in the bargain an undying crown of glory (1Pet.5:4; cf. Rev.12:11).

The victorious proclamation: This heavenly proclamation to the effect that God’s “deliverance and might and kingdom” have now arrived on the scene establishes what we have said above,

¹⁶ See part 3A of Coming Tribulation: From the Seventh Seal to the Two Witnesses, section I.1 “The Seven Archangels with the Seven Trumpets”.

¹⁷ See part 4 of The Satanic Rebellion: Background to the Tribulation: Satan’s World System, section III.3, “The Organization of the Holy Angels”.

namely, that in divine terms the return and victory of the Messiah are at this point so close and so sure as to be all but a present reality. From God's point of view, attempting to distinguish between the rescue of believers from the devil's final offensive, the demonstration of divine power at Christ's return which accomplishes this deliverance, and the blessed Kingdom of the Messiah established thereafter is both fruitless and pointless. Satan's launching of the Great Persecution, beginning with Israel and then expanding to the Church at large, guarantees the judgment and deliverance which follows and cannot rightly be separated from them. All of these aspects of victory spelled out in the proclamation of verse ten come from God, and all three are summed up in one breath in the following phrase, "even the power of His Christ". For Jesus will accomplish the deliverance and set up the kingdom as the true Messiah operating in the delegated power (Greek ἐξουσία, *exousia*) of God the Father Almighty. We who now contemplate the inception of the Great Tribulation and all those who will experience it have a right, indeed a need, to see the horrendous events to come in this same heavenly light. For the very assaults of the devil, taking his campaign to exterminate faith and the faithful from the earth to never before seen levels of intensity, are thereby guaranteeing the protection and personal deliverance of the people of God by God's own Son through His omnipotent power into a blessed new day and a glorious new kingdom ruled in perfect righteousness by our very own Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. So although we are tempted to fear the prospect and groan under the weight of the actual experience, it is incumbent upon us to remember that God's power is not to be compared to that of a mere creature, no matter how great the power of devil and his forces and no matter how terrible and onerous the persecution he will launch at that time.

The accuser thrown down: The Greek conjunction *hoti* ("because", "for") here significantly links the victorious proclamation of the first half of verse eleven with the casting down of the "accuser" in the second half of the verse. That is to say, the imminent coming of the kingdom is **signaled** by the casting out of Satan – that is Jesus' point in Lk.10:17-18, coming right after the mission of the 72 witnesses (just as the actual casting out occurs following the ministry of the 144,000). As terrible as the consequences of the devil's confinement to earth will be for its inhabitants, it is an unmistakable sign that the wonders of the kingdom are not far off. Further, we also see here an important change of dynamics in the ground rules under which the devil has heretofore been allowed to prosecute his rebellion against God. Up until this future time, Satan's slandering of believers before the throne of God has been tolerated, and has apparently been a very regular occurrence (cf. Job 1-2).¹⁸ After all, it is not for nothing that scripture calls him *diabolos* (Greek διαβολος, "slanderer" or "accuser"; cf. Hebrew *Satan*,]us, "adversary [who

¹⁸ See part 4 of The Satanic Rebellion: Background to the Tribulation: "Satan's World System", section V.5, "[Satan's] Accusation of Believers".

accuses]”).¹⁹ By virtue of his confinement to the earth, however, the devil will no longer be able to bring slanderous accusations against believers before God (cf. Jude 1:9), and this constitutes a highly significant turning point. Now the entire course of the rebellion Satan undertook against God so long ago has entered an entirely new (and final) phase. God’s tolerance of Satan’s attempts to challenge human free will by attempting to influence His treatment of errant believers is at an end, and we may extrapolate from this the end of such tolerance in general terms as well. Since his intrusion into the garden of Eden, the devil has been testing and twisting the hearts of mankind. In His unfathomable wisdom, God has allowed Satan to observe us, to try us, and to accuse us – yet not to destroy us – all within the parameters of His all-wise and comprehensive plan. The end of the devil’s accusatory audience with God on the one hand and the removal of much restraint from his attempt to destroy faith from the earth on the other vividly give evidence of the coming termination of all such operations at the end of these final three and a half years of the Great Tribulation. The heavenly truce which has obtained since God’s judgment upon the universe in the wake of Satan’s coup d’état is now at an end. Hostilities have moved into their final phase with the devil and his followers soon to be removed altogether from any part in the affairs of mankind upon Christ’s return, but determined in their attempt to eradicate believing mankind from the earth in the meantime. It will be helpful to recall at this point that the plan of God can be viewed as working in three distinct phases (see part 4 of Satanic Rebellion). This three phase process, consisting of Judgment, Restoration and Replacement, phases I, II, and III respectively, is, essentially, God’s plan for total victory over Satan and his rebellion as described in strategic terms:

Phase I: Constitution: Lays the foundation for the eternal victory (the “much” phase).

- Judgment I: The Genesis Gap judgment: judgment is passed upon Satan and his angels while the devil’s original headquarters, the pre-historic earth, is devastated and the original universe plunged into darkness.
- Restoration I: Earth is restored to a habitable environment (the Seven Days of Re-creation).
- Replacement I: The creation of the first Adam begins the human race (the source of eventual replacement for Satan and his angels). The gift of the Last Adam, Jesus Christ, provides the grace necessary for the salvation of the human race after the fall through the Messiah’s work on the cross. The Church is called out for replacement.

Phase II: Completion: Realizes eternal objectives with victory in time (the “more” phase).

¹⁹ See part 4 of The Satanic Rebellion: Background to the Tribulation: “Satan’s World System”, section V.1, “Names for the Devil”.

- Judgment II: the Tribulation (the Day of the Lord): God’s judgment upon the devil’s kingdom and upon his earthly subjects. Satan and his angels are expelled from heaven and later imprisoned.
- Restoration II: the Millennium: earth is restored to an environment of blessing.
- Replacement II: Christ the King replaces Satan as the de facto ruler of the earth. The Church is resurrected in replacement of the devil's angels, one for one.

Phase III: Consummation: Crowns the victory with surpassing eternal blessing (the “most” phase).

- Judgment III: The Final Judgments: Satan and his angels are removed to the lake of fire along with unbelieving humanity (the Great White Throne judgment).
- Restoration III: The New Heavens, New Earth and New Jerusalem provide an unparalleled and eternal environment of perfect blessing.
- Replacement III: The Advent of the Father: along with Christ, He will rule forever from earth. The Church is complemented by the double portion of millennial believers.

Thus with the commencement of the Great Tribulation we are likewise witnessing the commencement of Phase II of the plan of God, the great “Day of the Lord”, which begins with the tribulational process of judgment upon Satan and his angels, along with the beast and his human followers. In the casting down of the devil we see the beginning of this process of judgment which will terminate in the series of seven judgments associated with the second advent of the Messiah (see part 6 of this series).

This also has implications for the completion of the second echelon of the resurrection, the initial replacement for the devil’s fallen angels, namely, the Church. The end of standard-type satanic testing tolerated and used by God (replaced during the Great Tribulation by direct satanic opposition of the most severe sort) demonstrates that the Church, the company of believers from Adam to the second advent, has now been completed (and so testing of the standard sort has now fulfilled its purpose). The missionary efforts of the 144,000 under the sponsorship of Moses and Elijah will also terminate with the onset of the Great Tribulation so that those final three and a half years will not be a time for evangelism and adding to the numbers of the true Church, but of endurance and refining, as many of those who had formerly professed faith slip away into apostasy, while many others who remain faithful until the end are martyred for Jesus Christ.

There is no little irony in the fact that, while the devil in his own grand strategy has been driving towards the Tribulation and the installment of antichrist as ruler of the world as the capstone of his own plan, his complete and penultimate defeat (foreshadowed none too subtly in his expulsion from heaven) is nevertheless in a very real sense a result of the reaction that this

violation of all divine ground rules inevitably provokes. Fathering antichrist, establishing for him a one-world rule, and attempting to eliminate Israel and all believers from the earth are clearly courses of action that God has never and will never allow to stand. The Great Tribulation, whose inception is thus marked by Satan's expulsion from heaven, marks in turn the start of the second phase of the plan of God wherein the perfect world rule of the perfect King will replace and be directly juxtaposed to the most horrendous rule of the most anti-God ruler in history, and the unparalleled horror of the latter compared with unparalleled blessing of the former will only serve to glorify God and His victory in Jesus Christ all the more.

The martyrs vindicated: In verse eleven we find the heavenly voice continuing this beautiful hymn which foreshadows the Great Tribulation's major trends. Beginning with the ultimate victory of God in the coming of His Messianic Kingdom (verse 10a), and punctuating the victory with a chorus of exaltation over the casting down of the adversary (verse 10b), the hymn now turns its attention to the faithful on earth who will be tested by the devil's redoubled efforts in the fires of the Great Persecution. We are told that these courageous believers who have refused to fall in behind antichrist, and who have not wilted under the many tribulational pressures so as to fall away in the Great Apostasy, have defeated the devil (Greek *nikao*, νικᾶω). That is, they have "won the victory" over him (the central idea in the Greek root *nik-*; cf. Nike) "through the blood of the Lamb" (that is, they have been justified by faith so that the devil's accusations have fallen on deaf ears before the throne of divine justice). This victory is, then, the victory of faith, maintaining one's belief in and faithfulness to Jesus Christ in spite of all pressures and challenges to the contrary (cf. Rom.8:37; 12:21; 1Cor.15:57; 1Jn.2:13-14):

For everyone who has been born from God overcomes (*nikao*) the [devil's] world. And this is the victory that has overcome the [devil's] world: **our faith** [in Jesus Christ]! For who is the one who overcomes (*nikao*) the [devil's] world except the one who **believes** that Jesus is the Son of God.

1st John 5:4-5

In the passage above we see clearly the victory of faith defined not only by our continued belief in and allegiance to our Lord, Jesus Christ, but also by our continued faithful defiance of the present lord of this corrupt world. The tribulational believers in the context we are studying, Revelation 12:11, are likewise said to gain their victory over "him", that is, the accuser, Satan, now thrown down to the earth. During the Tribulation and especially during its final three and a half years this reality of faith locked in a deadly struggle with the devil and his dark forces will become all the more visible in practice just as it now is in principle:

You are of God, children, and you have overcome (*nikao*) them (i.e., the precursors of **antichrist**; cf. vv.1-3). For greater is He who is in you (i.e., the Spirit) than he who is in the world (i.e., Satan represented by his antichrist-like false prophets now, and, ultimately, by antichrist himself).

1st John 4:4

The theme of victorious faith seen in our context of Revelation 12:11 is more overtly prevalent in the Book of Revelation than any other place in scripture, and with good reason. For there will never be a crucible of testing the likes of which believers will have to endure during the Great Tribulation and its concomitant Great Persecution (Dan.12:1; Matt.24:21; Mk.13:19). The life of faith is a serious and difficult *fight* under the best of circumstances, and the reality and importance of our “faith struggle” will be all the more so as never before during the Great Tribulation. Victory during the time of greatest satanic opposition will constitute the greatest victory of all.

To the one who wins the victory, I will give to him [the right] to eat from the tree of life which is in the paradise of God.

Revelation 2:7

The one who wins the victory shall not be hurt by the second death.

Revelation 2:11

To the one who wins the victory, I will give to him the hidden manna, and I will give to him a white stone, and on it will be written a new name which no one knows except the one who receives it.

Revelation 2:17

And to the one who wins the victory and gives heed to My works until the end, I will give to him authority over the nations.

Revelation 2:26

And I saw a sea of glass, glass [yet] mixed with fire, and those who were winning the victory out from [under] (i.e., suffering martyrdom rather than submit to) the beast and his image and out from [under] the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass with lyres of the Lord God.

Revelation 15:2

The one who wins the victory shall be heir to these things (i.e., the glories of the New Jerusalem), and I will be His God, and He shall be my son.

Revelation 21:7

The tribulational believers in our context are said to be victorious over “him”, the accuser, by means of persistent faith manifest in faithfulness, specifically, “through [their faith in] the blood of the Lamb and [through] the Word of their testimony [faithfully preserved]”. The means of victory as described here in Revelation 12:11 are thus twofold, representing respectively the object of faith, the Person and work of Jesus Christ, and the production of faith, their work of witness in the world, requiring in many cases during this most trying of times the sacrifice of their lives on the altar of truth as martyrs of the Lamb. For the final words of this hymn of victory, “they did not love their lives, [even] to the point of death”, adumbrate the main challenge to faith during this time, namely, the Great Persecution, and make it abundantly clear that faith-

victory during the Great Tribulation will absolutely require valuing one's relationship with Jesus Christ much more dearly than one's physical life. For many believers during those final three and a half years will be called upon to render the ultimate witness for our Lord, the loss of their lives through martyrdom, and all who live through that period will also have to live with the threat of being martyred at any time for what they believe (not to mention having to endure the daily abuses of the Great Persecution; see section VII below).

Joy and woe: The final section of this hymn which encapsulates the Great Tribulation as a whole is concerned with the extreme contrast between the new reality in heaven as a result of Satan's having been cast down and the new reality on earth. In the presence of God, all is joy and rejoicing as no longer will the adversary trouble the assembly of the righteous by his vile presence and slanderous accusations, and the fact that the devil has now been consigned to earth is a harbinger of the coming of the Kingdom of the Messiah. At this juncture, all in the heavenly realms will know that the time is short indeed, and will be looking forward in blessed anticipation of that glorious time which is shortly to arrive.

On earth, however, the situation is reversed. Satan too knows that his time is short now, and there is no longer any reason to husband any resource or respect any rule. In his wrath, the devil (along with all of his subordinates, likewise confined to earth along with him) will now spare no expense and forgo no effort in his attempt to make Israel and the faithful in Jesus Christ "pay" for his expulsion. So while heaven is aglow with the prospect of the second advent, earth will groan under the satanic assault of those days as never before in her history. The Great Tribulation will affect all who live upon the earth, but will fall heaviest upon the seed of Israel, whether saved or unsaved, and upon all who have chosen for Jesus Christ and are determined to stay faithful to Him no matter the cost.

IV. The Dragon's Persecution of Believing Israel: Revelation 12:13-17

(13) And when the dragon saw that he had been cast down to the earth, he gave chase to the woman who had born the male [child]. (14) And to the woman were given two wings of the great eagle so that she might fly into the desert to a place [prepared] for her where she is [going to be] sustained there away from the presence of the serpent for a time and times and half a time. (15) And the serpent spewed [forth] from his mouth after the woman water like a river in order to sweep her away. (16) And the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and drank up the river which the dragon had spewed [forth] from his mouth. (17) And the dragon was enraged at the woman, and he went away to make war with the rest of her seed, [even] those who are keeping the commandments of God and maintaining their testimony to Jesus.

Revelation 12:13-17

Beginning in verse thirteen we find the first earthly event of the Great Tribulation proper. Satan's first assault upon the people of God, foreshadowed in the final stanzas of the heavenly hymn previously studied above (Rev.12:11-12), is an all-out attack against the largest

concentration of Jewish believers on earth, specifically all who had responded to the ministry of Moses and Elijah and the 144,000, and who now reside within the state of Israel. As we have mentioned before, while scripture does not say so explicitly, yet it is more than probable that the new remnant of faith present in Israel and described as the object of the devil's wrath in chapter twelve has neither arisen primarily from among the citizens of Israel proper nor does it constitute a majority of them (Rom.9:27; cf. Is.10:21-22), but must have instead assembled there from elsewhere in the world in response to the ministering of the 144,000 (just as they themselves were drawn to Jerusalem through the ministry of Moses and Elijah as we have seen in part 3A of this series).

Moreover, the verses above also indicate that this trend in migration of believers of Jewish ancestry to the present day Jewish state will be a uniquely Jewish phenomenon. Gentile believers in nations outside of Babylon will face persecution in their own countries following God's frustration of Satan's plan to eliminate this new Jewish remnant (cf. Rev.12:17, which marks the inception of the Great Persecution). From what we know about present day realities, it seems extraordinarily unlikely, given the apparent magnitude of the wave of Jewish immigration to Israel which will result during the Tribulation's first half, that the state of Israel, which has never been particularly welcoming of non-Jewish immigration (especially when the intended newcomers have been evangelical Christians), will allow any significant number of gentile believers who might desire to come and study at the feet of Moses and Elijah to do so. We who are gentiles should not lament this fact overly much. Each of us has his own gifts, his own mission field, and a particular effectiveness of ministry ordained, intended and empowered by God (1Cor.12:4-6). That we are to remain behind in our places, ministering and witnessing to our own countrymen, is clearly what God has in mind for us, even though (and especially since) in very many cases this will result in intensive persecution and even martyrdom.

Babylon constitutes a special case. As we have also mentioned before, there are indications from scripture that as the beast's original power-base, Babylon, will be somewhat of a safe-haven during this period of intense persecution, although the safety involved must be understood in relative terms. For there will indeed be a call for all believers to "flee Babylon" in the days before her destruction (and we shall have more to say about this in part 5 of this series), a fact that in and of itself suggests a large number of believers are still residing within her borders and effectively surviving if not thriving up until that point.

Before beginning our detailed exegesis of this section of Revelation, it will be helpful to recap the series of events which will transpire just prior to the flight of the Jewish believers into the desert described here in chapter twelve. Prior to the blowing of the 7th trumpet and the commencement of the Great Tribulation proper we have seen

- Antichrist's complete and total victory in his second campaign against the south (Dan.11:29-30a; 11:40-43).

- The collapse of all remaining organized resistance to antichrist, his armed forces, and his empire worldwide (Rev.13:3-4).
- The plundering of the riches of Egypt, antichrist's final objective at the end of the second campaign (Dan.11:43; cf. Ezek.29-32).
- The failed assassination attempt against antichrist (Dan.11:30b).
- Antichrist's subsequent return to Israel with a substantial contingent of his armed forces (Dan.11:30c; Lk.21:20-24).
- The breaking of the treaty with Israel by antichrist, and his war on Moses and Elijah (Dan.9:27; 11:30c-31a; Rev.11:1-13).
- The erecting of "the abomination which causes [spiritual] desolation", and antichrist's session in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God (Dan.11:31b; 12:11; Matt.24:15-16; Mk.13:14; 2Thes.2:4).
- The expansion as compulsory of his new worldwide religion whose object of worship is himself and his father the devil (Rev.13; see section VI.1 below, "The Anti-Christian Religion and its Worldwide Expansion").

The dragon's reaction to his expulsion from heaven: It is at this point that the 7th trumpet sounds and Satan, along with all his angelic forces there residing, are cast out of heaven and confined to the earth for the duration of the Tribulation. Thus the dramatic steps listed above designed to finally implement his grand scheme for frustrating the plan of God by eliminating faith from the earth and establishing in its stead a visible and physical worldwide kingdom whose inhabitants universally worship him and his antichrist meets with an immediate and equally dramatic consequence: the termination of his access to heaven and the presence of God, which access Satan had continued to enjoy up until this point.²⁰ In all this we see clearly the plan of God in action and the devil's schemes in reaction. Just as Satan is on the point of carrying through his fondest desires, he is cast to the earth, no doubt in part because of the actions he has taken to bring those plans close to fruition (the spawning of antichrist, the establishment of a one-world rule, the setting up of the abomination of desolation in the temple court, and his session in the temple of God being the primary apparent violations of the ground rules under which he and his compatriots have heretofore been allowed to operate). And although the effects of the devil's intensified depredations on the earth create the greatest wave of apostasy in history and will soon result in the greatest outbreak of persecution of believers, in short order it will be revealed how even these most distressful events have only served to bring about the fulfillment

²⁰ For the importance to the plan of God of the filling up of the full number of the Church and the devil's attempts to thwart this process see part 5 of The Satanic Rebellion, section II, "The Plan of God in Human History" and section III, "Satan's Counter-Strategy".

of what God has had in mind all along. This will take place when the Messiah returns at the apex of the Tribulation's final battle to lay all of God's enemies low, to rescue the remnant of believers, to deliver the nation of Israel, and to establish His kingdom of light and justice, with Satan and his followers removed not only from heaven but from the earth as well for the duration of Christ's millennial rule.

Finally in this regard, although the dragon, Satan, is viewed here as the actor in the persecution of the woman which follows immediately upon the heels of his expulsion from heaven, the earthly agent for this persecution is not the devil but his antichrist. The consonance of action between the devil and his son can be seen in the similarity with which scripture describes the two. Comparing these verses with the immediately following opening verses of chapter 13, we see that both the dragon and the beast are "red", both have "seven heads" and both have "ten horns". We will discuss the various aspects of this symbolism in section V.1 below, but suffice it to say here that the complete agreement and seamlessness in planning and execution between the devil and antichrist respectively is effectively brought out by this deliberate similarity in symbolism.

The frustration felt by the devil at being expelled from heaven even as he is on the cusp of finally accomplishing his long planned designs on earth brings immediate retaliation in his driving out of the woman. The woman, as noted above, represents true Israel, and in our context here it is very important to understand that she represents *believing* Israel as opposed to the majority of the population of the nation Israel at that future time (and this believing remnant will most definitely be a minority: Rom.9:27; cf. Is.10:21-22; Joel 2:32; Rom.10:13). These are the converts of 144,000 witnesses and the ministry of Moses and Elijah. They are Jewish believers in Jesus Christ who have assembled from the nations in response to the unique evangelism of the Tribulation's first half (covered in parts 2B and 3A of this series). In that these believers, "the woman, Israel", are said to be driven out by the dragon, it should be noted that the devil's purpose is definitely not merely to evict them from the land of Israel. Were he able to do so, antichrist at the behest of his father the devil would have destroyed these Jewish believers at this point. Only the divine intervention mentioned in the following verses preserves them from that fate, a fate of martyrdom which will indeed befall many of their brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ around the world.

The wings of the eagle: In keeping with the symbolism of the allegory, the woman's deliverance is likewise expressed in metaphorical terms with the "eagle's wings" representing miraculous divine provision for escape.²¹ The Lord's miraculous deliverance of Israel from Pharaoh, which event is typical of this deliverance (with antichrist functioning as an anti-type of Pharaoh), provides an identical use of this metaphor (Deut.32:11; cf. Is.40:31):

²¹ Compare the "eagle Cherub" representing the victorious, returning Messiah (see part 2B of this series, section I, under "The Four Living Creatures"). The eagle reference also reminds us of our Lord's comparison of the Second Advent to a "gathering of eagles" (Matt.24:28; Lk.17:37).

You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself.

Exodus 19:4

Just as the Lord miraculously delivered Israel from Pharaoh in the past, sustaining her in the desert and bringing her safely into the land of promise, so now the Lord will deliver believing Israel from the hand of antichrist, sustaining her in the desert through the Great Tribulation until our Messiah returns and establishes the millennial Kingdom in the land of promise. The wings of the eagle vividly convey the idea of soaring majestically over the trouble on earth below, and of swiftly departing from the danger at hand. When the time comes, the Lord will bring about the woman's deliverance in a manner so dramatic and miraculous that this passage in Revelation thus deliberately compares it to the dramatic and miraculous Exodus of the sons of Israel out of Egypt and out of the hands of Pharaoh.

1. Warning Signs: Deliverance will require unhesitating obedience. Scripture gives sufficient indications of the imminent arrival of this attempted persecution and leaves in no doubt the absolute necessity for swift and immediate flight just as soon as the conditions prophesied below by our Lord have been met. The first such sign is a great earthquake which, as we have seen, will occur immediately following the departure of Moses and Elijah to heaven (Rev.11:13). The upheaval following such an intense disaster will no doubt cause the initial departure of the believers to go unnoticed. The second sign, mentioned by our Lord Himself, will be equally unmistakable, namely, the erecting of the so-called "abomination of desolation", the statue of antichrist set up in the temple court:

(15) So when you see the abomination of desolation (which is spoken of through Daniel the prophet) standing in a holy place – let the reader understand – (16) then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. (17) Let the one on top of his roof not go [back] down to pick up his things out of his house, (18) and let the one in the field not turn back to pick up his cloak. (19) And woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing in those days. (20) And [so] pray that your flight may not take place during a storm or on a Sabbath. (21) For at that time there will be a great tribulation such as has never occurred from the beginning of the world until now, and [such as] will never again occur thereafter.

Matthew 24:15-21 (cf. Lk.17:31-32)

(14) But when you see the abomination of desolation standing where it should not – let the reader understand – then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, (15) and let the one on top of his roof not go [back] down, neither let him enter [back] into his house to pick up anything out of it, (16) and let the one in the field not turn back to pick up his cloak. (17) And woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing in those days. (18) And [so] pray that it might not take place during a storm. (19) For those days will see a tribulation the like of which has never occurred from the beginning of God's creation of the world until now, and never will occur again.

Mark 13:14-19

Once the abominable idol of antichrist becomes visible in the temple court, believers remaining inside the city must flee without delay. At that point, the necessity for departing immediately and with deliberate speed will be so urgent that even the briefest delay – only to retrieve one’s coat or a few essential items – may result in being caught in the beast’s net. Further, this emergency departure will be a “one day only” affair, for those involved are told to pray that that day of flight might not be one of inclement weather (which would hinder their movement) nor a Sabbath (where their movements would be obvious). For all who have remained in the city up until this point, strict obedience to our Lord’s command to depart without any further hesitation will be absolutely essential in order to avoid being swept up in the persecution the dragon and his antichrist intend. Only swift response will ensure that those believers who have stayed on in Jerusalem will be able to escape safely into the desert now.

This absolute last chance for deliverance from the impending persecution is delivered from the perspective of those believing Jews who are still resident in Jerusalem at that time. Once antichrist has conquered the southern alliance, returned to Jerusalem, killed Moses and Elijah, and put a stop to the temple rites, he will erect the idolatrous statue of himself in the temple court, the so-called “abomination of desolation” (i.e., “the abomination which causes [spiritual as well as material] desolation”; see part 3B, section VIII.1), and this will be the signal for believers in Jerusalem of their *final* opportunity to leave the city safely. For the dragon’s pursuit of the departing Jewish believers will follow immediately, and any who choose to remain or otherwise neglect our Lord’s command to make haste will find themselves trapped.

Which of you will listen to this or pay close attention in time to come?
Isaiah 42:23 NIV

In addition to the passages in Matthew and Mark which address this issue from the point of view of believers in Jerusalem, in the gospel of Luke our Lord also gives an earlier warning sign, addressing it to believers residing outside of Jerusalem:

(20) And when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that her desolation is near. (21) Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, and those who are in the middle of [Jerusalem] depart from her, and those who are in the countryside not enter into her. (22) For these are days of retribution in order that everything which has been written may be fulfilled. (23) Woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing in those days! For there will be great distress on earth and [great] wrath against this people. (24) And they will fall by the mouth of the sword and will be taken captive into all the nations, and Jerusalem will be trodden [down] by the gentiles until the times of the gentiles have been fulfilled.
Luke 21:20-24

The armies mentioned above are the forces of antichrist returning from plundering Egypt at the conclusion of the beast’s victorious second campaign against the south. It will be recalled that during this second campaign for the first time significant contingents of antichrist’s armies will swarm through Israel in conjunction with his surprise naval assault to the rear of the Mahdi’s

armies. This event is prophesied to be an unpleasant experience for Israel as she will be treated roughly at that time, a sure indication of things to come (Num.24:23-24). However it will not be until after the defeat of the king of the south that antichrist's forces will return to the land of Israel and "ring" Jerusalem. For during the prosecution of the second campaign their movements will be focused upon defeating the Mahdi's armies. It will only be after his defeat that antichrist will redeploy his forces northward with the express intention of removing Moses and Elijah to enthrone himself in the temple, a development which will require no small "war" in and of itself as we have previously seen (Rev.11:7; cf. Part 3A in loc., section V, "The War against Moses and Elijah"). Thus between our Lord's words in Luke on the one hand and in Matthew and Mark on the other we are given both the inception and the terminus of the period of warning for believers to flee Israel proper for safety and refuge in the mountains and desert, with antichrist's initial encircling of Jerusalem marking the beginning of the period of flight and his erecting of the idolatrous image of himself in the temple court marking its end. Before this time Moses and Elijah will still be ministering so that such flight will be premature, but by the end of this time those still remaining in Jerusalem and Israel will have missed their opportunity for a retreat under divine protection to the safe haven where this remnant of Jewish believers will ride out the remainder of the Tribulation, protected from the wrath of the dragon and the beast and from the Great Persecution they will subsequently launch.

The reason for the necessity of paying careful heed to our Lord's commands in this respect is made clear enough in the verses above. We have shown previously in this series how that the Tribulation, and especially the Great Tribulation, is characterized by divine judgment (see the synoptic chart in section I.6 above). In the second half of the Tribulation, and especially in its latter days, these judgments will take the form of exceptional divine wrath poured out upon the unbelieving world (the "retribution" referred to in Lk.21:22 above). And while believers can expect protection from the direct effects of these judgments, it is nonetheless obviously true that life in the protected haven to which these fleeing believers are about to be led will be far less onerous during those dark days than life in Israel, the very focal point of the penultimate and ultimate divine judgments of wrath, the battle of Armageddon and the second advent (Rev.16:12-21; cf. Rev.6:12-17; 19:11-21). Secondly, and even more pertinent to this point, is the fact that the Tribulation's second half will be, as we shall shortly see in detail below, characterized by its defining event, the Great Persecution (i.e., the "great wrath against this people" mentioned in Luke 21:23 above), and those believers in Israel who at this time for whatever reason fail to flee according to our Lord's command will, to one degree or another, be caught up in the suffering produced through the attempt on the part of the dragon and the beast to eradicate faith and the faithful from the earth.

(30) For ships of Kittim (i.e., the western "Babylon") will attack with him (i.e., antichrist) [so that he will be victorious]. Then he will be stricken [as if dead], but will revive. And he will be enraged at the holy covenant, so that on his return [to Israel from the far south] he will take action [against it] (i.e., ending the sacrifices, setting up the abomination, taking his seat in the temple). And he will give his support to those who abandon the holy covenant. (31) For it is from him that the military forces will issue forth which will

pollute the sanctuary (i.e., ending the ministry of Moses and Elijah), remove the daily sacrifice, and set up the abomination of desolation. (32) And with enticements he will seduce [people] to violate the [holy] covenant, but the people who know their God will continue to hold fast to it. (33) And those among the people who have insight will teach the people who will be persecuted by sword (i.e., martyrdom), and flame (i.e., torture leading to martyrdom), and captivity (i.e., imprisonment), and plundering (i.e., confiscation of property), for some time. (34) And when they are persecuted, they will receive a little help, yet many will ally themselves to them under false pretenses. (35) For even from among [the ranks of] those who have insight, some will be persecuted, in order to refine, purify, and cleanse them until the final end. For [it is] yet to come at its appointed time.

Daniel 11:30-35

This pressure and persecution upon believers residing in Israel, whether those who failed to flee at the proper time or those who became believers as a result of the beast's depredations as indicated and implied in the verses above, will continue throughout the time of gentile control, that is, the 42 months of the Great Tribulation which terminate with our Lord's return and victorious eradication of the forces of antichrist at the battle of Armageddon (compare Lk.21:24 with Rev.11:2).²²

2. Divine Protection for the Flight: Once Jewish believers within Israel do heed the warnings to escape, all indications both from this passage, Revelation chapter 12, and from elsewhere in scripture suggest abundant divine provision for that flight. In the first place, after the beast's conquest of Moses and Elijah, we may safely assume that the devil and his son will make their first order of business the capture and destruction of genuine Christian leaders worldwide, beginning with those in the territory of Israel. Inasmuch as the general persecution of the Church follows antichrist's attempt to exterminate believing Jews residing in the land, and that it is only after the dragon is "enraged" by the frustration of his attempt in this regard that he turns his attention to "the rest of [the woman's] seed" (Rev.12:17), Christian leadership is the next logical target. And beyond question the most significant leaders in the world at that time next in rank behind Moses and Elijah will be the 144,000. Now while their teams of two are distributed throughout the world, we may posit a disproportionately large number in the land of Israel for reasons discussed previously (see part 2B of this series, section V, "The Sealing of the 144,000"). We know from Revelation 14:1-5 (in the context of all of chapter 14 whose subject is the Great Persecution and the antithetical fates of those who love and those who oppose the Lord) that the 144,000 constitute the first wave of martyrs. In this respect then, the 144,000 will serve to

²² The "times of gentiles" refers specifically to the 42 months of antichrist's control of Jerusalem which does not extend to the entire temple mount for this entire period, since that place will be regained by the rebels along with some other parts of Jerusalem during the final days of the Tribulation (cf. Dan.8:13-14; Zech.12:1-9; 14:1-5). See The Coming Tribulation: Part 3A: The Tribulation Begins, section V, "The Two Witnesses", and The Coming Tribulation: Part 3B: Antichrist and his Kingdom, section VIII, "The Abomination of Desolation".

“cover” the escape of the rank and file believers in Israel at that time, refusing to hide or cower or run, and offering up a testimony to their persecutors as penetrating as that of Stephen prior to his martyrdom in Acts chapter 7 (cf. Matt.10:17-20; Lk.21:12-15).

Secondly, since, as we have already seen above, the parallel to the Exodus here in Revelation chapter 12 is being drawn by the Holy Spirit in such a deliberate and obvious way, we are right to conclude that the provision for these Jewish believers of this “second Exodus” out of the hands of this “second Pharaoh” will be equally miraculous and equally sufficient. It will be remembered that on that first occasion God provided absolutely everything the people needed, from strong and competent leadership, to specific divine guidance, to tangible material support, to powerful divine protection. For it will be recalled that the command to depart from Egypt on that first occasion came so abruptly that the people did not even have time to leaven their bread (the origin for the memorial of the unleavened bread at Passover: Deut.16:3; cf. Ex.12:11; 12:33-34), yet they suffered no ill-effects on account of their rapid departure. Now too we must understand that our Lord’s command not to return home even for one’s outer garment will not present any serious hardship. For those who obey with due speed and diligence, every material need will be met and provided for. Just as the Lord provided Moses and Aaron to lead the people and a pillar of cloud and fire to guide them by day and night, so we may be confident that these exiles will not lack for whatever leadership and guidance they need to bring them to their safe haven out of the clutches of the beast (cf. Ps.77:20). And just as the shoes of those participating in that first Exodus did not wear out nor did their feet swell (Deut.8:4; Neh.9:21), we may be confident that whatever stretching of material means and strengthening of personal health may be necessary for a safe escape will be faithfully and miraculously provided by our Lord as a part of the “wings of the eagle” carrying these refugees out of harm’s way. As those early refugees “plundered Egypt” through the divine favor our Lord poured out for them among their enemies (Ex.12:36; cf. Ex.3:21-23; 11:2-3), so we may expect a like measure of favor for these future believers to find grace in the eyes of all they encounter on their flight to safety (Is.21:13-15; cf. Is.48:20-21).

Thirdly, it is very clear both from our passage and from the obvious threat posed by the victorious armies of antichrist against an unarmed civilian column that these refugees would stand no chance whatsoever without a very large measure of supernatural protection. Revelation 12:16 describes the earth as giving aid to the woman by swallowing up the forces of antichrist sent in pursuit of the retreating remnant, and in this we see a clear parallel to the sea which “helped” retreating Israel during the first Exodus by covering over Pharaoh and his hordes. Obviously, in both cases the Lord is the One who is working supernatural deliverance for the children of Israel. In the latter case to come, moreover, we actually have an indication of direct angelic support as well against the unseen forces of Satan ranged against these believers in their flight, for the role played by Michael and his victorious angels in this safe retreat is specifically referenced in the book of Daniel:

At that time, Michael the great prince (i.e., archangel) will take his stand [in your defense], [even] he who stands [in defense] over the sons of your people. For [that time]

(i.e., the Great Tribulation) shall be a time of distress such as has never occurred since people first existed [on the earth] until that time. But during that time your people will escape, [that is,] everyone who[se name] is found written in the book [of life] (i.e., present and future believers).

Daniel 12:1

Since the context here is the commencement of the Great Tribulation, we can see from the correlation of these events that Michael's ejection of Satan from heaven is followed up by his immediate protection of Israel (something that is thus clearly taking place behind the scenes in Revelation 12:13ff.). Following the defeat of the devil's army, Michael and his forces are thus instrumental in preventing Satan from effectively spilling out his wrath upon these Jewish believers as they make their way into the desert and safety.

3. The Place of Refuge: In Revelation 12:6, we were told that the woman would find refuge "in the desert" and that there was a place "prepared by God" for her there. This point is reiterated in greater detail at Revelation 12:14 where we find that provision has been made for her in her desert sanctuary sufficient to endure the entire time of the Great Tribulation. This will be a fulfillment in part of several Old Testament prophecies.²³

Thus says the Lord: "Those from among the people who are survivors from the sword will find favor in the desert [prior to] My coming to give Israel rest (i.e., at the Second Advent)."

Jeremiah 31:2

Therefore, behold, I am going to woo her (i.e., Israel). For I shall bring her into the desert and speak to her heart.

Hosea 2:14 (cf. the Exodus comparison in v.15)

Our Lord's command given in the synoptic gospels to flee "to the mountains" (Matt.24:15; Mk.13:14; Lk.21:21), rather than being contradictory, actually offers us some additional information about the progress of the flight. In rough terms, the historical land of Israel is split from north to south by the Jordan valley rift (the '*arabah*' as it is often called in scripture). To the east of this wide valley one finds what is essentially an unbroken range of mountains running all the way from Lebanon in the north to the gulf of Aqaba in the south as the land rises out of the rift to the central plateau beyond. Even in our Lord's day and before, this area and the plateau beyond was predominately "desert" in both senses in which we employ the word, namely, arid, inhospitable land which is at the same time largely unpopulated. Thus "mountains" and "desert" are not mutually exclusive terms, but we can glean from our Lords words when set against the context of Revelation 12 and the related passages we are considering here that the mountains on

²³ There is also application here to our Lord's regathering of Israel at His Second Advent, bringing her first into the desert to separate the wheat from the chaff (cf. Ezek.20:32-38). See part 6 of this series, section I.6, "The Regathering and Purging of Israel".

the far side of the Jordan valley are to be the first objective of these fleeing believers.²⁴ Once the initial safety of this remote area is gained, we can safely assume that by various means, human, angelic, and divine, the refugees will be gathered together and, under divinely provided leadership, provision and protection, taken further into the desert sanctuary where they will pass the darkest days of the Tribulation in complete security.

(40b) And [the beast] will invade the lands [of the southern alliance], and inundate [them] and sweep through [them], (41) and he will advance into the Beautiful land (i.e., Israel). Now many lands will fall before him, but these will escape from his control: Edom, and Moab, and the first [part of the territory] of the sons of Ammon (i.e., the southern half of historical Ammon contiguous to Edom and Moab).

Daniel 11:40b-41

This passage in Daniel shows that the northern limit of the flight will be roughly parallel with Jerusalem (i.e., the northern part of biblical Ammon will not be safe). This means that the corridor from Jerusalem to Jericho will be the northernmost escape route, with many refugees undoubtedly opting for more southerly routes, either traversing the Dead Sea or taking to the highways heading south of Dead Sea through the Negev towards biblical Moab and Edom. Once the remnant has made its way thus far, the “wings of the eagle”, all the unspecified divine provision necessary for their journey, will continue to carry them southeastward into the desert to the specific place “prepared” for them by God (Rev.12:6; 12:14).

(13) An oracle concerning Arabia: You caravans of the Dedanites, who camp in the thickets of Arabia, (14) bring water for the thirsty; you who live in Tema, bring food for the fugitives. (15) They flee from the sword, from the drawn sword, from the bent bow, and from the heat of battle.

Isaiah 21:13-15 NIV

Dedan and Tema are settlements located several hundred miles farther out into the Arabian desert. Along with Dumah to the north (Is.21:11-12; cf. Is.42:11), they constitute the extreme eastern boundary of Edom (see Ezek.25:13). We can thus posit as a general area for the place of refuge a parallelogram of at least some 20-30 thousand square miles in area, extending on lines running roughly from the mountains opposite Jericho in the north and from the central Negev in the south southeastward into the Arabian desert for a distance of between 200 and 400 miles (and possibly farther). This is the approximate location of the biblical Kedar (Is.42:11; cf. Is.21:13-17).

4. Divine Provision in the Desert: Just as during the Exodus the Lord provided manna from the sky and water from the solid rock, so He will miraculously provide for all the needs of these tribulational refugees.

²⁴ Compare our Lord’s command in Lk.21:21 not to enter Jerusalem which sits in the midst of the Judean hills, showing that these are most assuredly not the “mountains” meant.

(18) “Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. (19) See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland. (20) The wild animals honor me, the jackals and the owls, because I provide water in the desert and streams in the wasteland, to give drink to my people, my chosen, (21) the people I formed for myself that they may proclaim my praise. Isaiah 43:18-21 NIV

The context of comparison for the verses in Isaiah above is the Exodus (cf. Is. 43:16-17), but instead of 40 years in the desert, these believers will endure only three and a half before being resurrected at the glorious return of their Lord and ours. For while that earlier generation tested the Lord “ten times” until He lost all patience with them (Num.14:22-23), these believers will truly be “the salt of the earth”, departing from trouble at His Word, and abiding in the place prepared for them by Him in complete safety and perfect divine provision through the Tribulation’s darkest phase, kept safe “away from the presence of the serpent” (i.e., the devil; Rev.12:14), and so kept safe from the beast and all his forces until the time of trouble finally comes to an end (cf. Is.40:3-4; compare also Elijah’s years in hiding and our Lord’s infancy in Egypt).

Get out, My people. Go into your rooms and close your doors behind you. Hide yourselves for a little while until My indignation has run its course. For behold, the Lord is about to come forth from His place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity. And the earth will reveal the blood shed upon it, and conceal its slain no longer (i.e., the persecution of believers will be punished).
Isaiah 26:20-21 [cf. 2Pet.3:10b]

The earth’s drinking up of the water: The symbolism used here for the destruction of the armies of antichrist assigned the task of hunting down the Jewish fugitives is both clear and, to a certain degree, paralleled elsewhere in scripture. At Daniel 9:26, for example, we also find this image of armies dispersing like the waters of a flood, albeit in that context the reference is to Armageddon (and cf. the same Hebrew word, *sheteph*, [u_w, used in this same way also at Dan.11:26; cf. Dan.11:22; 11:40; Nah.1:8; Is.8:7-8; 28:15-22). In both instances, the flood waters are impressive and impetuous, but each time they dissipate into nothingness without having accomplished the task for which they are sent forth. A number of other biblical parallels suggest themselves, such as the earth swallowing up Korah and his rebellious adherents (Num.16:30), and “the stars fighting against” the forces of Sisera, a reference to divine intervention in the form of torrential rains which impeded the chariot force of the Canaanites (Judg.5:20-21). But again, the closest parallel is provided by the Exodus. In the retreat of the children of Israel into Sinai, the armies of Pharaoh were, of course, drowned by the Red Sea. Here, in our present context, the armies of antichrist will be “swallowed up” by the earth, but just as miraculously removed as a threat to the retreating children of Israel. Beyond the fact that “the earth helped the woman”, we are not told of the precise manner in which these forces will meet their demise, but we can say that the context clearly indicates their complete destruction at the hands of the Lord. Under such circumstances, it is easy enough to see why Satan and the beast leave off pursuit at this point. In need of consolidation of their newly won worldwide empire, the

loss of such a large contingent of picked troops fresh from the victory over Egypt and not easily replaced will certainly be one which they will not be eager to repeat immediately. It will not be until the battle of Armageddon that the devil and his antichrist duplicate this folly, and then on the grandest scale of all, mustering their entire strength to do battle with the returning Messiah (Ps.2).

The dragon's war on the rest of the woman's seed: This prophecy in Revelation 12:17 marks the beginning of the "Great Persecution", the defining feature of the Great Tribulation which we shall study in detail in section VII below. Enraged and frustrated in his attempt to destroy "the woman", that is, the believing remnant of the people of Israel, the dragon, that is Satan, will transfer his attentions to "the rest of her seed", specifically, "[even] those who are keeping the commandments of God and maintaining their testimony to Jesus". These are clearly all other believers in Jesus Christ throughout the world, for they both follow God's will for their sanctification (i.e., keeping His commandments), and also His will for their production (i.e., testifying to Jesus Christ), the twin hallmarks of those who have faith in and are faithful to our Lord. The devil's efforts in this regard are described in Revelation 12:17 as "making war" against believers in Jesus Christ, and there is no better short description of what the Great Persecution shall entail for those of us who may find ourselves the object of the devil's wrath in those difficult days. Viewed in traditional terms, this "war" will be entirely one-sided, for we believers will most certainly *not* be authorized to use active measures to oppose the beast in his attempt at his father's behest to destroy us. Our weapons will be faith and perseverance, and our objective the gaining of maximum glory for our Lord through our faithful endurance of all that comes our way, even to the point of death. This is an important principle to grasp, for we shall have to deal with extremes on both sides of this issue – calls to resist as well as calls to compromise – and we cannot afford to give in to either false approach. We must take comfort that whether through death and martyrdom or the timely return of our Lord, "all who are written in the book of life will be delivered" (Dan.12:1).

V. The Beast out of the Sea: Revelation 12:18 - 13:3

(18) And [the dragon] stood at the shore of the sea. (1) And I saw a beast rising from the sea, with ten horns and seven heads. And on the horns were ten crowns. And on its heads was a blasphemous name. (2) And the beast which I saw resembled a leopard, and his feet were like those of a bear, and his mouth was like that of lions. And the dragon gave to him his power and his throne and great authority. (3) And one of the [beast's] heads [looked] as [if] it had been fatally smitten, yet its mortal wound had been healed. And the entire earth was in awe of the beast.

Revelation 12:18 -13:3

We have previously treated the verses above in respect to their application to the early career and character of the beast in our examination of antichrist in part 3B of this series. What concerns us

here first is the wider biblical symbolism of this passage, coming as it does in the chronological sequence here at the outset of the Great Tribulation, and, second, the implications this passage has for antichrist's consolidation of power following his defeat of the southern alliance and his subsequent enthronement in the temple at Jerusalem.

1. The Biblical Symbolism of the Beast out of the Sea

The allegory of the woman Israel and her opponent, Satan the dragon, comes to a conclusion here with the summoning by the dragon of the beast from the sea. This event marks the shifting of the allegory, a device designed to compress the prior tribulational events for us in a symbolic way, back to a more strictly chronological treatment of the remaining three and a half years. For in the verses above we see for the first time in the text of Revelation the beast being introduced as an actor in the Tribulation's events. Immediately after this symbolic "summoning" by the devil, antichrist's actions form the focus of all the evil that unfolds upon the earth (in stark contrast to the heavenly actions and judgments which oppose him and will ultimately destroy him and his followers). Simply put, these verses serve to shift our attention now to the beast and to his worldwide rule whose conduct will be characterized by the most significant of all tribulational horrors, the Great Persecution, that event which singlehandedly marks out the Great Tribulation as "great" (in the sense of being horrible beyond expectation or prior human experience). For in the allegory, it is precisely *because* of his rage and frustration over his inability to destroy the woman that the dragon seeks to make war with the rest of her seed (Rev.12:17). It is therefore crystal clear that the dragon in his summoning of the beast has this objective of persecuting believers foremost in mind (a conclusion that is reaffirmed by the "war" soon undertaken against the saints at Revelation 13:7-10). Satan's number one purpose in establishing the one-world rule of antichrist is thus to eliminate faith and the faithful from the face of the earth. Finally, it says much about the blinding effects of arrogance that Satan, who was originally the highest ranking and perhaps most intelligent of God's creatures, should, after some 6,000 years of experiencing God's ability to frustrate such plans, still entertain the vain hope of destroying all of believing mankind.

The Beast Rising from the Sea: The fact that the beast is summoned up from the sea by the dragon (representing Satan) shows conclusively that the allegory of chapter twelve continues here, and that what we have in this passage is a symbolic as opposed to a literal description. Whatever one may personally feel about the oceans of the world, it is undeniable that in terms of biblical symbolism the picture we receive from scripture of the sea, which is generally equated with death and the netherworld, is anything but positive (Gen.1:2; cf. Job 26:5-6; Is.27:1; 51:9-

10; Dan.7:2-3; Lk.8:31; 2Pet.2:4; Jude 6; Rev.9:1-11; 17:8; 20:1-3; 21:1).²⁵ For in the symbolism of the Bible, the sea, the Abyss, death, *Sheol* and Hades are essentially synonymous (cf. Rev.17:8, where the beast comes out of the Abyss). This rising of the beast from the sea is therefore meant to convey a rising up from death, and, more specifically, from a place symbolic of evil. This is true in a twofold sense, applying equally both to the revived Roman empire of the beast and to antichrist, the personal beast himself, each of which have in their own separate ways been given a new lease on life, if only for a very short while and if only for the perpetuation of the most horrendous evil and devastation.

Daniel said: “In my vision at night I looked, and there before me were the four winds of heaven churning up the great sea. Four great beasts, each different from the others, came up out of the sea.”

Daniel 7:2-3 NIV

The final beast of the four described by Daniel in the verses immediately above is, of course, Rome (Dan.7:7), and not only historical Rome, but also revived Rome under the rule of the “little horn”, namely, antichrist (Dan.7:8). Thus the image of the dragon summoning the beast serves to identify Satan as the one responsible for the rule of antichrist, both in terms of the establishment of a one-world empire of evil and in the empowerment of its emperor (cf. Rev.13:2b). Inasmuch as heaven is the place of God and the earth is the place where the conflict between God and the devil which explains so much of human history is being fought out, the figure of the sea (or Abyss) as the devil’s and antichrist’s symbolic realm is all the more perspicuous. And even this symbolic realm will be put under the Messiah’s feet when He returns (cf. the angel coming down from heaven prefiguring the 2nd Advent who places one foot on the sea as well as one on the earth: Rev.10:1-3). As the symbolic realm of Satan and the place of every sort of diabolical monster (Job 3:8; 9:13; 26:12-13; 41:1-34; Ps.74:12-14; 87:4; 89:9-10; Is.27:1; 51:9-10; Amos 9:3), it should come as no surprise then that from the sea will arise the most terrifying satanic beast in all of human history, antichrist.

The specific description of the beast in these verses, Revelation 13:1-3, has been sufficiently covered in our prior treatment of antichrist in the preceding installment of this series (part 3B: “Antichrist”). It must suffice here to recall the interpretation of the details given there in regard to this passage:

- The sea: The sea suggests the beast’s evil origin and represents resuscitation from death of both the empire and its emperor.
- The seven heads: The seven heads primarily represent the seven rulers of revived Rome allied with antichrist from the beginning of his rise. In Revelation 17:9-11 we discover that they also have a secondary symbolic meaning, for they also represent the original six emperors of Rome with antichrist being the seventh emperor of revived Rome. In terms

²⁵ As this point has been covered exhaustively in section II.3 of The Satanic Rebellion: Part 2: The Genesis Gap, “The Sea”, the details are not repeated here.

of the primary application of the seven heads, antichrist is “the eighth” (Rev.17:11a; i.e., he too is a “head”, but a “head” in his own right and the primary “head” at that); in terms of the secondary application of the seven heads, antichrist is “one of the seven” (Rev.17:11b; i.e., he is the next dominant emperor to arise after Nero, the sixth and last of the Julio-Claudians falls from power in 69 A.D.).

- The ten horns with crowns: The ten crowned horns represent the ten kingdoms and their kings, three of whom support antichrist surreptitiously, and only become part of his kingdom of revived Rome after the defeat of the southern alliance in the middle of the Tribulation.
- The (single) blasphemous name on the seven heads: As we saw in part 3B, the “name of blasphemy” is the seven letter Greek word Χριστος (i.e., “Christ”) written distributively on the seven heads, blasphemously and falsely asserting antichrist’s status as Messiah. Its presence on the seven heads shows their full complicity in accepting and propagating the beast’s false claim to be “the Christ”.
- The resemblance to a leopard: Inasmuch as the leopard is winged in Daniel 7:6, speed as well as treachery and ferocity are indicated. After his victory over the south, the beast will consolidate his one-world rule with exceptional rapidity and merciless force in those few instances where resistance is met. The four wings (in Daniel) likely represent the four quadrants of Alexander’s empire so that here, by extension, they can be seen to apply to the four quarters of the world and antichrist’s swift ascension to worldwide domination.
- The feet like those of a bear: The bear in Daniel 7:5 refers to the Persian empire which possessed bear-like tearing power based upon its massive mobilization potential, so that the reference to the bear’s feet here represents the immensity of the military power which the beast’s empire will be able to deploy.
- The mouth like that of lions: The winged lion in Daniel 7:4 refers to the lion-like “bite” of Nebuchadnezzar and his Babylonian empire, so that the reference here to the mouth of lions (plural) is an apt description of the formidable offensive capability available to the beast in the consolidation of his worldwide rule.
- The apparently fatal wound seemingly miraculously healed: This mortal wound on one of the beast’s heads refers to the apparent revival of Rome as well as to the apparent return to life of antichrist. The fact that new Rome will in many important ways be different from historical Rome and that antichrist will only appear to return to life will not reduce the wonder of the world at these ostensible “miracles”. The fact that the wound is found on one head only serves both to personalize the trauma to antichrist, as well as to show that at this point in the Tribulation the beast will be identified primarily with a single member of the original seven kingdoms of his revived Roman empire, namely, Israel, where his headquarters will be henceforth as he takes his seat in the temple, proclaiming himself to be God. Finally, in terms of the beast himself, the fact that the wound is “on the head” clearly foreshadows God’s ultimate judgment upon him (Gen.3:15), indicating for all who remember and believe the Genesis 3:15 prophecy that this is not the Christ but antichrist.

2. The Kingdom of the Beast: Revelation 13:2b-3

Revelation 13:2 tells us that during the Great Tribulation, the devil will lend antichrist his “power, throne, and great authority” over the nations now under Satan’s limited control as a result of Adam’s fall (Lk.4:5-7; cf. Matt.4:9). At His return, the true Messiah, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, will rule the world for a thousand years in a Kingdom of blessedness, justice, and prosperity, a kingdom that will, in effect, never come to an end, since at the conclusion of the Millennium He will “hand up the Kingdom” to the Father as the New Jerusalem descends from heaven and the eternal state begins (1Cor.15:24-28; Rev.21:1ff.). By way of the sharpest possible contrast, the world rule of the beast will be characterized by the most severe accursedness, injustice, and privation in human history, and in very short order will be abruptly terminated by the return of the true Messiah. Thus antichrist accepts the offer which the devil made to Christ and which our Lord emphatically rejected (Matt.4:10; Lk.4:8), with the result being the clearest possible demonstration of the difference between a world ruled by the true Christ and one under the control of the false Messiah, the anti-Christ.

It is an open question whether the beast, ever of one mind with his father the devil, will at this point also be possessed by him. Scripture does not say for certain, but it is clear enough that Satan, now expelled from heaven and consigned to the earth, does at this point empower the beast and his kingdom as never before, even going so far as to “give to him his power and his throne and great authority” (Rev.13:2b), with the picture given by scripture going forward emphasizing the complete unanimity of purpose between the devil and his antichrist (cf. Rev.16:13-14). Furthermore, the “summoning” of the beast out of the sea by the dragon seems to indicate a large degree of control.²⁶ In any case, the unbelieving world will certainly see no great distinction between the two, worshipping antichrist as the Messiah and the devil as God (2Thes.2:4; Rev.13:4; 13:11-17; cf. Dan.11:38-39). The amazement and awe in which the beast will be held by the world at large will in no small measure account for the rapidity with which he will consolidate his rulership over the world following his astounding defeat of the southern alliance. Whatever charisma and success antichrist had before is now exponentially expanded as all resistance melts away. For in the eyes of unbelievers everywhere, resistance to this “divine” individual will seem folly, making antichrist’s occupation of the remaining kingdoms of the world child’s play.

And he (i.e., the “little horn”, antichrist) threw truth to the ground, and ***was successful in whatever he did.***

Daniel 8:12b

²⁶ Compare the fact that Gen.49:17, which speaks of antichrist, recalls Gen.3:15, which speaks of Satan. Consider also the scriptural parallel noted in part 3B between antichrist and Judas who was possessed by the devil (cf. the serpent of Genesis 3, likewise possessed by Satan).

And he (i.e., antichrist) will become exceptionally powerful – but not through his own power. And **he will be astoundingly successful** in his corrupting [activities].
Daniel 8:24a

For [during that period] the king [antichrist] **will consult only his own desire**, and will exalt and magnify himself above every god, and against the God of gods he will speak astonishing things. **He will have success** until the [time of] indignation is complete, for [all this] has been firmly decreed to take place.
Daniel 11:36

And the entire earth was in awe of the beast. And they worshiped the dragon because he had given his authority to the beast. And they worshiped the beast, saying, “Who is like the beast? And **who is able to make war with him?**”
Revelation 13:3b-4

Scripture does not go into detail about the precise course of antichrist’s domination of the rest of the world following his defeat of the southern alliance, but, as the verses above make clear, this domination will be complete. To the extent that there is any further serious resistance to the establishment of his worldwide kingdom, we can expect a ruthless implementation of the same sort of techniques employed in his initial rise to power in Babylon and in gaining control over revived Rome. As we have seen, much of what Daniel chapters 8 and 11 have to say about this subject document antichrist’s deceptiveness and intrigue, and it takes no great leap of interpretation to see in the descriptions given therein a continuation of the asymmetric warfare which stood the beast in good stead in the past (i.e., a thorough integration of terrorism, infiltration, fifth-column-ism, technological sabotage, cunning double-dealing, surprise, unscrupulous methods, violation of agreements and expectations, violations of all conventions of warfare, striking at the head - neutralizing command structures, national and military, etc.). Importantly, we should keep in mind that **now** antichrist will be able to deploy a conventional military establishment whose superiority vis-à-vis whatever remains of other military forces around the world will be overwhelming to an unprecedented degree in the history of the world. Furthermore, we may expect the international movement that had formed the basis of the beast’s success in his ascension to power over the seven kingdoms to have been active throughout the period, and to have greatly multiplied around the world as a result of the inevitable bandwagon effect that will surely follow his complete victory over the south. And, after all, as a result of his supposed “resurrection”, the whole (unbelieving) world will worship him (Rev.13:12; 13:16; 16:9; 16:11; cf. Rev.14:8; 17:18), so that even the “kings of east” will obey the command to assemble for Armageddon (Rev.16:12-14). Thus during the Great Tribulation the kingdom of the devil’s messiah, the beast, will form a near-perfect antithesis to the true Messiah’s coming Kingdom by which it is destined soon to be conquered and replaced in fulfillment of the plan of God (cf. Rom.9:17).

(9) I kept looking until thrones were set down and the Ancient of Days (i.e., the Father) took His seat. His attire was white as snow, as was the hair of His head, [white] like the purest wool. His throne was aflame with fire, and its wheels were a blazing fire. (10) A

river of fire was flowing, and it poured forth from before Him. Thousands upon thousands were ministering to Him, and myriads upon myriads were standing before Him. The court was seated and the books were opened. (11) Meanwhile, I kept looking on account of the sound of the arrogant words which the horn (i.e., antichrist) was speaking. I kept looking until he was killed and his body destroyed and given over to the burning fire. (12) As for the remaining beasts, their dominions were taken away, but an extension of life was given to them for an appointed time and season. (13) I kept looking during my vision of that night, and behold – with the clouds of heaven One like a Son of Man was coming up, and He approached the Ancient of Days (i.e., the Father) and they brought Him before Him. (14) And to Him was given dominion and honor and a kingdom, so that all nations and peoples and tongues should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which will not pass away, and His kingdom one which will not be destroyed.

Daniel 7:9-14

Until that blessed day, life on earth during the Great Tribulation will be monstrous. For believers, the Great Persecution, the subject of section VII below, will be the primary reason that the final three and a half years will be so utterly terrible. However, the entire world population will, to one degree or another, be forced to deal with the implementation of antichrist's diabolical policies designed to consolidate his rule and impose his will on all human kind.

In part 2B of this series, we saw how the first six seals of Revelation chapter six indicate and predict the unique trends of the Tribulation, with the first four originating in and dominating its first half, and with seals five and six referring to the second three and a half year period, the Great Tribulation (with the opening of the seventh seal representing the beginning of the Tribulation overall). While as we have noted above the Lord's worldwide judgments of wrath and divine displeasure cannot be underestimated in explaining the horrific nature of these final three and a half years (cf. Is.24), antichrist's world rule constitutes the satanic trend that parallels this divine trend of judgment, accounting for a great deal of the intensified tribulation of those days. In addition to his establishment of an extremely oppressive and mandatory worldwide religion of devil worship and his institution of the Great Persecution, the characteristics of the beast's worldwide rule can be expected to parallel and intensify the four seal-trends we saw at work during the Tribulation's first half:

The Tribulation's First Half (four major trends):

1. **White horse: Antichrist's Conquests:** the trend of warfare and aggression.
2. **Red horse: Civil Discord:** the trend of lawlessness and political destabilization.
3. **Black horse: Economic Constraint:** the trend of economic dislocation and famine.
4. **Pale-green horse: Accelerated Mortality:** the trend of plague and rampant death.

The Great Tribulation (two major events):

5. Martyrs: the Great Persecution (of believers by antichrist and his religion).
6. Judgments: the Second Advent (with its preliminary and concomitant judgments).

While scripture gives us no indication that the underlying dynamics behind the first four seal-trends will change in any significant way during the Great Tribulation, the fact that antichrist's empire will control the entire world to one degree or another at this time does mean that these trends will most likely manifest themselves in a somewhat altered way after the beast's consolidation of power. With the establishment of the beast's worldwide kingdom, we can expect 1) the trend of conquest to give way to one of ruthless exploitation and consolidation; 2) the trend of civil discord to give way to one of forcible conformity; 3) the trend of economic restraint likewise to become a matter of policy and fiat as much as one of circumstance; 4) the trend to accelerated mortality to be less random and more a direct result of all of antichrist's repressive policies. What scripture there is that applies to this aspect of the Great Tribulation agrees with this assessment:

1. Political Exploitation and Consolidation (seal #1):

(39) And after you (Nebuchadnezzar) another kingdom will arise inferior to you, then a third kingdom after that, one of bronze which will rule the whole earth. (40) Then there will be a fourth kingdom (i.e., revived Rome), strong as iron inasmuch as iron crushes and shatters everything. And like iron which smashes [everything], [this fourth kingdom] will crush and smash all of these other [kingdoms]. (41) And in that you saw that its feet and toes were part potter's clay and part iron, it will be a divided kingdom; but in that you saw iron joined to common clay, it will possess some of the strength of iron. (42) And as to the toes of its feet [being] part iron and part clay, the first (lit., "end") part of the kingdom (i.e., the seven kingdoms) will be strong, but [the other] part of it (i.e., the three kingdoms) will be brittle. (43) And in that you saw iron joined to common clay, there will be an attempt to join these [ten sub-kingdoms] together in the seed of man (i.e., through a mixing of their populations), but they will not bond one to another, just as iron cannot be joined to clay.

Daniel 2:39-43

Although this passage deals primarily with revived Rome, it also suggests that the method of unification attempted within the ten kingdoms will likewise be attempted worldwide to a greater or lesser degree (no doubt with equally questionable results). The reason for the failure is that the devil and his antichrist, in spite of all the power they dispose of at this time, will nonetheless be incapable of altering the human language patterns and our inherent disposition to nationalism instilled by God Himself at the division of the nations at Babel (Gen.11:1-9). Nevertheless, we should not underestimate the pain and suffering that this attempt on the part of the devil and the beast to create a new, politically homogenized one-world "Babel" will cause. Furthermore, just as the rider on the white horse "went out conquering and *did* conquer" (Rev.6:2 in the Greek), so

we may expect that antichrist will enjoy some measure of success in his initial efforts, even if he is ultimately unsuccessful in the main.

2. Social Homogenization (seal #2):

And he (antichrist) will speak words against the Most High, and he will persecute the saints of the Most High God. And he will plot to change times and law. And they (i.e., believers, “the saints”) will be given into his hand for a time and times and half a time (i.e., for the duration of the Great Tribulation).

Daniel 7:25

The second major tribulational trend, exemplified by the red horse, is “to take away [social] peace” from the earth through the creation of civil discord. Just as the first seal-trend sees a transformation from exterior conquest to interior enforcement and domination, so this second trend will also undergo a like transformation, with antichrist’s efforts now switching from the incitement of differences for the sake of creating political opportunities to an enforced homogenization of the realms under his control. As we can see from the juxtaposition of the elements in Daniel 7:25 above, a large portion of antichrist’s “changing of times and laws” will involve the forcible imposition of his satanic religion upon the world resulting in the persecution of believers. But the beast’s essential goal of completely eradicating the ingrained law of God at work in the human heart will not succeed despite all his draconian methods and policies imposed from above. God’s basic ground rules limiting the devil’s activities in human history have as an essential part of their purpose the preservation of each individual’s ability to choose for or against God in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, the extent to which the availability of the gospel of truth and the faithful following of Jesus through that truth will be attacked by the devil and the beast in the course of the Great Persecution will come closer to eradicating this essential principle than ever before in human history. Isaiah describes this development by prophesying that mankind will at this time “break the everlasting covenant” (Is.24:5), a reference to the effective removal to a significant and unprecedented degree of any ability to hear or receive the truth of the gospel or grow in the Word (cf. 2Pet.2:21).

The only previous worldwide precedent is the situation which obtained when Nimrod organized a similarly exclusive universal religion during the building of the tower of Babel (Gen.11:1-9).²⁷ As in that historical parallel, so in the case of antichrist’s religion and the Great Persecution it sponsors and spawns, God will not allow such things to continue forever or even to reach a point where faith is entirely wiped off the earth. This one fact alone should encourage the faithful who anticipate or experience these things. For an end will come to such evil, an end which the faithful will see with their own eyes if only they remain faithful to the end (Joel 2:30-32). It is also a certainty, given the perfect and gracious character of our God, that in no case will any individual who truly desires it be deprived of salvation or spiritual growth despite the severe

²⁷ See part 5 of The Satanic Rebellion: Judgment, Restoration and Replacement, section III.2, “Satan’s postdiluvian attack on human freedom (the Tower of Babel)”.

restrictions upon believers actual and potential in those days – for nothing is impossible for our God (Gen.18:14; Job 42:2; Jer.32:17; Matt.19:26; Lk.1:37; 18:27).

The descriptions throughout Revelation of the bulk of humanity at that future time indicate as we have pointed out before that mankind during those fateful days will be more hardened and more negative to the truth of the Word than ever before in human history, meaning that Satan’s progress will be as much a result as an original cause of the evil and apostasy that will obtain during the Great Tribulation. In part for this reason the changing of times and laws will go well beyond the religious persecution with which this characteristic of the last days is linked in Daniel 7:25 above. The phrase “times and law” refers to the alteration by antichrist of customary practices and legal statutes respectively.²⁸ In his attempt to homogenize humanity, the beast will make every effort to neutralize both specifically statutory and more general norms of customary behavior (e.g., morality et al.). His purpose will be to cause every human being to break with the traditions of the past insofar as that can be achieved (in the same manner that cults strive to sever all of their victims’ prior associations the better to control them and command their loyalty).²⁹ As in the French revolution, we may expect some of these changes to be only mildly wrenching and awkward in their implementation – like the decimal system which is workable in some arenas for all its many faults (e.g., many things are more normally and naturally divisible by two or three or twelve, while “feet” and “pounds” are very needful and workable divisions for which the metric system has no suitable replacements). Other attempts are likely to be both more onerous and more unworkable (cf. the abolition of Sunday as a day of rest during the French revolution which soon resulted in draft animals dropping dead all over France). But unlike earlier examples, during the Great Tribulation the population of the earth will enjoy no respite from any of antichrist’s oppressive decrees until the return of Jesus Christ.

We may also anticipate in this respect, given antichrist’s adeptness at co-opting others (Dan.11:24; 11:39), that the biblical parallel we saw in the last installment of this series between the beast and the Seleucid king Antiochus Epiphanes will apply to some extent to antichrist’s methodology in this area as well. Antiochus Epiphanes, in addition to the proscriptive elements of his regime, also did much to make the inhabitants of his realm feel part of one nation despite their disparate ethnic backgrounds. He did so by aggressively spreading Greek culture and institutions throughout his kingdom, as well as by being very generous with his favors towards those who enthusiastically and wholeheartedly adopted this policy of cultural homogenization. Antiochus’ liberal use of Greek theaters and performance art, Greek military training institutions (specifically the *ephebate*), Greek coinage and economic standards, and Greek athletics

²⁸ The word “law”(Heb. *dhat*, תד) commonly refers to statutory law. On the significance of “times” (Heb. *’itiyim*, יתי) as referring to established customary practices which often have the force of “common law”, see Esther 1:13 “wise men knowing the times”, a phrase which in the context of that verse clearly sums up every aspect of “law and justice” both (cf. Est.1:19; 4:11; 4:16; 1:15; 1Chron.12:32; Jer.46:17).

²⁹ See the study, [Read your Bible: Protection against Cults.](#)

(establishing gymnasiums and palaestras throughout his realm) gave his supporters (likewise organized into Hellenic senates and assemblies) both the tangible means of expressing their devotion to this policy as well as an incentive to do so. At the same time, these new institutions became veritable litmus tests for all those who were reluctant to give up or compromise their traditions in favor of the Greek way (a conflict most clearly seen in Israel prior to and during Antiochus' persecution and the Maccabean revolt). History provides other examples of ruling elites co-opting useful members of indigenous, conquered societies by demanding allegiance to a common cultural norm (e.g., the Roman empire, the Goths, the British empire, and, in their own especially twisted ways, the Nazis and Communists), but it is likely that the degree of allegiance and the intrusiveness of the changes demanded by antichrist's party will be beyond anything yet witnessed.

In all this, the pattern set in the beast's assimilation of the seven kingdom empire of revived Rome will provide the model. We cannot say for certain, but it is possible and perhaps probable that the essential core of "culture" at the heart of this program of homogenization will be that of Babylon (and we can already see the spread of American culture in many of its more dubious aspects around the world today). If so, we may possibly see in the prophesied "purification" of human language that will be a part of the millennial blessings of the kingdom of the Messiah a divine reversal of antichrist's attempt to impose a single "tongue" upon all the inhabitants of the earth as well (Zeph.3:9).³⁰

Finally, the attempt on antichrist's part to make the union of peoples within the seven kingdoms as close as possible is certainly apparent in Daniel's prophecy of the great statue (Dan.2:39-43). In that passage we see beyond any question an attempt to accelerate the process of homogenization through intermarriage (compare the efforts of Alexander the Great in this regard), and it certainly stands to reason that this pattern will be applied to the entire world during the Great Tribulation. Coupled with his efforts in regard to social institutions, this attempt to join the entire world together "in the seed of man" (Dan.2:43) will be designed to accelerate the breaking down of cultural and social as well as of ethnic and nationalistic distinctions and political establishments, the better to further Satan's ultimate plan of eliminating any opportunity or place for faith by making the practice of following God stand out in stark relief against an otherwise undifferentiated and homogenous backdrop of satanic allegiance.

3. Economic Exploitation (seal #3):

And through [the same] seductive [methods] he will enter the strongest provinces (i.e., the seven nations) of the empire (i.e., Revived Rome), and will do what neither his fathers nor their fathers have done. He will distribute plunder, spoils and riches to his [followers] and will afterwards plot against the [remaining] powers (i.e., the three sub-coalitions of the southern alliance), but [will wait] for an opportune time.
Daniel 11:24

³⁰ i.e., Babylon's English to be replaced by Zion's Hebrew.

He (antichrist) will treat with [conspiratorial] gatherings in the [preeminent] powers (i.e., nations of military and monetary strength) with the help of [his] foreign god (i.e., the devil) whom he will greatly honor, and he will put these [individuals] in charge of the majority [populations], and will also distribute territories [to them] as a reward.
Daniel 11:39

In company with the description of the third horseman in Revelation 6:5-6 (covered in part 2B of this series) and the description of the mark of the beast and its economic consequences in Revelation 13:11-8 (see section VI below), these verses give us a taste of how antichrist will administer his realm worldwide in terms of economics. From all these passages (and indeed from what we know about the beast generally), it seems clear that the economic system that will obtain during the Great Tribulation will be merely one of gross exploitation, designed only to supply the military needs of antichrist's kingdom, to enrich his supporters, and to reduce everyone else to such a state of subsistence survival that the means of revolt will not lie readily to hand. The privileged Babylon will constitute an exception to this rule (Hab.1:11; 1:16-17; 2:6ff; Rev.17:1-6; 18:1-34), but this very fact will play no small role in the growing jealousy that will eventually contribute to her destruction (Rev.17:15-18).

4. Ruthless and Lawless Disregard for Life (seal #4):

Those who look at you will contemplate you; they will consider you: 'Is this the man who confounded the earth, who shook [the foundations of] the nations? He made the world like a desert, and trampled its cities underfoot. He did not let its prisoners go home.
Isaiah 14:16-17

Just as the beast's political, social, and economic policies during the Tribulation's final three and a half years as outlined in the sections immediately above will continue the patterns prophesied in the first three seal-trends (Rev.6), so we can see in the fourth seal-trend the continuing and accelerating ruthlessness and contempt with which antichrist will treat human life generally during the Great Tribulation. In the verses above, Isaiah 14:16-17, we can glean from the beast's "shaking of the earth" so that its "kingdoms trembled" the terror inspired by his methods. His making of the world "like a desert" and his "trampling of its cities" clearly reflects the devastation that antichrist will wreak upon the earth in the process of consolidating and administering his realm. Finally, we can also see in the statement that he "did not let its prisoners go home" a policy of widespread mistreatment of those enemies actual and potential not killed outright. This phrase without a doubt encompasses population deportation (cf. Is.23:6), hostage taking on a grand scale (Hab.1:9), and mass incarceration in concentration or prison camps (cf. Ps.79:11; 102:13-20; Is.14:2; 42:7; 49:9; 49:24-25; 51:14; 61:1; Zech.9:11-12; Lk.4:18).

VI. The Beast's Prophet and the Worldwide Anti-Christian Religion: Revelation 13:4-18

1. The Anti-Christian Religion and its Worldwide Expansion: Revelation 13:4-10

(4) And they worshiped the dragon because he gave his authority to the beast. And they [also] worshiped the beast, saying, “Who is like the beast? And who is able to make war with him?” (5) And a mouth was given to [the beast] to speak presumptuous things and blasphemies [against God]. And it was [also] given to him to do what he wished for forty-two months. (6) And he opened his mouth for [the purpose of] blasphemy against God, to blaspheme His Name and His dwelling and those who dwell in heaven (i.e., the family of God). (7) And it was given to [the beast] to make war on the holy ones (e.g., believers) and to conquer them (i.e., the Great Persecution). And authority was given to him over every tribe and people and language and race. (8) And all the inhabitants of the earth will worship [the beast], [that is, all] whose names are not [still] written in the book of life [where they were written] from the beginning of the world, [even the book] which belongs to the Lamb who was slain. (9) “If anyone has an ear, let him hear. (10) If anyone is [destined] for captivity [to captivity he will go]. If it is necessary for anyone to be put to death by the sword, by the sword he must be put to death. Herein lies the perseverance and the faithfulness of the holy ones.”

Revelation 13:4-10

They Worshiped the Dragon: The amazement the world will manifest at the beast’s pseudo-resurrection (Rev.13:3) along with his military successes (being now the effective ruler of the world as a result) spills forth at this point not only in the worship of antichrist himself, but also in the worship of his father, the dragon (i.e., the devil). It is to some extent a moot point whether or not these worshipers who will constitute the vast majority of the world’s population really understand that it is Satan and his antichrist they are worshiping and not the one true God and His true Messiah. For the beast will certainly represent himself as the latter so that there will also be no doubt about the representation in this worldwide religion of Satan as “true God” (cf. Ezek.31:11; Jn.12:31; 2Cor.4:4). Clearly, however, the world *ought* to know, inasmuch as antichrist’s reign in Jerusalem from the temple of God itself will be pursuant to his prior eviction of the two servants of God, Moses and Elijah, who, it will be recalled, mediated the trumpet judgments of warning (Rev.11:1-13; cf. Zech.4:14).

At the very least, therefore, it will be impossible for the world which now so enthusiastically worships not only antichrist but his father the devil as well not to know that whoever this new “god” may be, his right to be called such and to be worshiped as such is not uncontested. In other words, the “war in heaven” has now come to earth, and the world at this time will quickly and definitively be divided into two camps: those who accept the divinity of antichrist and his empowering “god”, and those who reject them, choosing instead to remain faithful to Him who is the one and only true God and His Son, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. As the Great Tribulation progresses, this essential opposition between the two camps will become even more pronounced, eventually manifesting itself in a mass persecution which begins with believing Israel (as we have already seen in chapter 12) then rapidly expands to include all believers worldwide after true Israel has been miraculously delivered (Rev.12:17). Thus the “war in

heaven” will continue on earth, reaching its climax as the beast and his father the devil summon all of their forces to fight against the Lord at the battle of Armageddon. But the fundamental point that we should come away with here is precisely that scripture is presenting the issue *as* a battle, a fight to the finish to decide once and for all “who is really God and who is His true Christ?” As believers in the truth, we may find this question somewhat nonsensical, and so in truth it is. However, that has not stopped Satan since before the creation of mankind from attempting to do everything in his power so that he might not only be viewed as God but also might assume that role in fact as well. For as impossible as this is, it should not be overlooked that such a complete reversal of reality is exactly what the devil has been lusting for since the beginning, namely, to replace God not only in his own thinking but also in actual practice, to shut Him out of the universe and to assume His role of rulership and authority. With the events of the mid-Tribulation now accomplished, the devil will proclaim these wild desires of his as the inevitable truth to come in the person of his own pseudo-Messiah, and will set in motion a process of attempting to complete and confirm this new regime in preparation for the final showdown with our God and His Christ at Armageddon. What this means for believers, of course, is the beginning of the most difficult time in the history of the world, the Great Tribulation, characterized and indeed defined in our cases by the Great Persecution.

The most effective, most dramatic, and most abhorrent means that the dragon and his antichrist will employ to consolidate their kingdom will be the establishment of a mandatory, worldwide religion designed to replace all genuine worship of the one true God with the worship of the beast and his father the devil instead. As Revelation 13:4 demonstrates, the population of the world at large, awed by recent events, will easily and readily put aside whatever scruples and reservations they may have had before and will enthusiastically embrace the worship of Satan and antichrist. Their reasoning and motivation is simple enough and is made crystal clear in our context: the dragon will be considered a legitimate object of worship “because he gave his authority to the beast”, and antichrist in turn will be regarded as such 1) because of his extraordinary person (exemplified in particular by his pseudo resurrection: “Who is like the beast?”), and 2) because of his extraordinary deeds (exemplified in particular by his conquest of the world, including his “defeat” of the two witnesses: “And who is able to make war with him?”).

Thus the world’s new-found reverence for the devil and their acceptance of him as “God” is a result of their prior conviction that antichrist is God’s divine representative on earth. While this may perhaps seem a somewhat unbelievable development to followers of the true Christ as we sit comfortable at home today, we would do well to remember the words of our Lord:

(10) And at that time many will fall away and will betray each other and will hate each other, (11) and many false prophets will arise and will deceive many. (12) Now because of the increase of lawlessness [at that time], the love of the many will cool. (13) But he who endures until the end, this [is the one who] will be saved.

Matthew 24:10-13

At that time if someone says to you "Look [(as they will tell you then)]! Christ is here!", or "Here [He is]!", do not believe [it]. For false christs and false prophets will arise and

will perform great miracles (lit., "signs") and wonders [sufficient] to deceive even the elect, if [that were] possible. Look [(as I am telling you now)]! I have told you ahead of time.

Matthew 24:23-25

The parallels between the beast and the true Messiah will be both deliberate and numerous. If, as Jesus tells us in the verse above, even the elect will be tempted to interpret the signs and wonders of antichrist as proof of his Messiahship, it is small wonder that those who have rejected the truth of Jesus Christ will be easily ensnared by the satanic lies of the beast and the dragon. For at this point, in addition to the signs and wonders mentioned above, antichrist will have defeated the “unbelieving nations” of the southern alliance in a “holy crusade” to deliver “Christendom and Israel” from Islamic tyranny; he will have defeated the “forces of evil” in the persons of Moses and Elijah who had for many months been “tormenting” the unbelieving population of the world (Rev.11:10); and he will have (to the eyes of the world) even risen from the dead. Following these unprecedented signs, he will take up residence in the temple of God in Jerusalem proclaiming himself to be God (1Thes.2:4), and setting about to begin the millennium of blessing prophesied in scripture as he rules from Jerusalem a united world without war. Not only will it be no wonder that unbelievers, attributing his feats to the supernatural authority of his father (which is indeed true enough), will accept him as divine, but it also follows logically for those viewing the circumstances in such a way that the imposition of a mandatory form of worship upon the entire world will seem reasonable and good in every way. Only those who know their God will be able to resist the incredible pressures to take part in the new phase of antichrist’s religion about to be unveiled and proclaimed worldwide. And it is likewise understandable that the satanic propaganda which has been around since pagan days which seeks to paint the true God as “a bad god” and Satan as “the good god” bent on replacing him will find a ready audience in all those whose names are no longer written in the book of life. Therefore one of the chilling ironies of the Great Persecution about to be unleashed against all who are determined to preserve their faith in Jesus even until death is that believers are going to be charged with “devil worship” by the very people who have in fact sold themselves to Satan. Our Lord’s words on the subject are important to remember in this regard, for they accused Him, the Son of God Himself, of being in league with the devil (Jn.8:48-59; cf. Mk.3:22-30), and He has assured us of the world’s hatred and persecution, because it hated and persecuted Him first (Jn.15:18-25).

Daniel 11:36-39 presents us with a similar picture of antichrist’s activities at the commencement of the Tribulation. Inasmuch as Daniel provides additional details, it will be helpful here to consider that passage together with its implications for the interpretation of Revelation 13:4-10.

(36) For [during the Great Tribulation] the king [antichrist] will consult only his own desire, and will exalt and magnify himself above every god, and against the God of gods he will speak astonishing things. He will have success until the [time of] indignation (i.e., the Great Tribulation) is complete, for [all this] has been firmly decreed to take place. (37) He will have no regard for the God of his fathers (i.e., the Lord), nor those favored by their wives, nor will he have regard for any god [at all], for he will exalt himself above them all. (38) And in His place he will honor a god of powers, even a god

whom his fathers did not know will he honor with gold and silver and precious stones and [all sorts of] delightful things. (39) He (antichrist) will treat with [conspiratorial] gatherings in the [preeminent] powers (i.e., nations of military and monetary strength; cf. Ezek.31:11; Jn.12:31; 2Cor.4:4) with the help of [his] foreign god (i.e., the devil) whom he will greatly honor, and he will put these [individuals] in charge of the majority [populations], and will also distribute territories [to them] as a reward.
Daniel 11:36-39

Verse 36: With the melting away of all military and political resistance worldwide, antichrist, “the king”, will have a free hand to carry out his own will (indistinguishable of course from the devil who spawned him), and so “will consult only his own desire”. Notwithstanding his unprecedented self-exaltation and self-magnification, and the temerity with which he will disparage the true King of Kings and Lord of Lords (i.e., he “will exalt and magnify himself above every god, and against the God of gods he will speak astonishing things”), he will yet enjoy “success until the time of indignation is complete”. This will happen not contrary to the will of God but in accordance with it: “for [all this] has been firmly decreed to take place”.

This is not the first time that our Lord has made sanctified use of secular, even evil agents in the cause of divine justice and holy judgment (though it is the most extreme). Egypt in the person of the Pharaoh of the Exodus (Ex. chap. 3-14), Assyria (Is.10:5-6), and historical Babylon (Jer.27:3-8), to name a few of the other most prominent examples, were all employed by God to render discipline upon rebellious Israel (along with other nations as well). As discussed above, the Tribulation, and the Great Tribulation in particular, is preeminently a time of divine judgment (cf. the chart of corresponding main trends given in section I.6 at the beginning of this study). Pharaoh, a type of antichrist as we have seen (in part 3B), is a particularly instructive parallel in the similarly unusual latitude he was allowed in opposing God to what was at that time an unprecedented degree (cf. Acts 12:21), but not without God’s permission and only with the purpose of demonstrating God’s power and glory (Ex.9:16). The fact that antichrist’s extension of his will and rule around the world is here prophesied in the Bible millennia before it actually comes to pass should be sufficient to show for all who believe scripture that the beast and his father Satan could never have brought things to this pass by their own efforts absent the permissive will of God. This, then, should remind us all that everything that will happen during those terrible days to come will not only be entirely within God’s hands, but will be important, even critical, to bringing about the end that He has ordained since before the heavens and the earth were created, namely, His complete refutation of evil in the process of thoroughly destroying the evil one and his works (1Jn.3:8; cf. Heb.2:14).

Verse 37: The phrase often translated “the desire of women” is not a reference to any particular pagan god, but represents the replacement or rather superceding of all other pagan activity by the new religion which worships only Satan and antichrist. In Jewish experience, foreign women were often the ones who led their husbands to idolatry (cf. Num.25:1-3; 1Kng.11:1-13), so that this phrase stands for all pagan influence in contrast to the “God of his fathers”. Not only will antichrist “have no regard for the God of his fathers” (i.e., the Lord), but will also not revere “those [gods and religions] favored by their wives”, and, indeed, will not even have any “regard

for any god [at all]”, but will instead “exalt himself above them all”. In place of both the worship of the one true God *and* all other pagan worship (wherein the satanic origins and effects may be presently concealed to one degree or another), antichrist’s new religion will put into place the direct worship of the devil (along with the worship of his son, the beast).

Verse 38: The pseudo-deity preferred by antichrist is described here as “a god whom his fathers did not know”, meaning that whatever the pagan unfaithfulness indulged in by the sons of Israel in times past, it was at least not clearly revealed to them that behind each of these pagan deities stood the angels of Satan and, ultimately, the devil himself. With the advent and full unveiling of antichrist and his religion, the subterfuge is over. The beast and with him the vast majority of the world’s population will honor Satan with offerings of “gold and silver and precious stones and [all sorts of] delightful things”, making pilgrimage to the new Mecca, Jerusalem, which is, figuratively speaking, “Sodom and Egypt” as long as antichrist holds court in the temple with his animated image on display in the temple court (Rev.11:8; cf. Dan.8:10-14; 11:31; Matt.24:15; Mk.13:14; 1Thes.2:4).

The devil, worshiped by the beast and the unbelieving world, is here described as a “god of powers”. This phrase reveals much about Satan, his kingdom, and his modus operandi. In contrast to the description “god of powers”, our God is a God of Power. That is to say, our God, the one true God, is omnipotent in every sense of that word, while the devil’s might, significant as it may be relative to minuscule human strength and capacity, is not to be compared to our Lord’s in any meaningful way. And while our God describes Himself as a God of love, mercy, and righteousness, Satan, lacking all of these truly impressive qualities, loves to describe himself in terms of his power.

(5) Then [Satan] took [Jesus] up and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in moment of time. (6) And the devil said to Him “I will give you *all this power* and all their glory – for it has been surrendered to me and [so] I [can] give it to whomever I please. (7) So if you will worship me, it (i.e., the power) will all be yours.”
Luke 4:5-7

While our Lord flatly rejected this offer with the words of Deuteronomy 6:13, “you shall worship the Lord your God, and Him alone shall you serve”, antichrist will unhesitatingly embrace it. For, like his father before him, “power” will be the ultimate good, the ultimate goal, the ultimate end.

It is worth considering that concentrating upon this material world and the charms of it, be they expressed in terms of power, or wealth, of fame, or possessions, or various and sundry pleasures, is fundamentally satanic and hostile by nature to true spirituality. For the quest for worldly security and worldly priorities through expediency and materialism is idolatry in its most quintessential form (cf. Eph.5:5; Col.3:5). Naturally (all *too* naturally) as fallible human beings, adopting a perfect standard of divorcing ourselves from such false values without at the same time falling into the equally dangerous trap of asceticism or withdrawal from the world is not an easy task. But it is important to note that every time we look for solutions or solace in the power

of things, people, organizations, movements, or nations, we are essentially playing the devil's game and esteeming what he esteems foremost, namely, fleshly solutions in place of spiritual ones. For he is "a god of [material rather than spiritual] powers". Given that it is important even now to beware of such a mind-set, and given that we ought rather to be taking pains to remember that God is in control regardless of what the eye may see, how much more will that not be true under the incredible pressures, challenges, and testing of the Great Tribulation!

Verse 39: The "preeminent powers" mentioned in this verse are the world's remaining power centers, nations, for the most part, but not exclusive of prominent organizations and individuals. Scripture gives a glimpse here of the methodology used by antichrist to consolidate his power worldwide after his mid-tribulational successes. The beast will essentially "franchise" his rulership around the world especially in far-flung places which have yet to feel the boot of his marching legions. The cost of the privilege of sharing in antichrist's rule in this way will be steep, including not only complete obedience in the carrying out of the will of the one who now "does what he pleases" without any restraint of any kind, but also the responsibility for propagating and enforcing the new mandatory religion of Satan worship (whom the beast will "greatly honor"), and it will only be through the continued, active support of the devil that this worldwide consolidation of power and expansion of the anti-Christian religion will be able to flourish (i.e., "with the aid of [his] foreign god"). But despite all his reliance on the power of human flesh and these "pillars" (literal "mighty fortresses" in the Hebrew), the beast and his armies are destined to be swept away by the terrible swift sword that proceeds from the mouth of the Son of God "on the day when the towers fall" (Rev.19:21; cf. Is.30:25; Jer.50:15; Amos 1:10; Zeph.3:6-15). No matter what our eyes may tell us, our faith assures us that our Lord is in complete control of the process of human history (cf. Is.37:26-29; 46:11; 48:3).

(8) Let all the earth fear the Lord. Let all the inhabitants of the world tremble before Him. For He spoke and it came into being. (9) He gave the command and it arose [out of nothing]. (10) The Lord shatters the plans of the nations. He frustrates the intentions of [the world's] peoples.
Psalm 33:8-10

They Worshiped the Beast (Revelation 13:4): Returning to our exegesis of Revelation chapter 13, as we have just seen from the parallel verses in Daniel, at that time it will be impossible to separate the worship of the devil and the worship of the beast. When the world of that dark day to come worships the devil, it will be "because he gave his authority to the beast". That is to say, the tangible "proof" of Satan's perceived "divinity" will be the successes of his pseudo-Messiah, antichrist. And it will be precisely these successes which produce the world's admiration, both his pseudo-resurrection ("who is like the beast?"), and his counterfeit Armageddon in defeating the vast southern alliance ("who is able to make war with him?"). Before the accomplishment of these two primary deceptions (and the domination of the world which followed), it was neither feasible from the standpoint of persuasion nor possible from the standpoint of political power either to reveal fully the nature of the new religion or to make it mandatory worldwide. The constellation of the events at the Tribulation's mid-point are what make possible (in company "with the help of [his] foreign god") antichrist's transformation of his rule from regional to

global. That transition will be both horizontal (i.e., geographic expansion until the entire surface of the globe renders him effective allegiance), and vertical (i.e., an increasing measure of loyalty and control within all political entities as well as all other power-nodes), with a corresponding degree of increased intensity in the demands he will make of those controlled. For immediately after his initial consolidation of power we can expect a greater requirement for allegiance to and participation in his cause and in his religion which will manifest itself most significantly in the Great Persecution about to be unleashed upon all who refuse such allegiance and participation.

A Mouth to Speak Presumptuous Things and Blasphemies (Revelation 13:5a): As we saw in our previous installment of this series, such temerity is a salient characteristic of antichrist (Dan.7:8; 7:20; 7:25; 8:25; 11:36; 2Thes.2:10-11; Rev.16:14; cf. 2Pet.2:10-12; Jude 1:8-10). Here, however, we have the beast taking his assault on the Person of God to unprecedented levels. Such presumption of deity for himself even as he denies it to the true God of the universe will both require and help to facilitate the unbelieving world's complete capitulation to the "empowerment of error" prophesied in 2nd Thessalonians 2:11.³¹

The Forty-Two Months (Revelation 13:5b): At this time, antichrist will be restrained in only a very minimal way from doing all he pleases. Instead, a free hand will be "given" to him to implement his satanic plans for one world rule, including the destruction of believers and the elimination of any possible avenue for faith and faithfulness. As it says in Daniel 11:36, "he will consult only his own will". It is this removal of restraint through the permissive will of God that will make the second half of the Tribulation "Great" in every negative aspect that word can bear. As believers who may potentially be called upon to endure those terrible days, we must keep in mind that, indeed, it is only because God allows it that such things can happen, and, if God allows it, He is doing so for good, especially for our good, even if the "good" will be veiled from our sight for a time during those days (Rom.8:28).

Call to remembrance the former things from the beginning of creation (lit., "eternity"). For I am God – no other One exists. [I am] God – and there is nothing like Me. Since the [very] beginning, I have been making known the end. Since [eternity] past, things that have not yet been done. [I am the One who] says, "My purpose shall stand", and "***I will accomplish all My good pleasure***".

Isaiah 46:9-10

Blasphemy against the Name, Dwelling, and People of God (Revelation 13:6): This listing of the objects of antichrist's blasphemy indicates that his opposition to God at the behest of his father the devil has now become an overt "crusade". At this juncture, the beast will begin to attack not only the Person of God (i.e., His holy "Name"), but also "His dwelling and those who dwell in heaven". The Greek root common to both "dwelling" and "dwell" in this verse is *sken-*

³¹ For a full discussion of this facilitation of unbelieving hardness of heart, see The Coming Tribulation: Part 3A, section II.3.a, "The unleashing of the 'mystery of lawlessness'".

(σκην-), and has the literal meaning “tent” (from which we derive our English word “scene”, from the changing of the “tent” or canvas backdrop in Greek dramatic presentations). This usage is significant, because, after all, God is merely “tenting” in the third heaven at present, and “those who tent with Him”, that is, the eternal family of God, are also only there on a temporary basis as well, for the rightful place of God and all who belong to Him is the earth (the ultimate of the seven Edens: Rev.21-22).³² These verbal attacks upon elect angels and victorious believers are thus antichrist’s way of representing their presence in heaven as somehow illegitimate, while his blasphemy against “the dwelling of God” suggests that he and his father Satan likewise regard the Lord’s continued physical presence in “their” universe as offensive. In this horrendous reversal of all that is right and righteous, we see clearly the depths not only of outrage to which the devil and his son are capable of sinking, but the essential madness their unbridled arrogance has produced. At the heart of all lies and slander one finds the erroneous assumption that verbalizing falsehoods can somehow make them realities. Despite the damage that such active disparagement and deceit can do, the idea that God could somehow be affected or diminished through any means (especially mere words) can only be understood to arise from the same self-induced insanity that will produce the Armageddon campaign wherein the devil, the beast, and the false prophet will attempt to overthrow our Lord Himself by physical force (cf. Rev.19:11-21).

War against the Holy Ones (Revelation 13:7a): As was the case in Revelation 12:17, this is of course a reference to the Great Persecution. Scripture describes it as a “war”, not because believers will take up arms against the beast but because despite what we may think or feel under the pressures of that time our suffering will be a part of the larger invisible conflict that has been underway since Satan’s rebellion began. We are indeed soldiers in this war, but our weapons are spiritual ones, the “panoply of God” (Eph.5:10-17; cf. Rom.13:12; 2Cor.10:4; 1Thes.5:8). What will transpire on earth, therefore, will only be a reflection of the true realities taking place beyond our ken. We should thus make every effort before the time to fortify ourselves with faith (rather than with material means), that we may avoid the equally devastating mistakes of allowing ourselves to plunge into despair on the one hand (thus forgetting that we are soldiers in our Lord’s army and that He is glorified through our persistent faithfulness), or of allowing ourselves to be caught up in human solutions such as opposing antichrist in a material way (thus forgetting that God is our mighty fortress, our strength, our shield, and our sword). For this scripture tells us explicitly that “it was given to [the beast] to make war on the holy ones *and to conquer them*”, so that beyond all argument the Great Persecution will come about through the permissive will of God, and the suffering and martyrdom which results will be unavoidable. Let us not forget that all this will be according to our Lord’s good pleasure and for His great glory – and for our ultimate blessing and inheritance in His eternal kingdom, if we but trust Him in that dark hour and stay faithful to Him no matter what the cost or the consequences.

(21) I was watching, and this horn (i.e., antichrist) was *waging war* with the holy ones (i.e., believers). And he was prevailing over them (i.e., “*conquering them*”), (22) until

³² See part 1 of the Satanic Rebellion series, section II.6, “The Seven Edens”.

the Ancient of Days came (i.e., our Lord's second advent) and rendered judgment on behalf of the holy ones of the Most High, and the time came when the holy ones ***took possession of the Kingdom.***

Daniel 7:21-22

Authority over Every Tribe, People, Language and Race (Revelation 13:7b): In the Greek text, antichrist's "authority over every tribe and people and language and race" follows directly after and is phrased in a parallel way to his conquest of believers. He has power over both because it is "given to him". The parallelism between the two also shows that antichrist's initiation of the Great Persecution is interconnected with the worldwide authority he will assume. In the prior history of the world, there was always some haven to which persecuted believers could flee with the help of our God, and thus find shelter from the storm. On that terrible day to come, however, no such refuge will exist. For the beast will be given through the permissive will of God an authority over the world which no one since Nimrod has enjoyed. Like Nimrod, antichrist will use his control over the world's population to create an atmosphere of compulsion for the express purpose of opposing God (as in the case of the tower of Babel). The opposite side of this coin of course will be the active oppression of any and all who do not embrace antichrist, his religion, and his anti-God agenda, with the beast's growing control over every aspect of life on earth facilitating a persecution which will be unlike anything the world has yet witnessed (and that is saying quite a lot: Matt.24:21). The rapidity with which the nations of the world will fall into line will be expedited by antichrist's delegation of the process of consolidation to a highly organized chain of command beginning with his trusted associates, his "party", prominent groups and individuals in the newly subordinated countries, and to specific nation states as well, all chosen for their power, influence, and absolute loyalty to the beast (Dan.11:39). Yet none of this would be possible unless our God permitted it, and we have faith that in His doing so everything is working out for our good and for His glory.

The Book of Life (Revelation 13:8): At this time, the vast majority of the world's population will accept antichrist as the Messiah and his father Satan as God and will worship them as such, that is "[all] whose names are not [still] written in the book of life [where they were written] from the beginning of the world, [even the book] which belongs to the Lamb who was slain". The reader's close attention to the precise translation is solicited at this point since this verse is often mistranslated and even more frequently misunderstood. As sinners at birth, none of us is worthy of eternal life by our own merits and therefore all are equally unworthy of being included in any "book of [eternal] life". Absent divine intervention, we would all instead suffer the just condemnation for the record of sins we have and will commit in this world (through our own volition). Blessedly beyond all expression God ***has*** intervened in the Person of His Son, and through His precious blood has redeemed us, paying the price in the priceless coin of the blood of Christ for all the sins of every single person who has ever lived. As a result, all human beings have their name written in "the book of life" since the beginning of the world, for Christ's sacrifice was ordained and valid from the time of God's original decree (Rom.3:25-26; Eph.1:4; 1Tim.2:6). Only by ***rejecting*** God and His solution in the Person of Christ and His work is anyone's name "blotted out" of the book, whether this is an active process as in the case of those who reject God in preference for the beast, or a passive one in the case of those who, though

never definitively rejecting God, yet refuse to come to Him before their days on earth expire (see Matt.22:1-14 for the two categories where coming to the wedding banquet without proper attire represents the passive rejection of not having received the clean garment of God's righteousness through faith; cf. Dan.12:1; Lk.10:20; Phil.4:3; Rev.3:5; 17:8; 20:12; 20:15):

May the [godless] be blotted out of the Book of Life, and may they not be recorded with the righteous.

Psalm 69:28

“And now, if You will forgive their sin, [fine]. But if not, [then] please blot my name out of Your book which You have written.” But the Lord said to Moses, “The one who sins against Me, him will I blot out of My book.”

Exodus 32:32-33

As is true even today, the unbelievers at that time will not recognize what was behind the humiliation and suffering of the true Christ in our place or accept its necessity. As a result, they will easily (and wrongly) accept and exult in the glorification of the anti-Christ”. As it says in 2nd Thessalonians 2:10, “they perish because they refuse to believe”. Such is the “empowerment of error” which will prevail so mightily in the darkened hearts of the followers of the beast at that time.³³

“If anyone has an ear to hear, let him hear” (Revelation 13:9): We have seen this exhortation before in our study of the seven churches of Revelation chapters two and three. In fact, this same exhortation in nearly identical phrasing occurs in each of Christ's messages to the seven churches (Rev.2:7; 2:11; 2:17; 2:29; 3:6; 3:13; 3:22), which, as we have seen, represent the seven periods of the Church Age (see Part 2A of this series). This is the only *other* place in Revelation where we find this exhortation, and that is highly significant. The second important thing to understand about this phrase is that it is looking forward here, not backward. In other words, the exhortation addresses the coming persecution of the Church during the Tribulational period and the advice given believers in verse ten regarding the necessity of perseverance. It is to these words in God's own voice that the exhortation points, and, specifically (on the basis of the parallel of the other seven passages where this phrase occurs), to Christ's own words directed to His Church on earth at the Tribulation's mid-point about to enter the Great Persecution. This message will be one of great importance to the believers of that time, and is comparable in its significance to the other exhortations to pay close attention such as the one to Laodicea which is addressed to us today (Rev.3:14-22). Just as our Lord outlined the most important characteristics and failings of the seven periods of the Church, exhorting each to take the appropriate corrective action, so here we find our Savior giving what in His perfect view is the most important advice for those of us destined to experience that final time of testing, and we would indeed do well to “give ear” to His words.

³³ See The Coming Tribulation: Part 3A: From the Seventh Seal to the Two Witnesses, section II.3.a, “The unleashing of the ‘mystery of lawlessness’”.

The Perseverance of the Holy Ones (Revelation 13:10): What we have here then is not only a preview of the Great Tribulation to come from the believer's point of view. What we have here are the direct words of Jesus Christ to us, summing up the attitude and the perspective that will be necessary for us to adopt and maintain should our Master call upon us to endure those terrible days ahead. The first thing to notice about this verse is that it presents only two possibilities for the experience of believers during the time of the Great Persecution: martyrdom and imprisonment. That is not to say that there will be no other possible outcome for those of us who face the pressures of that fiery furnace to come, but the fact that our Lord gives us only these *two* eventualities to consider when we contemplate the possibility of our participation in those future events is highly significant. The fact is that martyrdom and imprisonment will be so common that it will be folly to assume that somehow "we" will escape one or the other or both. We may very well do so, but for our spiritual health and spiritual survival the most essential armor we can don in preparation for the crucible of the Great Persecution will be the mind-set of complete obedience and patient submission to the will of God whatever that may be *in full recognition and acceptance of the fact ahead of time* that such obedience and submission may very well and may even very likely require that we endure imprisonment and or martyrdom at the hands of antichrist. For at no time in human history will it be more important for believers to be properly attuned to the will of God for their lives. And it will be of critical importance for all of us who must run this gauntlet to understand fully and completely that should such be our lot, that lot has been allotted by our Lord Himself, serves His purposes, glorifies Him, and is not a result of our failings, but rather is the ultimate opportunity to demonstrate our love and responsiveness to Him for the sacrifice of sacrifices He made for us.

The comparative experience of Peter and John is illustrative of this. Both men were apostles of the Lamb, both great believers, both authors of significant portions of the Word of God. Without the benefit of scripture, we would be hard-pressed to guess which of the two would be a candidate for martyrdom while the other was to be spared that particular fate for continued ministry. But John 21:18-19 records how our Lord Jesus told Peter ahead of time that it was his destiny likewise to glorify God with a martyr's death. Upon hearing this, Peter immediately asked about John, "Lord, what about this one?" (Jn.21:21). To this Jesus responded, "If I want him to remain until I come [back], what does that have to do with you? You follow Me!" (Jn.21:22). In a similar way, our Lord is telling us here to be accepting of the imprisonment and martyrdom that may be destined to come our way, even if, in the end, we are spared such a fate. For it is true that there will be surviving believers who will "be caught up to meet the Lord in the air" (1Thes.4:17; cf. 1Cor.15:51-52), but it is entirely the Lord's decision whose role it will be to endure until the end, and who will be removed from this life in a death that glorifies Him in a very special way. We cannot know before the fact what our particular destiny will be in this respect, but one thing is certain as this passage makes clear: in order to cope with the tribulation of those days we must arm ourselves ahead of time with the proper attitude of accepting God's will for our Savior's glory, even if that entails imprisonment or martyrdom or both. Revelation 13:10 is itself a quote or paraphrase of Jeremiah 43:11, and it is significant that the Jeremiah passage occurs in the context of divine judgment upon *unbelievers* who had defied God's will and out of fear had fled to Egypt instead of staying in the place of blessing. In our verse the

Great Tribulation has temporarily overturned the natural order of things, and we see the righteous receiving what the wicked deserve. Yet we are confident that our God will never abandon or forsake us, and that none of this will transpire apart from the will of God, to the glory of God, and in anticipation of a swift reversal of our fortunes in a most dramatic way at our Lord Jesus' imminent return. But we must wait patiently for that day and guard against fighting antichrist's minions (that must be left to the Lord) or fleeing from them (unless and until our Lord directs us to do so). Herein lies "the perseverance and the faithfulness" of all of us blessed to be included in the number of His "holy ones".

Characteristics of the New Religion: Before moving on, it needs to be stressed at this point that despite the inherent horrors of antichrist's universal religion of Satanism and the terrors it will hold for all who refuse to bow down to it, we should not think that it will be for those reasons a system of worship that most people find oppressive and abhorrent but are only embracing out of necessity. As suggested in part 3A of this series, the situation will be much to the contrary. As in the case of many cults, beyond the obvious mind-control and group coercion, there is always also an element that appeals to and even legitimizes the secret desires of many if not most of its members. Just as we would be mistaken to imagine the devil as some horrible looking creature when in fact he was made beautiful (Ezek.28:12-13) and even now masquerades as "a messenger of light" (2Cor.11:14), so in the case of the worldwide cult designed to worship him, rather than imaging some repulsive collection of odd and onerous rituals, we would do better to understand this new religion as something that most people will find incredibly appealing (cf. Nah.3:4 and the harlot analogy generally: Rev.17:1-5; 17:15-16; 19:2). Cults often attract new adherents by promising them a welcoming and friendly society, and by offering them a "deeper" spiritual relationship through initiation into "secret doctrines and mysteries" unavailable elsewhere. And if in the process they also appeal to the hidden desires of the new initiate (be they of either an ascetic or licentious nature), then their appeal can seem irresistible. The unique feature of the beast's religion will be, as we have seen, a syncretism of all such elements, allowing virtually every human being to clothe his or her base desires in the mantle of religion, in a friendly and welcoming environment, and with the conviction that the "truth" is thus being sought, and the "true God" thus being served, to the end that "true eternal life" may be earned (such as antichrist seems to exhibit in his feigned rise from the dead).

One of the trends visible in our own day is the increasingly meticulous concern large segments of the population are showing towards their dietary regimes even as they are less and less bothered by sexual indiscretions – as if God were greatly concerned about the former and little about the latter when in fact exactly the opposite is the case. The beast's religion is prophesied to take great advantage of this trend, fulfilling the deep-seated need to "do something" about holiness on the one hand (i.e., practicing a pseudo-holiness of dietary restraint), while having one's true sins and indiscretions excused and even justified on the other (i.e., it is probable that antichrist's religion will, in the manner of pagan cults, include all varieties of sexual practices as "acts of worship", even as the one divinely authorized venue for sexual activity, marriage, is denigrated).

The Spirit explicitly says that in the end times certain men will rebel from the faith, giving their allegiance [instead] to deceitful spirits and demonic doctrines. With their own consciences seared away and speaking with the hypocrisy of men [who peddle] lies, they will [instruct their victims] to refrain from marriage, and to keep away from certain foods

1st Timothy 4:1-3a

Perspicuous in the verses above is the perverse reversal of God's natural order of things as marriage is discouraged – but not sexual practice of all sorts, both natural and unnatural. Inhabitants of urban 21st century America may well wonder what great change this will represent from contemporary practices. Nevertheless, there will be a decided change for the worse as the incipient trends now visible burst into full flood, are blessed by the state and the state religion, and become mandatory for all loyal citizens of antichrist's world state. And while believers will have as much trouble accepting this degraded and degrading behavior as they do accepting antichrist, the partisans of antichrist will be disposed by the darkness of their minds to embrace his religious strictures even as they have been drawn to embrace him – a phenomenon which cannot be disentangled from the prior rejection of the truth of God:

I have come in My Father's Name, and you do not accept Me; but if someone else comes in his own name, you will accept him.

John 5:43

Of course, this new Satanic religion will not spring out of nowhere. It will be a development, expansion, and consummation of the religious movement developed by the beast in Babylon and elsewhere which was instrumental in his rise to power in the first place. In part 3A of the present study, we saw this religion in its incipient and growth phases.³⁴ Here in chapter 13 we now see it in its implementation phase, spreading under the umbrella of the beast's protection both horizontally (i.e., to every corner of the world) and vertically (i.e., becoming an ever more intrusive part of the daily lives of all the inhabitants of the world). The logical extension of the world's acceptance of antichrist as God and the true Messiah as a result of his extraordinary successes and personal "rise from the dead" will be the universal forced conversion of all humanity, marginalizing, then ostracizing, then persecuting, then executing all who refuse to join and participate.

In general terms, the religion of the beast will stress the material and the visible over against invisible spirituality of which, of course, it will be completely bereft. And in all of its worldly manifestations it will attempt to mimic the outward appearance of Christian forms (although this will be more in terms of the "traditional" forms of the church visible as opposed to genuine Christian faith and practice). One thing that will be noticeably missing from antichrist's "church" will be the Bible. For while false religions often have some doctrinal focal point or

³⁴ See The Coming Tribulation: Part 3A: From the Seventh Seal to the Two Witnesses, section II.3.c, "The rise of false teaching".

other, it behooves any organization that is in truth no part of the truth to maintain “flexibility” about the truth. In other words, when an organization or movement is built upon lies, the freedom to continue lying without restraint or fear of contradiction is crucial. For this reason, we may expect that with his “revelation” as the Son of God, antichrist will expect the world to accept his words as fully sufficient and authoritative since they come from “God”. What need will the world then have for an outdated, outmoded written Bible when they now have the purported author to worship in person? It is worth noting in this regard that, in effect, this is where we find much of contemporary Christianity in our present Laodicean age of spiritual lukewarmness. For while many so-called Christian churches and organizations pay lip service to the Bible (and we imagine that the beast and his religion will do so as well), in terms of practice and application the scriptures often take a distant second place to entertainment, self-help, motivational speaking, emotional appeals, pop-psychology, and “worship”. For many groups, therefore, the adoption of the beast’s religion in both name and practice will sadly mean very little change in either outward appearance or inward effect.

1. Its Ultimate Object of Worship: As our context of Revelation 13:4 makes clear, “the dragon and the beast” will be the ultimate objects of worship in this new religion. So while there will be other focuses of worship and veneration as well (e.g., the idolatrous cult statue in the temple court and the false prophet), the world will have no excuse – Satan and his antichrist will replace the Lord God Almighty and His true Christ in the active worship in which the unbelieving world will now orgiastically indulge. The prior apostasy of one third of the Church, coupled with the removal of Holy Spirit restraint, and the empowerment of error spoken of in 2nd Thessalonians 2:11, will, as we have seen, contribute mightily to the rapidity and the totality of the world’s rush to embrace the devil and the beast:

(10) And [the little horn] (i.e., antichrist) magnified himself against the host of heaven, and he cast down to the earth some of the host (i.e., believers seduced into apostasy) and some of the stars (i.e., angels seduced into rebellion) and he trampled them underfoot (i.e., destruction by association). (11) He even magnified himself against the Prince of the host (i.e., Christ). The daily sacrifice was abolished by him, and the holy place (i.e., the inner court) was desecrated. (12) And along with the daily sacrifice, ***the host*** (i.e., believers) ***fell into his power on account of [the] rebellion*** (i.e., the Great Apostasy). And he threw truth to the ground, and was successful in whatever he did.
Daniel 8:10-12

2. Its Ultimate Place of Worship: Just as antichrist proclaims himself to be the true Messiah and makes every attempt to support that claim in ways that would, “if possible”, deceive even the elect (Matt.24:24), so Jerusalem and the temple of God are not accidentally chosen as the supreme place of worship. The idea of substitution is clear in everything that the beast and his father Satan will do in this regard, for it has ever been the devil’s desire to replace God, so that the installing of his son on the throne of God with himself enshrined as the ultimate object of creature worship is in many respects the fulfillment of a dream which has been millennia in the making. Indeed, Satan will take pains during this entire period to represent this time as the beginning of “the Millennium”. For, after all, the true Millennium begins following the

revelation of Jesus Christ, the defeat of His enemies at Armageddon, and His installment in the temple at Jerusalem as the Ruler of the world. To the unbelieving world, antichrist's pseudo-resurrection, conquest of the southern alliance, and usurpation of the temple and Jerusalem for his own use will fit this bill. Needless to say, the ensuing three and half years, the time of greatest tribulation in world history, will hardly seem "millennial", but the selection of Jerusalem as the supreme place of worship will contribute to the persuasiveness of the beast's claims and to the acceptance by the unbelieving world of his new universal religion. For not since the tower of Babel will the world be thus so completely "united" in a political sense, or have a single unifying religious center and motivation as it will have at that time as antichrist begins his rule from Jerusalem with the intent of putting all of *his* enemies under his feet – if they refuse to worship him.

3. Its Ultimate Priest: As with all of the other supreme foci of the beast's religion, so in the case of the "clergy" we can expect to see a deliberate usurpation of both true and traditional Christianity in antichrist's system. There is, of course, nothing biblical about Roman Catholicism's "pope", but the false prophet will indeed be a true "vicar" or substitute for antichrist, serving him in a way that falsely parallels the true Christ but in reality models antichrist and the devil (e.g. the false prophet has "two horns like a lamb", but "speaks like a dragon": Rev.13:11). We may expect this to be the case with the other lesser "clergy" as well, especially considering that in all probability antichrist will make use of already existing clergy who are co-opted into his new universal religion, so that any distinction as seen by the world between the beast's church and the "Christian church" will be difficult to draw (since in most cases it will be a question of the same people in the same buildings employing many of the same rituals only now committed to worshipping the beast "as Christ"). In general terms, we can expect antichrist's new clergy to be extremely persuasive (cf. Matt.24:23-24; Col.2:16-23; 2Thes.2:3-12; 1Tim.4:1-8; 2Tim.3:1-13; 2Pet.2:1 - 3:18; Jude 1:4-16).³⁵

4. Its Ultimate Sign of Membership: Believers in Jesus Christ have as their sign and as their seal of divine ownership the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit (2Cor.1:21-22; Eph.1:13-14; 4:30; cf. Rom.8:9:-17; Rev.7:1-3). Antichrist's substitute for this true yet invisible sign is, once again in keeping with the pattern above, a false, visible sign, the "mark of the beast" (covered in section VI.3 below).

5. Its Ultimate Promise: Given that the beast has been "restored to life", it is likely that the promise of a similar reward will be given to those who embrace his religion, especially in the context of antichrist's claim to be the true Messiah. It should be noted in this connection, however, that rather than being a universal good promised to all, as in the case of the true resurrection of the righteous, we may instead expect this false promise of resurrection to be qualified, offered only to the few who distinguish themselves in loyalty, and thus used as a goad to spur the "faithful" on to ever greater degeneracy and fanaticism. Moreover, the type of

³⁵ See The Coming Tribulation: Part 3A: From the Seventh Seal to the Two Witnesses, section II.3.c.1, "The persuasiveness of tribulational false teaching".

“eternal life” being offered will be along the same lines of materiality we see in every other aspect of the beast’s religion, namely, the continuation (or revivification) of the sordid and (apart from God) pointless temporal life that is humanity’s lot, rather than any true transformation. That so many around the world will find this offer appealing is almost a cause for pity, especially considering that antichrist will be incapable of making good on this promise in even a single instance.

6. Its Ultimate Sacrifice: It is a common-place in literature to portray those who make a “deal with the devil” as having “sold their souls”. And it is true that the unbelieving world of that future time, by their embracing of the beast’s religion, will have likewise embraced their own condemnation, willfully rejecting through the worship of antichrist and his father Satan the grace and mercy in Jesus Christ that God was eager to give them freely (cf. Jonah 2:8). However, the true nature of the “bargain” is this: they have forsaken eternal life and spiritual riches beyond calculation for the sake of some trifling and, in many cases, totally disgusting short-lived material benefits. In other words, like Esau, the unbelieving world of that time will sell en masse “their birthright for a mess of pottage” (Heb.12:16). To those concerned, the bargain will actually seem reasonable, for it will involve substituting present persecution endured for the sake of intangible advantages (which their hearts blinded by unbelief find incredible) for tangible “benefits” in the here and now (cf. the pattern of Is.57).

7. Its Ultimate Service: As in the case of its ultimate sacrifice, the ultimate service for believers in antichrist and his religion will reflect a sick parallelism to genuine Christianity. After the pattern of our Savior (e.g., Jn.13:1-17), true Christians are committed to service for the sake and the benefit of their fellow believers, seeking their spiritual growth and welfare above all else (Rom.14:19-21). For adherents of the religion of the beast, however, “the ultimate service” will not be edification but destruction, namely, the betrayal of all who refuse to accept antichrist in preference for the true Christ.

2. The False Prophet: Revelation 13:11-15

(11) And I saw another beast (i.e., the false prophet: cf. Rev.16:13; 19:20; 20:10) rising up from the earth, and he had two horns like a lamb, but he spoke like a dragon. (12) And he [will] act with all the authority of the first beast [while] in his presence, and he [will] make the world and all its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose mortal wound was healed. (13) And [the beast’s false prophet] [will] perform great miracles (lit., “signs”), even making fire come down from heaven to the earth in front of everyone. (14) And he [will] deceive those who dwell upon the earth on account of the miracles (lit., “signs”) which have been given to him to perform in the presence of the beast, even commanding the inhabitants of the earth to make an image of the beast, [that is] of him who received the [deadly] stroke of the sword and [yet] came [back] to life. (15) And it was given to him to provide a spirit for the image of the beast so that the image might speak, and [it was also given to him] to bring it about that as many as refused to worship the image of the beast might be put to death.

The beast rising up from the earth: The first beast's rising from the sea is in part, as we have seen, an indication of his non-human paternity. The fact that this second beast's origin is also described in unusual terms in that he will rise up "from the earth" likewise may be taken as an indication that he too is not completely human (cf. Rev.19:20 where both are cast into the lake of fire without the trial of a last judgment that all created by God in His image do undergo).³⁶ This false trinity stands in the greatest possible contrast to the genuine Trinity. For while Father, Son and Holy Spirit share a single divine essence, three unique and individual Persons though they are, in the devil's counterfeit version we see Satan himself, being merely an angel, dominant in this relationship over two abominable creatures of his own making, both part angelic and so not truly human, one of whom is his direct seed (Gen.3:15), and the other this first beast's false prophet (cf. Rev.16:13; 19:20; 20:10). None of these three, it goes without saying, are divine, but this does not preclude such a claim, and, indeed, the world will for the most part gladly pay these three divine honors while enthusiastically persecuting those who refuse to do so.

He [will] act with all the authority of the first beast: Another clear contrast between the true Trinity and Satan's pseudo-trinity is that while the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are coequal, there is a clear hierarchy in the counterfeit version. The first beast receives his power and authority from the devil (Rev.13:2; 19:20), just as in our context the second beast receives his power and authority as a clear subordinate of the first beast. In this respect we see another deliberate (though false) parallel between the high priest and the head of state in the original Jewish monarchy. As believers in the only true God, we understand very well that Jesus is both the ultimate King *and* the ultimate High Priest "in the order of Melchizedek", having offered Himself on the cross as the only sacrifice sufficient to cleanse us from our sins (Ps.110:4; Heb.4:14; 5:5-10; 6:19; 7:1-3; 8:1-2). Antichrist, however, will ignore the true Savior's redemptive work and will instead stress the regal aspects of the Messiah who is destined to institute the worldwide "kingdom of heaven". For those who reject Jesus and His work on the cross (i.e., the true functioning of His priesthood) and choose instead to accept antichrist's claim to be the legitimate ruler of the world, it will seem reasonable that there should be a new high priest to conduct the worship of the first beast and his father (the devil).

Two horns like a lamb, but he spoke like a dragon: Herein we see yet another difference between the true Trinity and the devil's counterfeit version. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit each have very clearly defined and very clearly necessary roles in the plan of God. But in the case of the false prophet, one finds no such clear role. For while the devil falsely assumes the role of God with antichrist as his false Messiah, the second beast bears absolutely no resemblance to the third Person of the true Trinity, the Holy Spirit. And it is no wonder that the

³⁶ It is interesting to note that, like antichrist who is the preeminent antitype of many other lesser "antichrists" (2:18-22; 4:3), so in the case of this premier "false prophet" scripture describes him as an exemplar, so to speak, of other lesser false prophets (Matt.24:23-24; 2Pet.2:11; 4:1).

false trinity should lack such a presence since it and the false religion it represents, encompasses and propagates is entirely fixated upon the material realm, having no part in anything which is truly spiritual. That is one reason why the false prophet is described as he is here, namely, as outwardly resembling a lamb but speaking like a dragon. For while it is very true that the false prophet will seek to establish and support antichrist's claim of Messiahship (hence the horns of the lamb) and will in so doing actually be furthering Satan's plan (i.e., speaking like a dragon), it is also the case that this person's significance is not only less than the other two members of the pseudo-trinity but is also entirely dependent upon them, a fact which by itself gives the lie to all of the false claims of divinity for this trio (at least for anyone who is still paying the slightest attention to scripture).

He [will] make the world and all its inhabitants worship the first beast: This phrase demonstrates that the second beast, the false prophet, will take the lead in the administering of antichrist's religion, both in terms of its expansion and also in the implementation of the compulsory aspects of it, including the Great Persecution which mandatory conversion will occasion in the case of all who refuse. The administrative and cultic center of this new religion will not be Rome, as many have surmised, but Jerusalem. For it is in Jerusalem that the beast will take his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God, and it is in the temple court that the statue of the beast, the "abomination which causes [spiritual] desolation" will be erected (Dan.11:31; Matt.24:15; Mk.13:14). Thus the temple and the idol then associated with it will be the new religion's focal point from the middle of the Tribulation onward. And it will be in front of the temple and its idol that the false prophet will perform his miracles, acting with antichrist's authority "in his presence" (Rev.13:12; 13:13). In his implementation of the first beast's false religion, we see the second beast following the pattern of counterfeiting true forms and practices, and, specifically now that the focus of worship has moved to the temple in Jerusalem, of paralleling the Mosaic Law with a series of practices designed to resemble the truth even as they propagate satanic lies:

1. False Pilgrimage: In the law, all males in Israel are commanded to present themselves before the Lord on three occasions every year, i.e., at the Passover, the festival of first fruits, and the feast of Tabernacles (Ex.23:14-17). We may infer from the testimony given in our context to the effect that the false prophet will "deceive those who dwell upon the earth on account of the miracles which have been given to him to perform *in the presence* of the beast" that many individuals, especially those of any sort of prominence, will be expected to make what amounts to a similar "pilgrimage" to Jerusalem during those 42 months in order to worship at the feet of the beast, paying homage to him and to his idol under the watchful eye of the false prophet (compare the behavior of Nebuchadnezzar vis-à-vis the idol of gold which he had erected on the plain of Dura in Babylon: Dan.3:1-12).

2. False Worship: It is likely that the false prophet will represent himself as the high priest of Israel (though scripture does not give him that title possibly for the very good reason that he is not so in fact), and that much of the ritual carried on in and around Jerusalem at this time, illegitimate though it is, will closely parallel the historical temple rite (i.e., the appointment of

divisions of priests, the reconstruction of all the trappings and paraphernalia of the Aaronic priesthood, and the continuation of various rules and regulations; although apparently not sacrifices per se: cf. Dan.9:27). It is the case that this show of historicity will in truth have nothing to do with the original temple worship, or the worship re-instituted by Moses and Elijah, or the millennial temple worship reestablished by the true Messiah. But to those who have been deceived to the point of accepting antichrist as the Christ, restoration of the temple rite at least in some form or other far from being surprising will indeed be expected of this pseudo-Messiah who has now come to Jerusalem to begin his “millennial reign”.

3. False Dietary Regime: Dietary regulations play a significant role in the Mosaic Law for the purpose of “distinguishing between the holy and the profane” (Lev.10:10). That is to say, Israel’s separation from the practices of the world in diet were to be representative of their far more important spiritual separation (Rom.4:13). Reversing this relationship, that is, claiming holiness or righteousness on the basis of “keeping the Law” in any of its aspect is, as any reader of the New Testament is well aware, diametrically opposed to the true purpose of the Law and the true meaning of grace. Yet a key feature of antichrist’s religion as administered by his high priest, the false prophet, will be to take traditional legalism a step farther, instituting a system of aggressive vegetarianism that will give its practitioners a feeling of “holiness” and “purity” on the basis of diet (i.e., physical, substituting for spiritual, purity), despite whatever truly sinful behavior in which they may be engaged (1Tim.4:1-5; cf. Col.2:16-23; 2Tim.3:5; Heb.13:9).

4. False Communion: Closely tied to these everyday dietary restraints will be the practice of a false “communion” which will follow closely after the pattern of historical pagan practices (cf. Zech.9:7):

Those who sanctify and purify themselves for the gardens following the lead of the one [characterized] by violence, eating the flesh of swine, and of whatever is an abomination, and of rats will be swept away together (i.e., at the Second Advent), says the Lord.
Isaiah 66:17

The context of this verse (both preceding and following, but see especially Is.66:18-24) shows clearly that while the behavior described is not unprecedented in Israel’s past (cf. Is.65:3-5), the disgusting communal meal described above will be the one in vogue during the Tribulation. Therefore the “one with violence”,³⁷ clearly an individual acting as a sort of priest officiating over the proceedings, is best taken to be the false prophet, antichrist’s own “high priest” and the one responsible for directing his false religion. The fact that meat will be eaten in this “communion” whereas vegetarianism will be the rule otherwise is not contradictory, for this eating of abominations will represent a “sacrifice” and for that reason necessarily includes behavior not otherwise sought out or condoned.

³⁷ Reading *tokh* instead of *tavekh*, a change in vocalization but not in the orthography of the MT.

5. False Piety: The “sanctified” behavior of antichrist’s religion will go beyond diet including in particular a general prohibition against normal marriage (1Tim.4:3). Genuine Christianity does indeed forbid sexual conduct outside of marriage (e.g., 1Thes.4:3-8), but never forbids legitimate marriage (1Cor.7:8-9). Here once again, therefore, we see the beast’s religion turning the truth on its head. While preaching and encouraging sexual licentiousness (cf. 2Pet.2:17-22), the false prophet will lead the charge to forbid the only valid forum for sexual behavior. We may expect many such instances of making virtue out of sin and vice versa. One particularly well documented form of counterfeit piety will be the tattooing of the beast’s name (or number) on the forehead and/or right hand of his worshipers (covered in section VI.3 below), wherein we see a clear attempt to mimic legitimate biblical practices past and present (Is.44:5; Rev.3:12; cf. Ex.13:9-16; Is.62:2; 65:15; Rev.2:17), even while violating the express commands of scripture (Lev.19:28; Rev.14:9-11; cf. Rev.16:2; 19:20; 20:4).

6. False Millennial Program: During the Great Tribulation, antichrist will represent himself as the Messiah. Therefore it should not be surprising that his religion will attempt to counterfeit and play off of the prophecies regarding Christ’s true Millennial Kingdom. One of the key thematic characteristics of the genuine Millennium will be justice, divinely defined and directly administered by the Lord worldwide for the first time in human history since the garden (cf. Ps.2; 9; 24; 45-48; 50; 68; 72; Is.11; 24-27; 32; 34-35; 49-52; 62-66). Instead of true justice stemming from divine administration of the world (an under-appreciated blessing that is worth far more than many material blessings with which the Millennium will be replete), the beast’s religion will offer unprecedented “freedom” from innumerable legal and societal restraints (Dan.7:25; 2Pet.2:17-22; cf. Is.24:5), but this “freedom” will in fact help to produce the most outrageous violations of the most basic human rights as well as of the most important freedom we as a species possess, namely, the right to choose for Jesus Christ and to follow and serve Him in this life without persecution. From the believer’s perspective, the beast’s false millennium is best understood by its divinely assigned name, “The Great Tribulation”. Instead of a time of justice and safety, these final forty-two months will be a time of trampling down of all that is just and right and decent in the name of “freedom”. For whatever good one may find in anti-materialistic, new age, vegetarian, libertarian anti-commercialism, in the context of antichrist’s pseudo-millennium all such things will be mere fig leaves employed solely for the purpose of covering a campaign of crime, lawlessness, licentiousness, and the judicial murder of all who find themselves in opposition to the beast for whatever reason, and especially those who have determined to stay faithful to Jesus Christ regardless of the consequences. One category of “freedom-blessings” scripture does spell out for this period is a general redistribution of wealth by antichrist on behalf of his supporters (Dan.11:24b; 11:39). Presented no doubt as a “jubilee” along Old Testament lines (Lev.25; 27), this action will instead be motivated out of the beast’s desire to firm up his own support rather than any desire to help the poor.

7. False Service: Finally, the “righteous works” required of the adherents of antichrist’s religion as led by his high priest, the false prophet, will entail first and foremost participation in the satanic attempt at universal conversion to the beast. In addition to all the other depravities required of those who choose to serve the beast, this final “crusade” will involve the active

destruction of the free will opportunities of others to choose for Christ, even to the point of betraying those they ought to love the most (Matt.10:36; Lk.21:16).

Great miracles: More persuasive than any of the lies the false prophet will spout will be the exceptional “miracles” he is permitted to perform in the name of the beast and in the power of the devil. Scripture is very clear here and elsewhere that these signs and wonders will be most impressive, “deceiving those who live upon the earth” (v.14; cf. 2Thes.2:9-10), and even capable of deceiving even the elect, “if that were possible” (Matt.24:24; Mk.13:22). In the production of these miraculous signs once again we see Satan’s familiar pattern of aping the wonders of God in order to appear a god in the eyes of world (2Cor.11:14). Moreover, the specific false miracles given to the second beast to perform are particularly deceptive in that they so directly parallel demonstrations of genuine divine power. For Moses and Elijah, both historically and even more importantly during their recent return to earth to direct the missionary activities of the 144,000, performed similar signs and miracles (Rev.11:5; cf. 1Kng.18:38; 2Kng.1:9-14). Just as Pharaoh’s magicians, Jannes and Jambres, were able to produce counterfeit signs and miracles that nevertheless fell short of what God gave Moses to perform (Ex.7:11; 7:22; cf. 2Tim.3:8-9), and just as the devil was able to manipulate the pre-historic creation and yet fell pitifully short of the power of God, so the false prophet’s signs and miracles will in fact be pathetically lacking compared to true divine power. However, we must not underestimate the power of their *persuasiveness* upon the unbelieving world. As believers contemplating these events before the fact, we need to realize that these signs and wonders will appear to the human eye as indeed being the “real thing”, so that only through our understanding of the truth of scripture will we be able to resist being impressed to the point of misguided belief as the rest of the world will be. Believers in Jesus, therefore, must take pains to remember at all times (and especially at that time) that what we know to be so from the Bible is always of much greater import than anything our eyes may happen to see – it is by faith in God’s truth that we navigate this world, not by how we may feel or by what we may experience or by what our eyes behold (2Cor.4:18; 5:7). However impressive and persuasive the signs and wonders we may see, the true “test” lies in whether or not those who perform them contradict the truth and seek to lead us astray (Deut.13:2-4).

Commanding the inhabitants of the earth to make an image of the beast: The fact that the world’s entire unbelieving population is included here as involved in the construction of the idol, the “abomination which brings [spiritual] desolation”,³⁸ indicates that this statue will be of massive size and probably constructed of extremely valuable materials. Given the close relation between many aspects of this occurrence and Nebuchadnezzar’s similar construction of the huge, ninety foot tall golden idol in the plains of Babylon (Dan.3:1 ff), we would be justified in assuming that this statue is made of gold as well. We may posit that the false prophet in his role as high priest of the beast’s religion will supervise a worldwide campaign of contributions for the construction, for this is most likely what is to be understood from the phrase “commanding the

³⁸ See The Coming Tribulation: Part 3B: Antichrist and his Kingdom, section VIII, “The ‘Abomination of Desolation’ and the ‘Session’ of Antichrist”.

inhabitants of the earth to make an image of the beast” (cf. Ex.35:4 - 36:7). Once the idol is in place, the false prophet will animate it through satanic power (i.e., v.15: “it was given to him to provide a spirit for the image of the beast so that the image might speak”). This ability to animate a statue so large and impressively appointed will play no small role in the deception of the world, and we may anticipate that many who come to Jerusalem unconvinced will be awed into “belief” by this unprecedented sight (cf. Nebuchadnezzar’s attempt to impart a similar sense of awe through ornate and extensive musical accompaniment: Dan.3:5; 3:7; 3:10; 3:15).

And [it was also given to him] to bring it about that as many as refused to worship the image of the beast might be put to death: It stands to reason that only those in the presence of the image of the beast can be put to the test as to whether or not they are willing to worship it. This verse indicates that all whose allegiance to antichrist is suspect will be brought to Jerusalem and made to stand before the colossal idol, with those who refuse to give their obeisance in its presence being put immediately to death. The means of execution is not given, but it would certainly continue the parallel with Nebuchadnezzar’s statue if the imminent demise for all who refuse was a horrifying death by fire in a furnace akin to that into which Hananiah, Mishael, and Asariah (Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego) were thrown upon their similar refusal (cf. Dan.11:33). The terrifying sight of this monstrous, animated colossus, and the prospect of being cast alive into the flames for refusing to worship it, will no doubt prove too much for anyone to bear – except for those who are solidly grounded in their faith in Jesus Christ, and ready to follow Him even unto a fiery death rather than prove unfaithful in this life.

3. The Mark of the Beast: Revelation 13:16-17

(16) And he (i.e., the false prophet) compelled everyone, small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to allow [his clergy] to place a mark on their right hand or on their forehead, (17) so that no one would be able to buy or sell except those with the mark, [consisting of] either the name of the [first] beast or the number of his name.
Revelation 13:16-17

We see again in these verses that the false prophet, antichrist’s high priest, is responsible for the implementation of the policy regarding the “mark”. Several important points contained in the text above need to be considered before proceeding to the discussion of the “number of the beast” in verse eighteen:

1. The beast’s universal religion results in universal compulsion to receive the mark: Whatever civil rights and benefits of citizenship obtain under antichrist’s worldwide state, we are right to expect that these will all be closely tied to membership and participation in his universal religion because it is through this religion that his “majesty” will be worshiped and revered. Consequently, it should come as no surprise that at this juncture the false prophet will administer the placement of a visible sign of obeisance upon all of the beast’s followers with the objective of “marking” the entire world. Given the dire consequences the reception of this mark will have, we may posit that, in addition to true believers, there will be an indeterminate number of

unbelievers who will avoid it as well. We should not, however, underestimate the short-term negative consequences which resisting this mark will entail (see point #3 immediately below).

2. The placing of the mark is most likely carried out by the clergy of the beast's religion: Since antichrist's religion is a purposefully syncretic mixture all other religions distinguished mainly by its universal acknowledgment of the beast as God, we do not have to find in this policy of marking its adherents any fundamental reconstruction or reorganization of its parts. More than likely, the same priests, pastors, imams, etc. of all religions and cults previously co-opted into antichrist's universal religion will be at the forefront of the process of marking all of the world's "believers" in antichrist, and that this process will be essentially religious rather than civil in nature (though it will have definite civil consequences).

3. The pressure to receive the mark: The mark will accomplish a melding together of church and state such as the world has not seen since the tower of Babel. For while the taking of the mark will have a putative religious purpose and be imprinted in a religious setting, its consequences for every other sphere of life can hardly be underestimated. In addition to the economic hardships of a posture of refusal spelled out here in our context (i.e., essentially banning the unmarked from commerce of any sort), we may expect all such persons to become what amounts to "unpersons", bereft of any rights, legal recourse, or any consideration of any kind whatsoever under the beast's system of governance. The beast's focus upon economic activity as related in verse seventeen is entirely understandable as the most effective stimulus to the progress of this universal conscription of humanity into the official ranks of evil. For while legal matters, voting, various registrations and the like might all be of use in the process of coercing the world to enroll, "buying and selling" are weekly if not daily activities in which all but those engaged in the most independent of agricultural operations must necessarily engage.³⁹

As one of the most important functional and practical spheres of daily life, therefore, commerce, and specifically the exclusion of the unmarked from commerce, will be an ideal vehicle for the universal enrollment of mankind into antichrist's religion. For in addition to the necessities of life, commerce is also the entrepot into all of the key aspects of the devil's worldwide system of lust generally:

a. Money: If currency, cash, gold, money and fungible assets of every sort were "important" in the eyes of the world in the past, during the Tribulation, a time of such intense insecurity, we can expect the twin desires for financial security and opportunity based upon a large store of liquid assets to be more intense than ever. Clearly, under the new mandate of the mark, those who have it or seek or otherwise want and need money will feel the pressure to be marked all the more intensely according to the degree of their wants, desires, lusts, and needs for it. For without the mark, not only will they be unable to acquire monetary assets, but they will also be largely unable to make use of what they have previously accumulated.

³⁹ See the discussion of the "third horseman" in The Coming Tribulation: Part 2B: The Heavenly Prelude to the Tribulation, section IV.3, "The Black Horse: Economic Constraint".

b. Possessions: As mentioned above, part of the beast's system will entail the redistribution of wealth, real estate in particular. We can well imagine that gaining new lands and holdings will be virtually impossible for those who lack the mark, and that without it retaining what substantial possessions one may have will also be difficult in the short run and essentially impossible in the long run. Most large, hard assets, moreover, require various types and degrees of maintenance, a process that also requires engaging in commerce on some level. Therefore it will be very difficult for those who are rich in any sense in which this world defines it to maintain that wealth and those possessions during this period without receiving the mark.

c. Pleasure: Whether large or small, illicit or legitimate, the gratification of non-essential pleasures makes up a large part of the current world economy. Inevitably, in order to gratify most pleasures one must engage in commercial activity. Therefore even those who might for other reasons be willing and able to resist the process of marking – and be stubborn and bold enough to do so – will be sore tested on this count, for they will find themselves largely shut out of this particular aspect of the devil's world system if they do.

d. Fame: Glory, celebrity, reputation, fame of every sort, large and small, is an important area of lust in Satan's world system. For those whose self-image and ultimate desires are bound up in this area, the prospect of becoming an "unperson" and being shut out of all commercial activity and the essential things that often attend that activity will be difficult even to contemplate. However defined or derived, antichrist will have a virtual monopoly on "fame" during the Great Tribulation, so that failure to take the mark will necessarily turn any good reputation to "infamy", a hard road to take for any one who does not value God's opinion over the opinions of mankind.

e. Power: The ultimate lust in the devil's world system is that of power (on whatever level), the myth of having some sort of control over others by virtue of position or other means. Generally this also has a base in commercial activity on some level (if only indirectly). But in any case, it is virtually certain that, during the Great Tribulation, the powerful will owe continuation in their positions of power to antichrist, making it a near certainty that they will be among the first to receive the mark.

Since everything that human beings lust after and desire apart from God will be put at risk by refusing to accept the mark of the beast, it is a mistaken notion to assume that the taking of the mark will be something easily avoidable by merely refraining from direct "legal" commercial transactions. The end result will thus be that many who would rather not take the mark, even if they would be otherwise willing to go underground or seek to skirt the system not out of any love for God but just on general principles (i.e., the taking on to one's body of a large tattoo not even of one's choosing is bound to rub many people the wrong way, not only Christians), will ultimately do so. For, otherwise, they will find themselves entirely deprived of or at least seriously hindered from seeking and enjoying the things that, for a large part of the secular world, "make life worth living".

For those who know their God, the loss of the things of this world, culminating for many in the loss of their very lives, will constitute a true blessing, the privilege of persecution and martyrdom for the Lord who died for us (though the world will not realize it as such). But for those who do not believe, the down side of refusing to take the mark will be so horrific without any apparent appreciable benefit that only the most irascibly independent are likely to try. One thing is certain: anyone at this point who “has anything” as defined by the five areas delimited above will certainly think twice before refusing the mark and losing everything, even though accepting it is a guarantee of divine judgment (Rev.14:9-11; cf. Rev.16:2; 19:20; 20:4). For during the Great Tribulation, at the center of the spider’s web of these five main cross-fertilizing and intersecting lusts of Satan’s world system will be the beast himself and his religion, Satanism, the worship of the devil in preference to the worship of God. And this is the devil’s strategy and objective: to present to God a world inhabited *only* by those who of their own “free will” have taken upon themselves the mark as a proof of their choice of Satan over God.

4. The mark will take the form of a permanent, visible tattoo: The Greek word used here for the “mark” is *charagma* (χαραγμα), meaning something that has been permanently marked, generally through inscription or carving or other permanent imprinting (cf. our derived word “character”). The context and its logic certainly suggest the same, for there would be little purpose to antichrist’s requiring an easily removable mark. The whole point is to make the world choose for him in a visible and irremediable way, and requiring a permanent, highly visible tattoo certainly accomplishes this purpose. But the beast’s “sealing” of his faithful is so dramatically at odds with our Lord’s sealing of us that it bears comment. We are sealed with the Holy Spirit, an act of God on our behalf with positive and invisible spiritual consequences for good in every way (2Cor.1:21-22; Eph.1:13-14; 4:30), while those who choose for antichrist and for Satan are physically sealed for short-term material benefit without any positive spiritual consequences whatsoever. Indeed, receiving the mark is guarantee of condemnation (Rev.14:9-11; cf. 16:2; 19:20; 20:4).⁴⁰

5. The significance of the two places for the mark: Why two places for the mark? The answer most likely has to do with a hierarchy of marking, that is, we may assume that the mark received on the forehead will be considered “better” than merely marking the hand. While it is possible that this distinction will be one of choice with each person deciding where to receive it, the more likely scenario is that only the elite will be “allowed” to receive a mark on the forehead, and this will constitute a badge of honor showing that those who have it are not merely responding to universal coercion but are instead enthusiastic communicants of antichrist’s religion. The danger in this two-track system for those under pressure to receive the mark is that they will make the mistake of assuming (in the face of divine warning to the contrary) that only the mark on the forehead is spiritually dangerous (i.e., since the mark on the hand will represent more of an attitude of acquiescence than of enthusiasm). But in fact receiving the mark in either place will be a cause for “drinking of the wrath of God” (Rev.14:9-11).

⁴⁰ See also in The Coming Tribulation: Part 2B: The Heavenly Prelude to the Tribulation, section V, “The Sealing of the 144,000”.

6. The significance of the two variations of the mark: An additional “choice” is afforded those who respond to the false prophet’s demand that the whole world be marked for antichrist, namely of receiving the “number of his name” in place of the name itself. The fact that the number comes second in the sequence in verse seventeen (just as the forehead marking comes second) suggests that this is the “better” choice signifying a deeper commitment to the beast. The fact that verse eighteen is taken up with explaining the significance of the number of the beast confirms this analysis. Inasmuch as the name or the number can be placed on either the forehead or the hand, we see in this system a hierarchy of four levels of dedication to antichrist as follows:

Highest:	Number on the forehead
Second Highest:	Name on the forehead
Third Highest:	Number on the hand
Lowest:	Name on the hand

As noted above, scripture is quite clear that in God’s eyes there will be no distinction between the highest and lowest in this hierarchy, for by taking the mark in any of its four manifestations the individual in question is willfully throwing his lot in with antichrist and his father the devil, and so by definition and of necessity has in the process deliberately turned his back on God the Father and His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. One further monitory note here. Since in every way possible he attempts to counterfeit the true Messiah, it is very possible that the beast’s “name” will in some way mimic one of Jesus’ names or titles. We cannot know the precise “name” before the fact (on this point and on the Greek system of enumeration generally see section VI.4 immediately following), but it is worth noting that several divine names come very close to the requisite “six hundred and sixty six” when computed via the Greek numbering system wherein letters of the alphabet represent numerals (n.b., the system of Arabic numerals which we use today is a much later development). For example, Messiah in Greek, *Messias* (Μεσσίας), is short by only one letter, an iota, of 666 (a deficit easily made up by any number of initials that would equal ten in the Greek system). If this word or any number of other legitimate divine titles variously calculated should turn out to be antichrist’s name, there is at least the danger that some believers under coercion may rationalize the taking of the mark as really being a name of the Lord, since it may well be, at least in some form. But scripture is adamant about the fact that the mark, however innocuous it may seem and whatever alternative meaning it may be made to bear, will constitute an act of ultimate unfaithfulness so extreme that any and all who may have been believers before the fact will by that act become believers no more – taking of the mark by any brother or sister will put faith to death (Rev.14:9-11; cf. 16:2; 19:20; 20:4).

4. The Number of the Beast: Revelation 13:18

Here is wisdom: let everyone who is alert [at that time] calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man[’s name]. And his (i.e., the beast’s) number is six hundred and sixty six (i.e., 666 “ways”).

Since in verse seventeen we are told specifically that the alternative form of the mark is “the number of his (i.e., the beast’s) name”, the “number of the beast” mentioned here, therefore, has to be the same numerical equivalent of antichrist’s name referenced in that previous verse. That is to say, “six hundred and sixty six” is the number which both constitutes a numerical value for the beast’s name and which also functions as the alternative (and superior) form of the mark.

Before considering the number of the beast per se, we need to say a few words about his “name” as it will occur in the other versions of the mark along with its numerical value. The “wisdom” given here is not in any way mysterious. If at that time one is merely “alert” or paying attention to what scripture says about this issue, the formula provided will easily dispel all doubt about what is the true “mark of the beast” so that believers will have no trouble whatsoever identifying it (and no excuse for failing to avoid it). As part of the New Testament, this book of the Bible is written in Greek, and for that reason it is the Greek system of numerals which must be employed to calculate the “name” for its numerical value (use of Arabic numerals in the west was not widespread until the 15th century). In the Greek system, each letter of the alphabet (and some symbols as well) has a numerical value, with *alpha*, the first letter equaling one, and *omega*, the last letter equaling eight hundred. For example, the Greek transliteration mentioned above for the Hebrew word Messiah (meaning, “anointed one”), is as follows:

$$\text{Μεσσιας: } M = 40; E = 5; \Sigma = 200; \Sigma = 200; I = 10; A = 1; \Sigma = 200 = 656$$

By adding the Aramaic imperative “come!” (cf. *Marana tha!*, “O our Lord, come!”), we create a phrase equaling the requisite number of six hundred and sixty six (because the letters *theta* and *alpha* equal nine and one respectively so that $\theta\alpha = +10$). Before the reader gets too excited about all this, let me point out what should be readily obvious, namely that in such a system the number of possibilities for constructing names that add up to 666 is incalculably large (if not literally infinite). For this reason, the information given us in Revelation 13:18 **cannot possibly** be used to figure out antichrist’s name before the fact. For even if one was fortunate enough to hit upon the precise sequence of letters for the actual name, there is absolutely no way to determine before his revelation that said sequence **was** the uniquely correct one. What we are given in Revelation 13:18 is thus not a key to figuring out the identity of antichrist **before** the fact. On the contrary, it is an analytical tool or “litmus test” for evaluating the putative name of the beast to see if he is indeed antichrist **after** we have a name to work from. With a simple transliteration of any name into the Greek system, we can with relative ease examine any name and discover fairly easily whether it might have the numerical value of 666. This was a fairly common sort of cipher in antiquity (often called a “gematria”), and one finds, for example, graffiti recovered from Pompeii where the names of lovers were concealed in this manner, as well as riddles on funeral monuments in the Greek speaking areas of the Mediterranean which substitute a sum of letters for the name of the deceased and invite the onlooker to solve the puzzle. Without clues, such riddles are impossible to solve, since, as mentioned above, the number of names that can be made to fit into any large sum is, for all practical purposes, endless. The relatively small number

“10”, for instance, could be a lone *iota*, an *alpha* plus a *theta*, a *beta* plus an *eta*, etc., etc. And the possibilities grow geometrically the larger the numbers become.

One should also note that once the universal marking begins, decoding the precise mark of the beast as it occurs at that time will be a fairly simple matter despite issues of transliteration. Before the precise form of his name as it is to be used for the mark comes to light, however, this test is unlikely to be the best litmus test for uncovering antichrist. For example, will the mark contain only his last name? Will it include his first name or merely his initials, and which ones? More to the point, will antichrist change his name in some way at the point when he takes his seat in the temple of God in Jerusalem and proclaims himself to be God? The point is that until the exact form of the name as it occurs in this alternative version of the mark becomes generally known, there is little point in making the calculation recommended here. And Bible believing Christians should take careful note that scripture only gives us this information at the point when the actual marking begins, indicating very clearly that any attempt to identify antichrist in this way before the process of universal marking is pointless. In any case, by the middle of the Tribulation it is difficult to comprehend how any genuine believer in Jesus Christ who has the least bit of spiritual discernment could not know that the dictator who has come to control the world and has invaded God’s very temple is antichrist. The real danger here is that believers in the early days of the Tribulation will fail to recognize the beast because his name as it occurs *at that time* may not seem to fit the formula given in verse eighteen.

The significance of 666: The first thing to emphasize here is that we do not necessarily have to do with three consecutive numeral “sixes”, that is, some precise variant of 6-6-6. In our system of Arabic numerals, a system that does not greatly antedate the printing press here in the west, it is true that there is no distinction between the number six hundred and sixty six and its representation by three consecutive sixes: 666. In the Greek system, however, this is not at all the case. In Greek, the language of Revelation and therefore the basis for the system that must be employed to understand this issue correctly, six hundred and sixty six would be represented by two letters and a symbol, namely, *chi*, *xi*, and *stigma*. What this means for our purposes here is that much popular theorizing that makes the “sign of the beast” a series of three sixes may be entirely wrong. And while it is certainly possible that three Arabic numeral sixes will indeed constitute the essential mark that stands for the name of antichrist, there is no convincing reason why this should be so. Just as the Arabic numeral representation 666 would appear different in the Greek system (i.e., as $\chi\xi\varsigma$), so it is also fair to point out that the contemporaneous Roman system (i.e., “Roman numerals” wherein 666 = DCLXVI) and Hebrew system (an alphabetic system similar to Greek wherein 666 = νcrt) certainly have as much claim to be considered as the much later, non-contemporaneous western version of the Arabic system. Moreover there is no way that we can say before the fact that antichrist might not adopt, say, a base two system (stressing technology), or a base twelve system (stressing Babylonian mysticism), or any other system of mathematical, geometrical, or mystical symbolism to represent the integer 666, perhaps even one of his own devising not yet extant. The point is that discerning Christians *cannot* afford to assume that any mark that does not have three Arabic numeral sixes (i.e., 666) could not possibly be “the mark of the beast”.

The significance of the number itself has also long been a matter of as much speculation as its appearance. Like “pi”, a repeating system of sixes may have some significance for the mythology that antichrist creates around himself and his system of devil worship. As Christians, we would rather choose to note that whether 666 is seen as single integer, a series of sixes, or a repeating decimal, at all points it falls short of perfection (i.e., of the perfect number seven) by “one”, namely, through rejection of the “One” who is the way, the truth and the life, our true Savior Jesus Christ.⁴¹ One thing that is generally not appreciated in such discussions is that, unlike English, Greek numerals are at times declinable, and such is the case in this instance. Specifically, “six hundred and sixty six” in this instance at Revelation 13:18 is feminine,⁴² so that what the text here is really saying is “six hundred and sixty six (*feminine*) _____’s, and it is left to the reader to fill in the blank from the context. This is a not unfamiliar situation in Greek where one often understands the occurrence or repetition of a particular noun which can be easily guessed from the information contained in the ending of an adjective (in contrast to English where adjectives are unchangeable). Of course there is no feminine noun in context, a situation which no doubt explains why various other versions switched the ending to masculine, neuter, or eliminated the problem entirely by using symbolic notation (i.e, the Greek equivalent of 666 mentioned above: χξς). But in fact the case of a feminine adjective with no noun expressed is far from unprecedented in Greek, there being a generally understood short list of common nouns to be supplied in such circumstances. By far the most common noun to supply in such situations is the Greek word for “way”, *hodos* (ὁδός; cf. “odometer” = “road-measurer”), and that is the noun to be supplied here. Since 666 represents an infinitely repeating cipher, the “six hundred and sixty six *ways*” may be understood as the all inclusive and virtually infinite number of “paths to salvation” in the beast’s religious system (cf. Amos 8:14 where "way" refers to a type of paganism). Provided only that one worship antichrist and his father the devil as god, all other religious, traditional, or cultic practices will be pronounced acceptable and deemed effective in “saving” the individual worshiper. But in fact, this cipher leaves out the “one” that would end its pointless repetition and instead produce completion and fulfillment, the “One” who is the one and only true “Way”, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (cf. Acts 9:2; 19:9; 19:23; 22:4; 24:14; 24:22; 2Pet.2:2;):

I am the *Way*: the truth and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me.
John 14:6

⁴¹ On the significance of seven as the number representing perfection and completeness, consider the seven Genesis days of re-creation, the seven millennial days of human history, the seven Spirits of God (i.e., the Holy Spirit described in this formula of perfection: Is.11:2-3; Rev.1:4; 1:20; 3:1; 5:1ff.; cf. Ps.12:6; 119:164; Prov.6:16; 9:1). For further references and discussion see J.J. Davis, Biblical Numerology (Grand Rapids 1968) 116ff.

⁴² We find *hexakosiai* (ἑξακοσῖαι), the feminine form of the number meaning “six hundred”, both in Sinaiticus (Ⲅ) and Ephraemi Rescriptus (C), two of the best ancient witnesses to the Greek text.

VII. The Great Persecution: Revelation 14:1 - 15:8

1. The Great Persecution is what makes the Tribulation's second half "Great": We have made the point repeatedly in this series that the "distress" and "tribulation" which characterize the final seven years of human history before Christ's return are seen in scripture first and foremost from the standpoint of believers (cf. Dan.12:1; Matt.24:21; 24:29; Mk.13:19; 13:24). It is true that many of the events of that terrible time to come will weigh heavily on the people of God, but believers will be protected to a large extent from much of the worst of it (viz. the judgments of God which are directed toward the reprobate). The Great Persecution is the preeminent exception, for it will be a period of the greatest testing wherein because of widespread martyrdom believers in unprecedented numbers will have to put into practice what we should all understand in principle, namely that our true security consists in our eternal relationship with Jesus Christ rather than in clinging to this temporary physical life (Matt.16:25; Mk.8:35; Lk.17:33; Jn.12:25; Rev.12:11).

The uniting of the globe under the banner of antichrist and the one-world "peace" which results will be the worst thing that has yet happened in human history by virtue of its elimination of any countervailing power to check the machinations of the beast and of his father the devil. This will be particularly true for believers in regard to the Great Persecution, an event which will begin not long after antichrist's consolidation of power. For with the world united in evil, there will be no place to hide, no place to run. Those who in the will of God are destined for martyrdom will be martyred, while those who are destined to survive must endure persecution until the return of our Lord (Rev.13:10).

As is evident from its occurrence in chapters thirteen and fourteen of Revelation, the Great Persecution will begin not long after the beginning of the Tribulation's second half, the Great Tribulation. To recap in brief some of the preceding events, following his total defeat of the southern alliance, antichrist will quickly turn his attention to the establishment of his capital in Jerusalem. The beast will be the target of an assassination attempt at this time, and his remarkable recovery coupled with his victory will do much to swing the great majority of the world's population in his favor. Using this attempt on his life as a pretext, antichrist will make war on Moses and Elijah, killing them and then occupying the temple of God, even proclaiming himself to be God, erecting the "abomination that causes [spiritual] desolation" in the temple court. Those in Israel who have responded to the ministry of the two witnesses and the 144,000 will flee to the wilderness at this time, evading through divine intervention the beast's attempts to catch and destroy them. His frustration in this attempt will result in the commencement of the Great Persecution, a reign of terror directed against all true believers in Jesus Christ, the implementation of which will be part and parcel of the establishment of antichrist's worldwide system of religion:

And the dragon was enraged at the woman (i.e., the escaping Jewish believers), and he went away to make war with the rest of her seed, [even] those who are keeping the commandments of God and maintaining their testimony to Jesus.

Revelation 12:17

The scapegoating of believers in the matter of the assassination attempt will have the dual effect of provoking a violent reaction in Israel and worldwide against all believers on the one hand, and on the other hand will also contribute to an environment of great suspicion wherein unbelievers will be eager to show by their acceptance of the mark that they are without blame in the matter, and even more eager and willing to “smoke out the traitors” by way of this litmus test. Thus will the stage be set from the very early days of antichrist's worldwide reign for the event that more than any other defines and characterizes the coming Tribulation, namely, the Great Persecution.

2. Key Passages: The precise term “Great Persecution” is, as we have said before, one coined for the purposes of this study. But that a persecution of believers the likes of which the world has never seen will take place at this time (and through its terrible nature make the second half of the Tribulation “great”) is evident from the volume and specificity of the major passages which treat this event, especially in (but not limited to) the book of Revelation:

(9) And when He (i.e., the Lamb) opened the fifth seal, I saw below the altar the living persons who had been slain because of the Word of God and because of the testimony which they had maintained. (10) And they cried out with a loud voice, saying “How long, O Master, holy and true, will you [wait and] not render judgment and vindication for our blood upon those who dwell on the earth?” (11) And a white robe was given to each one of them that they might rest yet a little while longer until their brothers who were destined to be killed in the same fashion should also fulfill [their course].

Revelation 6:9-11

Comment: It will be recalled that only two seals, the fifth and sixth, deal with the trends of the last three and a half years (the seventh serving to “open the book” and begin the seven year period itself), with the sixth seal referring to Armageddon and related events. Therefore the fact that this seal serves as the sole agent of characterization for the bulk of the Tribulation’s second half demonstrates that the Great Persecution is the decisive event of that period.

(9) After this I looked and, behold, [there was] a huge multitude which no one was able to number from every nation and tribe and people and tongue standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes and with palm branches in their hands. (10) And they were shouting in a loud voice, saying, “Salvation belongs to our God, the One who sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb!” (11) And all the angels had taken their stand around the throne and the elders and the four living creatures. And they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, (12) saying, “Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might belong to our God forever and ever! Amen!” (13) And one of the elders who was speaking with me replied, “These people dressed in white robes – who are they and where have they come from?” (14) And

I said to him, “My lord, you know.” And he said to me, “These are the ones who are about to come forth from the Great Tribulation. And they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. (15) For this reason they are before the throne of God and serve Him day and night in His temple. And the One who sits upon the throne will pitch His tabernacle over them. (16) They will neither hunger nor thirst again, nor will the sun beat down upon them nor any burning [heat], (17) because the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and will lead them to fountains of living water (lit., “fountains of waters of life”), and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes”.

Revelation 7:9-17

Comment: There are so many who have been martyred that they can not be counted, showing clearly the scope of the Great Persecution. Moreover, the fact that these martyrs come “from every nation and tribe and people and tongue” demonstrates the worldwide nature of the persecution. Finally, this passage definitely fixes the time of the Great Persecution, for as the angel says in verse fourteen, these martyrs are “about to come forth from the Great Tribulation”, that is, the second half of the seven year period.

(7) And war broke out in heaven. Michael and his angels fought with the dragon and the dragon and his angels fought [back], (8) but they did not prevail against him, and they could no longer find any place [of refuge] in heaven. (9) And [so] the great dragon, the ancient serpent, the one called Devil and Satan, was thrown down; even he who deceives the entire world was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. (10) And I heard a loud voice in heaven saying,

“Now our God’s deliverance and might and kingdom have come, even the power of His Christ. For the accuser of our brothers, the one who accuses them day and night in front of our God, has been thrown down. (11) But these [believers] have defeated [the devil] through the blood of the Lamb and the Word of their testimony. For they did not love their lives, [even] to the point of death. (12) Because of this, rejoice, O heavens and those residing in them! [But] woe to the earth and the sea, for the devil has come down to you, having [great] anger, because he knows that he has [only] a short time [remaining]!”

Revelation 12:7-12

Comment: In verse eleven the martyrs are described as virtually synonymous with all believers alive at this time, indicating the scope of the Great Persecution. The casting down of Satan at the midpoint of the Tribulation (verse nine) and the proclamation that his remaining time is short (verse twelve) further serves to fix the time of the Great Persecution as the final three and a half years. Finally, in this synopsis of the Great Tribulation, we see that from the standpoint of believers the Great Persecution is *the* event which dominates this period.

And the dragon was enraged at the woman (i.e., the escaping Jewish believers), and he went away to make war with the rest of her seed, [even] those who are keeping the commandments of God and maintaining their testimony to Jesus.

Revelation 12:17

Comment: Just as the dragon, Satan, attempted to use his newfound mastery of the world's political systems united under his son, the beast, for the destruction of Jewish believers in Israel, so now, at the Tribulation's midpoint, he will turn his attention to the destruction of "the rest of her seed", namely, gentile and Jewish believers worldwide. This passage likewise fixes the time of the Great Persecution (i.e., it follows the escape of believing Jews immediately after the beast's victory and shift of headquarters to Jerusalem), demonstrates the universal sweep of the persecution (i.e., the target is all the rest of "her seed", that is, all other believers not removed to the special place of protection), and characterizes its horrible nature (i.e., it will be a "war" whose object is the annihilation of the faithful).

"If anyone is [destined] for captivity [to captivity he will go]. If it is necessary for anyone to be put to death by the sword, by the sword he must be put to death. Herein lies the perseverance and the faithfulness of the holy ones."

Revelation 13:10

Comment: This caveat from our Lord removes all doubt about either the intensity of the Great Persecution to come or the possibility of avoiding it. Only two outcomes are contemplated, death or prison cell. While other outcomes are not necessarily ruled out, this passage suggests that they will be the exception rather than the rule, and thus encourages us to steel ourselves to these grim realities before the fact.

And it was given to him (i.e., the false prophet) to provide a spirit for the image of the beast so that the image might speak, and [it was also given to him] to bring it about that as many as refused to worship the image of the beast might be put to death.

Revelation 13:15

Comment: Here we see that the Great Persecution is central to the institution of the beast's worldwide religion, for it will be by means of the litmus test of willingness to worship antichrist that true believers will be winnowed out. This passage also makes it clear that the number of those martyred will be significant, for refusal to worship, once a believer has been "processed" to that point, will apparently result in a sentence of death in every case.

And I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on so that they may rest from their labors", says the Spirit. "For their deeds follow with them."

Revelation 14:13

Comment: This verse, coming immediately after the most stringent of warnings to refrain from the beast's religion in any form (i.e., the third angel's proclamation of Revelation 14:9-12 [on which see section VII.2.c below]), encourages believers to face martyrdom with confidence and a sense of peace, since the end will be rest and reward. The need for such comfort is a sure

indication that the Great Persecution will be a horrendous experience which is near universal in its scope and impossible to survive apart from a close walk with the Lord.

(14) And, behold, a white cloud. And sitting on the white cloud was what looked like a man with a golden crown on his head and a sharp sickle in his hand. (15) And another angel came out of His temple, shouting in a loud voice to the one sitting on the cloud, “Send [forth] your sickle and reap, because the hour of the harvest has come, and the harvest [crop] is ripe” (lit., “dry”). (16) And the one sitting on the cloud set his sickle to the earth, and the earth was harvested.

Revelation 14:14-16

Comment: As we shall see below (section VII.3), the reaper represents Jesus Christ, and the believers martyred during the Great Persecution are the harvest. This passage shows that, far from being an accident, the Great Persecution is an integral part of the plan of God designed for the glory of God, reflected in the faithfulness of His witnesses, and the ultimate good of the martyred, who, like a ripe crop, are removed at precisely the right time, being spared the time of final judgments of the Great Tribulation while yet receiving all the rewards that accrue to those genuinely martyred for Jesus Christ. The dramatic and worldwide nature of the Great Persecution is also evident from the above.

(2) And I saw [something] like a sea of glass, [but this time it was] mixed with fire, and those who were [in the process of] winning the victory over the beast and his image and over the number of his name were standing on the sea of glass holding lyres of the Lord God, (3) and they were singing the song of Moses the servant of God, even the song of the Lamb, saying

Revelation 15:2-3a

Comment: While this passage is often taken to represent the victorious martyrs who have come out of the Great Tribulation, the fact that they are seen here actually standing *on* the glass sea, the “viewing port”, so to speak, whereby earthly events are visible from heaven, gives us instead a picture of faithful believers enduring the Great Persecution while still on earth. The glass sea familiar to us from its description in chapter four is now described as being “mixed with fire”,⁴³ a clear and hardly subtle symbol of the intensity of the trial that the believers of that time will experience (1Pet.1:7; 4:12; cf. Dan.11:33; Heb.11:34). This interpretation explains the fact that the participle describing the endurance of the faithful is in the present tense here, and by rights should be translated “who were [in the process of] winning”, expressing their status as being still

⁴³ See The Coming Tribulation: Part 2B: “The Heavenly Prelude to the Tribulation”, section I, Revelation 4:1-11.

in the midst of the fiery trial.⁴⁴ The passage above describes all believers who remain faithful as belonging to the same essential category of those “[in the process of] winning the victory” over the beast, indicating that no one who maintains faith in Jesus Christ will be exempt from the fire or the fight (nor, blessedly, from the exaltation of victorious struggle on behalf of the Lord who bought us).

And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given to them (i.e., they sat in judgment), namely the persons who had been executed (lit., “beheaded with an ax”) because of their witness for Jesus and because of the Word of God, [that is] whoever did not worship the beast or his image and did not take the mark on their forehead and on their hand. For they came to life and began to rule with Christ for a thousand years.
Revelation 20:4

Comment: We know from a number of important and specific New Testament passages (1Cor.15:50-55 and 1Thes.4:13-17 in particular) that a significant number of believers do survive the Great Persecution and are resurrected while yet alive at Christ’s return. The fact that this verse equates refusal to worship the beast with execution demonstrates unequivocally the widespread martyrdom and intensity of the Great Persecution.

(21) I was watching, and this horn (i.e., antichrist) was waging war with the holy ones (i.e., believers). And he was prevailing over them (i.e., “conquering them”), (22) until the Ancient of Days came (i.e., our Lord’s second advent) and rendered judgment on behalf of the holy ones of the Most High, and the time came when the holy ones took possession of the Kingdom.
Daniel 7:21-22

Comment: As in Revelation 12:17, the Great Persecution is here described as a “war”, with antichrist continuing to “conquer” (i.e., execute) believers until our Lord’s return. The implication is that no believers will be “neutral”, that is, immune from the effects of the Great Persecution. Further, the casualties (i.e., martyrs) will likely be horrific since the beast will continue to “prevail” until the second advent.

And he (antichrist) will speak words against the Most High, and he will persecute the saints of the Most High God. And he will plot to change times and law. And they (i.e., believers, “the saints”) will be given into his hand for a time and times and half a time (i.e., for the duration of the Great Tribulation).
Daniel 7:25

⁴⁴ This point is universally misunderstood in the versions and is incorrectly rendered in, e.g., the KJV: “that had gotten the victory”; the NASB: “who had come off victorious”; and the NIV “who had been victorious”.

Comment: This passage also fixes the period of time during which antichrist will persecute (lit., “wear down”, “consume”) believers as lasting through the entire Great Tribulation (the “time and times and half a time”, or three and a half years). As mentioned in section V.2.2 above, the Great Persecution is here also connected directly to the implementation of the beast’s religious and his not unconnected radical social “reforms”, the net effect of which places all believers “into his hand” (i.e., subject to persecution) until our Lord returns.

(10) And [the little horn] magnified himself against the host of heaven (i.e., the family of God, men and angels both), and he cast down to the earth some of the host (i.e., antichrist seducing believers into apostasy) and some of the stars (i.e., Satan having seduced angels into rebellion) and he trampled them underfoot. (11) He even magnified himself against the Prince of the host (i.e., Christ). The daily sacrifice was abolished by him, and the holy place (i.e., the inner court) was desecrated. (12) And along with the daily sacrifice, the host (i.e., believers) fell into his power on account of [the] rebellion (i.e., the Great Apostasy). And he threw truth to the ground, and was successful in whatever he did. (13) And I heard one of the holy ones who was speaking, and he said to the other holy one who was speaking, “How long will this vision of the daily sacrifice and of the rebellion which produces desolation and of the handing over of the holy [place] (i.e., the inner court) and of the trampling down of the host be?” (14) And he replied to me, “Until 2,300 evenings and mornings have passed. Then the holy [place] will be purified.”
Daniel 8:10-14

Comment: This passage (cf. Dan.8:23-35), previously covered in our treatment of the Great Apostasy,⁴⁵ deals primarily with the Tribulation’s first half when seduction will be the primary means of leading believers away from Jesus Christ. But also clearly foreshadowed in the verses above is the near future time when seduction gives way to compulsion (i.e., in verse 12 “the host fell into his power”, and in verse 14 “the trampling down of the host”) which is only terminated by our Lord’s second advent.

(32) And with enticements he will seduce [people] to violate the covenant, but the people who know their God will continue to hold fast to it. (33) And those among the people who have insight will teach the people who will be persecuted by sword (i.e., martyrdom), and flame (i.e., torture leading to martyrdom), and captivity (i.e., imprisonment), and plundering (i.e., confiscation of property), for some time. (34) And when they are persecuted, they will receive a little help, yet many will ally themselves to them under false pretenses. (35) And even from among [the ranks of] those who have insight, some will be persecuted, in order to refine, purify, and cleanse them until the final end. For [it is] yet to come at its appointed time.
Daniel 11:32-35

⁴⁵ See The Coming Tribulation: Part 3A: “From the Seventh Seal to the Two Witnesses”, section II, “The Great Apostasy”.

Comment: These verses are some of the most explicit in detailing the harrowing time that those who continue to “hold fast” to Jesus Christ will have. Set in the context of antichrist’s establishment of the abomination (v.31), and indicating that the ordeal will continue “until the final end”, this passage likewise establishes the time period for the Great Persecution as essentially extending over the entire final 42 months of the Great Tribulation, and likewise apportions the suffering, “sword, and flame, and captivity, and plunder”, to everyone subject to it.

(8) But all these things (of vs. 3-7) are [merely] the beginning of the birth pangs (i.e., the first half of the Tribulation). (9) Then (i.e., the beginning of the Great Tribulation) men will betray you [bringing you] into tribulation (i.e., the Great Persecution), and will put you to death, and you will be hated by all of the nations on account of My Name.
Matthew 24:8-9 (cf. Matt.10:16-33; Mk.13:9-13; Lk.21:12-24)

Comment: Our Lord’s words here anchor the previous prophecies of Daniel and later prophecies of Revelation, and demonstrate with certainty the reality of a coming persecution during the second, final phase of the Tribulation of such unprecedented scope and intensity that it can only be described as “great”.

The above are only the major passages which directly describe the Great Persecution in some detail, but they are sufficient to show that this widely underappreciated teaching is both heavily stressed in scripture and of absolute importance to us all “upon whom the ends of the ages have come” (1Cor.10:11). Nor are these the only passages where one finds reference to the Great Persecution (cf. also Is.24:16; Jer.31:2; Mic.7:1-7; Jn.16:1-4; 2Thes.1:6-10; cf. Jer.9:4; 12:5-6; 31:2). For example, the attribution of the divine wrath that will come upon the earth at the end of the Tribulation is consistently characterized by scripture as a direct divine response to the “blood of the saints”, that is, divine judgment descending upon antichrist, his kingdom, and his minions as a direct result of the Great Persecution (e.g., Is.26:20-21; 2Pet.3:10b; Rev.16:5-6; 17:6; 18:24; 19:2). In conclusion, it may also be mentioned that there have always been persecutions of believers in every age of world history, so that the many biblical passages which deal with this general subject will be, if anything, even more important and applicable during the quintessential persecution to come, the Great Persecution (cf. Jer.45:1-4; Mic.7:1-7; Matt.13:21; Jn.15:20; 16:33; Acts 14:22; 1Thes.1:6-10; 3:3; 2Tim.3:12; Heb.11:32-40; 1Pet.4:12-19).⁴⁶

3. The Precedence of the 144,000: Immediately following the description of the false prophet, of his administration of the Great Persecution, and of the mark and number of the beast in chapter thirteen, chapter fourteen turns directly to the 144,000. The appearance of these unique Jewish witnesses at this point, following the inception of the Great Persecution in the chronological sequence (yet preceding the angelic blessing upon those about to be martyred and the symbolic description of the general course of the Great Persecution in Revelation 14:14-16), is highly significant. We will cover this passage in some detail below, but suffice it to say here

⁴⁶ See especially Peter lesson #25, “Personal Tribulation”.

that this juxtaposition of passages definitively establishes the martyrdom of the 144,000 as the inaugural event of the Great Persecution. Scripture describes them here as being “purchased *first* from among men for God [the Father] and for the Lamb” (Rev.14:4), an explicit representation of these witnesses as having been delivered from the crucible of tribulation through martyrdom.

We should not let it go unnoticed here that this precedence of the 144,000 in martyrdom is an exceptional honor which in turn teaches us how we should view the prospect of our own potential martyrdom during that most difficult of times to come. Instead of seeing the possibility of literally giving up our lives for Jesus Christ as a terrible tragedy to be endured, we need to learn to see it for what it truly is, namely, a deliverance which is both a great honor and a great blessing, honoring the One we love, while guaranteeing great reward for us through all eternity. This does not mean that we seek martyrdom (the choice is God’s, not ours), nor that the experience is likely to be easy or painless, only that if so wills the will of God we need to be ready to accept the eventuality of martyrdom not with sullen resignation but with confidence, faith, and joy that God is accomplishing His will for our lives in a special way that brings special honor to our dear Savior and ultimate benefit to us (if only we comport ourselves honorably in the process – and this we shall do, God helping us).

Demonstrate faithfulness unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.⁴⁷
Revelation 2:10b

4. The Number of the Martyred:

(9) After this I looked and, behold, [there was] a huge multitude which no one was able to number from every nation and tribe and people and tongue standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes and with palm branches in their hands.
Revelation 7:9

As we have already seen, many of the passages dealing with the Great Persecution present the possibility of martyrdom for those who would remain faithful to Jesus Christ as a near certainty. This passage which describes them as “a huge multitude which no one was able to number from every nation and tribe and people and tongue” removes all doubt about the magnitude of their number, while at the same time emphasizing the worldwide nature of the Great Persecution. The actual number is withheld in Revelation 7:9, a significant fact in and of itself inasmuch as the Book of Revelation does often provide specific numbers, even when they are extremely large (e.g., Rev.9:16). Nor are we given a ratio, another form of specification found on more than one occasion in the book (e.g., Rev.8:7-12). Yet we know, even given the unprecedented magnitude of the number of these martyrs, that even so there will apparently be a sizeable host of believers still alive when our Lord returns at the end of the Great Tribulation (1Cor.15:50-54; cf. Matt.24:36-51; 25:1-13; 1Cor.15:23; 1Thes.5:1-11; 2Thes.1:3-12):

⁴⁷ For crowns as indicating levels of eternal reward, see Peter #18, “Eternal Rewards”.

(15) For we tell you this by the Lord's own Word, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord (i.e., the Second Advent which brings the Great Tribulation to a close) will not precede those who have fallen asleep. (16) For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout of command, with the archangel's blast on the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ shall rise first (in resurrection), (17) then we who are alive and remain will be snatched up together with them *in clouds* to meet the Lord in the air, and in this way we shall always be with the Lord.

1st Thessalonians 4:15-17

It is worth noting in this regard therefore that the fact that those martyred will be an innumerable multitude does not necessarily mean that they will constitute the majority of those still faithful to Jesus Christ when the Great Persecution begins (although that may be the case). Based upon the passages covered above all we can say of a certainty is that virtually all believers will be subject to persecution during that time, and that an extremely large number will be martyred while a sizeable number will be spared in order to be resurrected while still alive at our Lord's return. It is therefore probably best to estimate the ratio at approximately "50/50". This proportion of the martyred to those who survive until the coming of the Lord is supported indirectly by the parable of the ten virgins in Matthew 25:1-13. In that parable the light of the lamp represents faith so that the five virgins whose lamps are extinguished before the bridegroom arrives stand for those who fall away in the Great Apostasy. Thus the five wise virgins whose lamps continue to shine represent those who maintain their faith until the end of the Tribulation (in contrast with those who fall away). Since we do know that those who fall away constitute one third of the Church (see part 3A, section II, "The Great Apostasy"), and since in this parable they are complemented by an equal number of believers who survive until the second advent, the only way that the one third proportion can thus be preserved is by positing an equal number who neither fall away nor abide until the end, namely, the martyrs who will quite possibly be commensurate in number with both of the two groups described in the parable.

5. General Persecution and Imprisonment: The refusal of believers to accept the mark of the beast will, from the very start, bring upon them general persecution including but not limited to social ostracism and economic hardship (Matt.10:17-20; 24:9; Mk.13:9; Lk.21:12-15; Jn.15:20-21; 16:2). As the Great Persecution gathers momentum, moreover, we may expect the faithful to come under ever greater pressures and more intense forms of persecution, not the least of which will be imprisonment (and possibly torture) as a transitional stage preceding eventual martyrdom.

(33) And those among the people who have insight will teach the people who will be persecuted by sword (i.e., martyrdom), and flame (i.e., torture leading to martyrdom), *and captivity* (i.e., imprisonment), and plunder (i.e., confiscation of property), for some time.
Daniel 11:33

In fact so many passages of scripture allude to the widespread incarceration of believers during the Great Persecution either directly or by application that it seems the most prudent course on the basis of Revelation 13:10 for us to assume our imprisonment as a matter of course, even if it should be God's will for some believers to be spared this particular ordeal (Is.14:16-17; 42:7;

49:9; 51:14; 61:1; Dan.11:33; Hab.1:9; Zech.9:11-12; Matt.10:17-20; Mk.13:9; Lk.4:18-19; cf. Ps.79:11; 102:13-20; Is.14:2; Matt.14:3; 18:30; 25:36-44; Acts 5:19; 8:3; 12:4; 16:23; Heb.10:34; 13:3).

But, [what is] even more [grievous] than these things (i.e., the disruptions of the Tribulation's first half),⁴⁸ they will lay hands upon them (i.e., believers during the Great Persecution), betraying them into [the hands of] their [religious] assemblies **and prisons**, haling them before kings and governors for the sake of my Name.

Luke 21:12

Have no fear of what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you **into prison** to test you, and you will have tribulation for ten days.

Revelation 2:10a

6. **Betrayal**: Notwithstanding the difficulties for believers in sustaining life, and the dangers involved in collective worship that will attend the Great Persecution, it is still questionable whether such a large number as prophesied would or could ever be rounded up for imprisonment and execution without an efficient method for actively hunting them down. But the Bible leaves us in no doubt about the fact that many of the “candidates” for persecution will be secured in a most disheartening way, namely, by betrayal, often by those most near and dear to them (see also Dan.11:34; Mic.7:5-7; Mk.13:9-13; Lk.21:12; cf. Jer.9:4; 12:5-6; Matt.24:23-26).

(16) And **you will be betrayed** even by parents and siblings and friends. And they will put some of you to death, (17) and you will be hated by everyone because of my Name.
Luke 21:16-17

(10) And at that time many will fall away **and will betray each other** and will hate each other, (11) and many false prophets will arise and will deceive many. (12) Now because of the increase of lawlessness [at that time], the love of the many will cool. (13) But he who endures until the end, this [is the one who] will be saved.

Matthew 24:10-13

(34) Do not think that I have come to hurl peace upon the earth. I have not come to hurl peace upon the earth but a sword [of divisiveness]. (35) For I have come to divide, [so that] ‘a man [will be set] against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; (36) [with the result that] a man’s enemies

⁴⁸ The use of the Greek preposition *pro* in the phrase *pro de touton* (προ δε τουτων) is misunderstood in the versions as being temporal, whereas it should be taken here as preferential in degree rather than in time, that is “more significant” rather than “more recent” (cf. 1Tim.2:1; Jas.5:12; 1Pet.4:8). The point is that for believers the Great Persecution will be much more of a shock to the system than even the horrendous and notable judgments for which the Tribulation is renowned.

will be the members of his own household' (cf. Micah 7:6). (37) Whoever loves his father or mother above Me is not worthy of Me, and whoever loves his son or daughter above Me is not worthy of Me. (38) And whoever does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. (39) Whoever has found his life will lose it, and the one who has lost his life for My sake will find it.
Matthew 10:34-39

In these passages we can also see the close connection between the Great Persecution and the Great Apostasy, as the pressures of persecution serve to intensify the trend of abandoning Christ (see part 3A, section II, "The Great Apostasy"). For those believers determined to stay loyal to Jesus no matter what, the example of Daniel comes to mind, who was thrown into the lions' den precisely because he refused to alter his behavior of prayerful worship to God in spite of the fact that his enemies in the Persian government had managed to make it illegal (Dan.6). Confronted with the suspicious eyes of nearly all our prior acquaintances who are now hostile towards us no matter how close the prior relationship, it will be nigh on impossible to live and worship as true believers in Jesus Christ without exposing ourselves to similar charges of illegality and without inviting similar persecution. But just as God was able to deliver Daniel contrary to all human expectation, we need to be confident of the same potential deliverance (cf. the "help" promised in Dan.11:34), even as we accept the very real possibility outlined throughout this section that it may well be God's will for us to die as witnesses for our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (cf. 2Tim.2:11-13). We must be prepared to show the world that we truly do love Him more than our very lives.

But these [believers] have defeated [the devil] because of the blood of the Lamb and their word of witness (lit., "martyrdom"). For they did not love their lives, even to the point of death.
Revelation 12:11

7. The Mechanics of Martyrdom: In his famous exchange of letters with the Roman emperor Trajan (no. 96-97), Pliny the younger in his capacity as governor of Bithynia was told that the government should not initiate investigations to determine who might or might not be a member of this new "sect", Christianity, but that once someone was denounced as a Christian, failure to sacrifice to the emperor must be considered a capital offense. Harsh as this "don't ask, don't tell" policy was, it will appear mild in contrast to the regime of persecution that will obtain during the Great Persecution. For the elimination of faith from the earth has always been an objective near and dear to the devil's heart, and with the entire world now under the thumb of his son antichrist, the process of actively hunting down Christians in order to extirpate Christianity stock and stem will have no equal in world history. The combination of the economic prohibitions directed at those who lack the mark of the beast, the (seemingly certain) prohibitions upon Christian worship et al. (along with the infiltration of true Christian groups: Dan.11:34; cf. Matt.24:23-26; Mk.13:21-23; Lk.21:8), and the pressures placed upon friends and family to betray their kindred who are still faithful to Christ (no doubt out of a persuasive mix of penalties for inaction and rewards for cooperation) will all combine to produce a flood of captive believers into the hands of the beast's politico-religious apparatus. Those who do not immediately

acquiesce by renouncing Christ while proclaiming antichrist's divinity will become the grist for the mill of the Great Persecution. Although the scale of the Great Persecution will dwarf anything of the like in the past, in individual terms such has often been the lot of those who truly do choose Jesus over this world (cf. Rev.2:10; 2:13).

Some [of these great believers of the past] were tortured, refusing release, that they might obtain a better resurrection (i.e., worth more to them than their lives; cf. Ps.63:3). Others endured ridicule and beatings, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, sawed in half, killed by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goat hides. They were deprived, persecuted, abused. The world was not worthy of them. They wandered the deserts and the mountains, making their homes in caves and fissures in the earth. And through their faith, all of them became witnesses [to the world] (lit., "were martyred") . . .

..
Hebrews 11:35b-39a

Although individual experiences will no doubt differ somewhat, scripture gives us enough information to establish a basic schematic of the typical stages of the process to be endured by a believer during the Great Persecution once betrayed and arrested upon initial refusal to "repent". It should be noted that the three stages delineated below parallel exactly the sort of ordeal to be faced by a person wrongly accused of some heinous crime for which the penalty is death.

a. Imprisonment: We have covered above the Bible's frequent references to the imprisonment of believers during this period. The wide scale incarceration of so many believers at this time on the basis of "religious crimes" would no doubt be impossible without the cooperative efforts of clergy and authorities in a world-state where there is effectively now no separation between "church" and state, and it is further likely that only logistical issues will prevent the immediate imprisoning of the entire believing population of the world. Indeed, it is a blessed encouragement to remember that God's limitation of the devil's logistical reach, great though it will be at this time, will stymie Satan's efforts to achieve his goal of removing faith from the earth (cf. Mk.13:20). But, as noted above, a large percentage of believers will indeed be cast into prison, and, given the emphasis that scripture places upon their release at the hands of the returning Messiah, we can expect that once arrested, most of those who are not executed will not see freedom again until the second advent (cf. Is.14:17; 42:7; 49:9; 51:14; 61:1; Zech.9:11-12; Lk.4:18-19). This prospect will undoubtedly add to the pressure to apostatize on the part of those whose faith is weak. Finally, the atmosphere in which these mass arrests will take place will probably be ugly in the extreme. Just as Nero blamed the Christians for destroying Rome in order to deflect attention from himself, antichrist will in an analogous way blame believers for the assassination attempt on his person, so that we should not underestimate the zeal and vitriol with which the followers of the beast, many of them nominal "Christians", will turn to rounding up these "enemies of the state" who refuse to swear allegiance to antichrist, and, in doing so, will actually feel that they are doing God a favor:

But a time will come when everyone who kills you will think that he is making an offering in worship to God.

b. Quasi-Judicial Scrutiny: Just as our Lord's false arrest, imprisonment and trial was carried out on the basis of pretext alone (cf. Is.53:7-9; Matt.26:55; Mk.14:55-56; Lk.22:37; 22:52-53; Acts 3:13-15; 8:33; 1Pet.2:22), so those who are called to "walk in His footsteps" (Jn.13:15; 1Cor.11:1; 1Pet.2:21-25; 1Jn.2:6; cf. Matt.11:29; 16:24; Mk.10:38-39; Phil2:5) and "share in His sufferings" (Rom.8:17; 2Cor.1:5; Phil.1:29; 3:10; Col.1:24; 1Pet.4:13; cf. Gal.6:17) in this special way will be subjected to a severe process of interrogation, pressure, and abuse, along with judicial and quasi-judicial inquisition. Anyone who has been through any sort of trial will understand immediately how a string of illegal and abusive ordeals will bring enormous emotional pressures to bear on those so accused. When we add to this the concomitant physical abuse, scourging, ostracism, humiliation, and plundering of all that we have (Matt.10:17; Mk.13:9; cf. Dan.11:34), it should be obvious that this gauntlet of opposition will constitute an enormous test of faith, and one for which those so tested will be extremely grateful for every bit of prior preparation in the Word and its application. Clearly, what we may have to endure, no matter how stressful or terrible, will be nothing like what our Lord did endure. Yet we must in any case avoid underestimating either the difficulties of this process so as to lose heart, or the great honor it bestows in God's eyes so as to fail to count it the great joy amid the tears that it can and should be. Many of the greatest believers of all time endured similar extreme tests of their faith (and it is very much worth studying in this regard the examples of Daniel and his friends: Dan.3:1ff.; 6:1ff.; Stephen: Acts 6:8-7:59; Peter: Acts 5:17-42; 12:1-19; and Paul: Acts chapters 21-28). Further, in that time of testing we will receive divine "help" (Dan.11:34), so that even the words we shall speak will not be ours, but will be graciously given to us through the Holy Spirit with the result that even those among us who are not gifted in public speaking need not worry in the least about this ahead of time:

(17) Beware of [all] men. For they will betray you into [the hands of their] tribunals and will scourge you in their assemblies. (18) And you will be haled before governors and kings for my sake as a witness to them (i.e., the pseudo-Christian leaders) and to the gentiles (i.e., generic unbelievers). (19) But when they betray you, do not worry how you will speak or what you will say. For it will be given to you in that [very] hour what you will say. (20) For you will not be the ones speaking, but your Father's [Holy] Spirit will be the One speaking in you.

Matthew 10:17-20

(9) Take care for yourselves. For they will betray you into [the hands of their] tribunals and you will be beaten in their assemblies. And you will stand before governors and kings for my sake as a witness to them. (10) For the gospel must first (i.e., before "the end"; cf. Matt.24:14) be proclaimed to all the nations. (11) And when they betray and hale you [in before them], do not worry about what you will say, but whatever is given to you in that [very] hour, say that. For you are not the ones speaking but the Holy Spirit.

Mark 13:9-11

(11) And when they bring you into their assemblies and rulers and authorities, do not worry how or what defense you shall make or what you shall say. (12) For the Holy Spirit will instruct you in that very hour [as to] the things which must be said.

Luke 12:11-12

(12) But, [what is] even more [grievous] than these things (i.e., the events of vv.8-11), they will lay hands upon them, betraying them into [the hands of] their [religious] assemblies and prisons, haling them before kings and governors for the sake of my Name. (13) For this will result for you in an act of witnessing [for Me]. (14) So set it [firmly] in you hearts not to prepare ahead of time to make a defense. (15) For I will give you a mouth and wisdom which none of your enemies will be able to oppose or refute.

Luke 21:12

c. Trial by Fire: As these martyrs follow in the footsteps of our Lord, if their betrayal by their friends and loved ones and consequent imprisonment is roughly analogous to His betrayal by Judas and arrest in the garden of Gethsemane (Matt.26:48-49), and if the inquisition they undergo is roughly analogous to His series of trials by Herod, Pilate, and the Jewish religious leaders, then their subsequent trial by fire will be roughly analogous to His condemnation and ordeal in crucifixion (excepting, of course, His death for our sins). Please understand, what our Lord did for us at the cross is not to be compared with any other earthly event. But as we are called to walk in imitation of Him (Jn.13:15; 1Cor.11:1; 1Pet.2:21-25; 1Jn.2:6; cf. Matt.11:29; 16:24; Phil.2:5), and to share His sufferings (Rom.8:17; 2Cor.1:5; Phil.1:29; 3:10; Col.1:24; 1Pet.4:13; cf. Gal.6:17), the parallels which scripture points out in general terms between His experience and that of these martyrs does need to be considered. Indeed, our Lord Himself drew a clear parallel between His imminent death for us and the high calling of those who choose to follow Him (i.e., we too are to “pick up our cross” and follow Him: Matt.10:38; 16:24; Mk.8:34; Lk.9:23). So while we would never wish to make an exact comparison between martyrdom and our Lord’s unique sacrifice (for only His death could suffice to accomplish our salvation), it is nonetheless true that these martyrs for our Lord by their similar experience will be His unique witnesses, calling attention to His unique sacrifice through the absolute faith they will demonstrate in it and in Him, when they give up their lives rather than denouncing the One who bought them with His life’s blood.

And when He (i.e., the Lamb) opened the fifth seal, I saw below the altar the living persons who had been slain *because of the Word of God and because of the testimony which they had maintained.*

Revelation 6:9

In the preceding section, the verses in the gospels which detail the process of the inquisition that these believers will undergo mention first “tribunals” and “assemblies” (Matt.10:17; Mk.13:9; cf. Lk.21:12). The second word is a translation of the Greek *synagoge*, often transliterated as *synagogue*. This is somewhat misleading in that it suggests a solely Jewish setting whereas in truth what we should understand in terms of the true context being studied here is indeed a religious venue but one which is much more likely to be pseudo-Christian than Jewish. For what

is being described in respect to the quasi-judicial examination process of believers incarcerated during the Great Persecution is part and parcel of the pressure placed upon them by antichrist's religious establishment. These believers will be commanded to "repent" of their "misplaced" faith in that "other Messiah" (i.e., our true Lord and Savior Jesus Christ), and to declare instead their acceptance of antichrist as the true Christ by taking the mark of the beast. As in the case of our Lord who was called upon to deny Himself, and who was tried numerous times in the hours before His crucifixion, this process may involve numerous "trials" before various tribunals, but in every case those doing the examination will be adherents of the beast's political and religious apparatus. In particular, as has been suggested above, it is likely that many main line religious organizations completely co-opted at that time by antichrist to serve and worship him will take the lead, at least initially, in the process of pressuring those who still have true faith to abandon it in order to save their lives. That is what is meant by the "tribunals" (*synedria*), namely, smaller screening bodies of religious officials analogous to Jesus' first trial before Annas and the Sanhedrin (derived from *synedrion*, the singular form of the same word: Jn.18:12-24), whereas "assemblies" (*synagogai*) will refer to more public meetings presided over by larger numbers of religious officials with a larger audience, analogous to our Lord's second trial before Caiaphas (compare Jn.18:24 with Matt.26:57-68; Mk.14:53-65).

In this regard we should recall that the apostle John identified "many antichrists" at work during the Church age (1Jn.2:18-22; cf. 2Jn.1:7), and gave as the means for that identification the fact that "they went out from us". Applied to our present discussion, this gives us a clear indication that both antichrist and many of his key followers will be erstwhile "Christian leaders" as indeed we have already seen.⁴⁹ We have already noted here a consistent parallel between our Lord's trial by fire prior to the cross and the experience of the martyrs of the Great Persecution. In this respect we may anticipate present-day equivalents among the beast's co-opted "Christian leaders" which likewise parallel the various religious sects of our Lord's day, groups which in prior years and centuries had no doubt included genuine believers, but which by the time of Jesus' multiple trials had similarly been co-opted into doing the devil's work. For the "scribes" who consistently put tradition over truth, the similarly traditionalist denominations of the Orthodox and Catholic persuasions are the best fit. For the secularist Sadducees, the old line now quite liberal Protestant denominations who have come to prefer "reason" to scripture along with other related groups (e.g., Unitarians and Christian Scientists) are a good match. The legalistic Pharisees who used judgmental applications of the Law to eliminate mercy and faith bring to mind the trends now found in many conservative Protestant denominations such as various Baptists and other spin-off independent denominations (and one may wish to place the Mormons here as well). The other-worldly Essenes are somewhat analogous to the various "charismatic" groups who worship experience over scripture, while we may find in the Zealots a parallel for any of the many fringe groups, left or right, which embrace violence, setting their extreme efforts in place of God and His plan. Apologies ahead of time to any and all who are partial to any of the groups mentioned above, but the reader is asked to remember that we are

⁴⁹ See The Coming Tribulation: Part 3A: From the Seventh Seal to the Two Witnesses, section II.2, "The Situation of the Church-visible on the Eve of the Tribulation".

talking here about *future* events that will take place only after the removal of the Holy Spirit's restraining influence in the crucible of the Tribulation. This set of parallels is thus *not* meant to indict any present group (and indulgence is also asked for any which may have been inadvertently left out), but merely to illustrate how the various tendencies of all the major Christian (not to mention pseudo-Christian) organizations could very well result in their being employed in the service of evil once they no longer contain any true believers, that is, the very situation which obtained in our Lord's day and the very one which we are contemplating during the Tribulation after antichrist co-opts the church-visible for his own ends.

Before final approval is given for the execution of those who refuse to repent despite such pressures, the political authorities will also have to weigh in. These are the "governors and kings" mentioned in the pertinent scriptures above (Matt.10:17; Mk.13:9; Lk.21:12), and are analogous to our Lord's trials before Herod and Pilate. Just as religious officials are co-opted in antichrist's kingdom, so of course will all of the world's political officials be, for the beast's rule will be a worldwide rule (Rev.13:1-9). For those being persecuted, it is very important to understand that being alone and having been subjected to extreme physical and verbal abuse, these trials will constitute an inordinate amount of pressure the degree of which is difficult to grasp before the fact, even by those among us who may have been subjected to a lengthy legal process. It is therefore imperative as we study these things to appreciate ahead of time the importance of prior spiritual preparation to the successful endurance of such trials, even as we gain a better appreciation for the gauntlet our Lord ran for us even before He got to the cross and died for our sins.

Revelation 6:9 quoted above tells us that those put to death in the Great Persecution will be executed "because of the Word of God and because of the testimony which they had maintained". We have also seen that the false prophet will be given the authority "to bring it about that as many as refused to worship the image of the beast might be put to death." (Rev.13:15). Further, the resurrected martyrs seen in Revelation chapter twenty who reign with Christ for a thousand years are said not to have worshiped "the beast or his image and did not take the mark on their forehead and on their hand" (Rev.20:4). The litmus test then for execution and martyrdom will be the two-sided coin of refusing to reject the true Christ on the one hand and of refusing to worship the pseudo-Christ beast and his image in conjunction with the reception of his mark on the other.

This brings up the question of whether or not a person can be said to refuse to worship the image of the beast in any place other than Jerusalem. For clearly the false prophet who forces obeisance and administers capital punishment on all who refuse will be in Jerusalem, as will antichrist and antichrist's abominable image. Given the vast numbers of those put to death for the Lord and their geographical diversity, "a huge multitude which no one was able to number from every nation and tribe and people and tongue" (Rev.7:9), it is likely that, when Jesus tells us in Matthew 24:9 "and [they] will put some of you to death", He is talking about the local "governors and kings" mentioned above. Therefore just as the mark of the beast is discussed in a manner that seems to connect it with worshipping the statue in person (i.e., Rev.14:9-11; 16:2;

19:20; 20:4) and yet it seems improbable that everyone who agrees to take the mark will have to go to Jerusalem to do so, so in this case it seems preferable to understand some sort of satellite process, possibly enhanced through technology, whereby many of the martyrs will be put to death locally.

As to the timing, we can expect persecution to go hand in hand with the ceremonial placing of the mark of the beast, with the coercion, compulsion, and execution of some believers beginning from the start. It stands to reason, however, that the process of denouncing, arresting, examining, and executing those who refuse to acknowledge the beast will have to gather speed and momentum over time. Human limitations being what they are, a period of transition into the new, harsh economic reality that accompanies the mark (Rev.13:7) will thus be unavoidable despite the devil's best efforts, so that not all believers will be identified immediately (indeed, as we have seen, fully half of those who remain at that time will most likely survive until the coming of the Lord). Nevertheless, we can be sure that the beast will do everything in his power to make that time of transition as short as possible so that we may expect to see a rapid implementation of this policy and subsequent ensnaring of the faithful. Given the desire for speed, sheer logistics would seem to indicate that, while there will be a certain amount of celebrity worship and marking done in Jerusalem itself (and the conspicuous execution of prominent Christians there too, for that matter), this process will take place mainly on the local level. Whether or not the local venues will have smaller replicas of the "abomination that causes [spiritual] desolation" or be fitted out with large viewing screens or some other such substitute, we cannot say for certain. What is certain, however, is that worshiping the beast and his image, in person or remotely, and taking the mark, whether from the second beast himself or one of antichrist's clergy far from Jerusalem, will just as surely guarantee condemnation. Finally, inasmuch as Revelation 13:15 shows that the false prophet will be engaged in personal direction of some of these inquisitions which result in the execution of those who refuse to worship the beast and his image and take his mark, it is therefore also the case that some of the martyrs will indeed be killed in Jerusalem – and perhaps a large number of them at that. For those so "selected", it will certainly mean the necessity not only of being strong under the initial pressures following imprisonment, but of staying strong in faith for what is likely to be a long and arduous process. Gaining a temporary reprieve on the local level merely for the purpose of being transported to the headquarters of evil for "special treatment" will no doubt be very much like facing a firing-squad twice.

As to the manner of execution, scripture does not provide any basis for dogmatically singling out a preferred method (although see Rev.20:4 where the martyrs are described as having been beheaded). The "sword" in Revelation 13:10 is a common biblical metaphor for capital punishment (cf. Matt.26:52; Rom.13:4). Crucifixion as well as more traditional modern modes of execution are certainly possible (cf. Jn.21:19). However, given that fire is closely connected with antichrist and his false prophet (Rev.13:13), and the close analogy already noted between the refusal by Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego to worship the statue of Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel chapter 3, it is more than likely that a similar death by fire will be the end result of this "trial by fire" for the tribulational martyrs (cf. the fiery sea" of Rev.15:2). Just as those three

great men of God were not intimidated into forsaking Him despite the terror before them and were vindicated in a most miraculous way, so we need to commit ourselves to trust and obey God in spite of the commands of the world's authorities to reject Him, in spite of the confidence of the beast's followers that they are "doing good" in putting us to death (cf. Jn.16:2), and in spite of every terrifying eventuality with which we may be threatened. For while it will not be the fate of the tribulational martyrs to walk out of the fiery furnace the way Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego did, it will be their lot to rise first in the ranks of the redeemed (1Thes.4:16b), and to reign with Jesus a thousand years:

And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given to them (i.e., they sat in judgment), namely the persons who had been executed (lit., "beheaded with an ax") because of their witness for Jesus and because of the Word of God, [that is] whoever did not worship the beast or his image and did not take the mark on their forehead and on their hand. For they came to life and began to rule with Christ for a thousand years.
Revelation 20:4

8. The Great Persecution in Israel: As we saw in our study of Revelation chapter 12 above, the vast majority of believers within Israel will respond to the divine command to flee into the desert and will thus be shielded from the otherwise universal persecution of the faithful. However, Daniel chapter eleven, a passage already covered above in some detail, does seem to indicate that, along with Moses and Elijah and the 144,000, a certain number of believers will remain in the land (as is also indicated by a number of other passages which suggest continued problems for believers in Israel despite the flight of the faithful: e.g., Jer.30:7; Dan.8:12; 12:7; Zech.10:11).

(30) For ships of Kittim (i.e., the western "Babylon") will attack with him (i.e., antichrist) [so that he will be victorious]. Then he will be stricken [as if dead], but will revive. And he will be enraged at the holy covenant, so that on his return [to Israel from the far south] he will take action [against it] (i.e., ending the sacrifices, setting up the abomination, taking his seat in the temple). And he will give his support to those who abandon the holy covenant. (31) For it is from him that the military forces will issue forth which will pollute the sanctuary (i.e., ending the ministry of Moses and Elijah), remove the daily sacrifice, and set up the abomination of desolation. (32) And with enticements he will seduce [people] to violate the [holy] covenant, but the people who know their God will continue to hold fast to it. (33) And those among the people who have insight will teach the people who will be persecuted by sword (i.e., martyrdom), and flame (i.e., torture leading to martyrdom), and captivity (i.e., imprisonment), and plundering (i.e., confiscation of property), for some time. (34) And when they are persecuted, they will receive a little help, yet many will ally themselves to them under false pretenses. (35) For even from among [the ranks of] those who have insight, some will be persecuted, in order to refine, purify, and cleanse them until the final end. For [it is] yet to come at its appointed time.
Daniel 11:30-35

Whether it is the case that those described in the above persecution in Israel following the Tribulation's mid-point failed to depart at the proper time, or were led by the Spirit to remain, or became believers after the fact, it is certainly true that what is being described here is applicable to the Church as a whole and to the pattern of the Great Persecution as a whole everywhere else in the world as well (and that is undoubtedly an important connection we are meant to make). One thing is certain: all those who remain in the land during this period, believers and unbelievers both, are in for a very difficult time (e.g., Is.8:14-15).

9. The Role of Babylon: The book of Revelation very emphatically makes Babylon responsible for the Great Persecution, both directly (Rev.17:6; 18:20; 18:24; 19:2; cf. Rev.16:6), and also in terms of the beast's religion of "prostitution and witchcraft" which lies behind it and for which she is the primary source (Rev.17:1-5; 18:3-4; cf. Rev.14:8-9; 16:19). In fact, Babylon the great prostitute is said in Revelation 17:6 to be "drunk with the blood of the holy ones, even from [the blood of] the witnesses for Jesus", providing us with a clear linkage between the Great Persecution and Babylon in her capacity as the original headquarters of antichrist's religious and political base. Babylon, of course, is also the wealthiest state in the world (cf. the descriptions in Rev.17:1-6 and in all of chapter 18), so that the commercial restrictions upon those who lack the mark (whereby so many believers will be identified, incarcerated and martyred) are doubtless to be understood as intimately connected with her role in this regard as well. Since the Great Persecution is thus largely indistinguishable from Babylon in scripture, showing that she will thus be the chief agent of that persecution through the amalgamated world-system of religious, economic and political power she represents, we are further correct to conclude that the new pseudo-Christianity developed by antichrist in Babylon will be instrumental in conducting the Great Persecution itself. Just as our Lord was haled before a series of Jewish religious councils which ought to have worshiped Him, the Messiah of the Jews, so believers during the Great Persecution will find themselves being accused, berated, and condemned by erstwhile fellow "Christians", a fact that will make the burden of martyrdom all that much more difficult to bear.

10. A Brief Christian "Code of Conduct" for the Great Persecution: While the issue of proper conduct for believers during the Tribulation generally is properly the subject of part 7 of this series, it seems appropriate to discuss the topic here in brief. After all, the most difficult testing of the Tribulation will fall upon those caught up in the Great Persecution, especially the martyrs. It is hoped that the following list of guiding principles, though not meant to be exhaustive, will prove to be some help to those facing the trying circumstance of that future time (or indeed similar pressures in the present):

a. Don't hide your light of faith under a bushel (Matt.5:15-16): Be courageous in continuing to carry out the ministries and Christian witness to which Christ has called you (Matt.10:28). Many contemporary Christians seem to believe that once the Tribulation arrives we are to go into "survivalist mode". This seems to run counter to everything the Bible has to say. When the apostles were told to stop speaking and teaching in the Name of Jesus, they refused on pain of scourging, imprisonment and death (all three of which fates lay in wait for many of them because of their determination to serve Jesus no matter what the cost; cf. Acts 5:29). Certainly, we are

told to be wise as well as innocent in the way we conduct ourselves in the world (Matt.10:16; cf. Rom.16:19; 1Cor.14:20), and no one is suggesting that we volunteer to be executed, that we “dare” the authorities to martyr us, or that we deliberately go out of our way to run afoul of those who are administering the Great Persecution, calling attention to ourselves rather than to Christ (cf. Matt.6:2). This extreme is clearly not what God would have us to do any more than He expects us to run for cover rather than confess our faith in His Son. Daniel and his three friends give us the perfect examples of how we should behave in this regard. Daniel did not immediately go into the presence of the king and protest the wicked decree forged against him, daring him to make him a martyr for the Lord; but neither did he run and hide as he well might have done for just a day, or even change in any way his normal walk with the Lord, but continued in exactly the same way as he had before the harsh decree was passed. Likewise, Hananiah, Mishael, and Asariah (Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego) did not make a point of identifying themselves to the king, daring him to throw them into the fiery furnace so that they might be martyrs for the Lord; but neither did they run and hide as they well might have done for just that day, or even change their normal manner of faithful service to the king as a reflection of their duty to God, but were present on the plain of Dura at the king’s command. In each case, continuation of faithfulness in normal spiritual and secular behavior led these men to be martyred – but in each case God delivered them in a miraculous way. It is well for us to consider, should it so be that we face such circumstances ourselves, that God is completely capable of delivering us as well, so that if we should be caught in the process of living our lives as God would have us to do and then martyred as a result, it can only be because this is the will of God for us, and it is only through our response to His will that He is glorified through us (Is.43:7; Eph.1:5-14). Everyone will have to make his or her own applications of this principle during that time and it may very well be that some measure of greater circumspection will be appropriate in some things (such as avoiding commercial venues where the lack of the mark will be an issue; cf. Is.26:20; Matt.10:17; Mk.13:9), while more boldness will be appropriate in others (such as visiting those who have been imprisoned for their faith: Matt.25:39; Heb.13:3; cf. Rev.2:10). The point is that, just as we should do today, during the Great Persecution we ought to be consulting our Lord and His Word of truth in prayer and in the power of the Spirit in order to know the right thing to do in trying circumstances, rather than consulting the world and our circumstances in it first and foremost, making God merely an afterthought.

[But in contrast to those who receive the mark of the beast and worship him], the saints have *perseverance*, [even] those who in this way (i.e., by refusing to receive the mark or worship the beast) *keep God’s commandments and [retain] their faith in Jesus* (viz., even though it may cost them their lives).

Revelation 14:12

b. Don’t fall asleep spiritually (Mk.13:32-37): Stay alert through continued spiritual growth and ministry. As we mentioned above, one of the most disturbing ironies of the Great Tribulation is that true believers in Christ will be persecuted as at no other time in history for being unwilling to accept this pseudo-Messiah. Therefore we should not underestimate the degree to which antichrist and his pseudo-Christianity will resemble the real thing at least on the surface, nor the degree to which the pressures to conform and join-in arising both from putative fellow

“Christians” and also especially from friends and family will be persuasive (as they were in the case of Jewish believers in Israel during the first century: cf. Hebrews 10:23-39). For the comforting aspects of “belonging” to the pseudo-church of that day will be even more deadly to faith in truth than it was in the situation described throughout the book of Hebrews or than it is today (where what we are experiencing is in most cases merely rank superficiality and lukewarmness to the truth of scripture rather than outright worship of the devil). Embracing apostasy out of pressure, even the extreme pressure of persecution, is the one sure way to put faith to death and thereby lose out on all the blessings of eternity so very close at any time, but especially during the waning days of the Tribulation (Heb.11:26; 11:37; cf. Rev.14:9-11).

c. Don't let your light of faith go out (Matt.25:1-13): Keep fighting the good fight of faith in spite of the many difficult challenges to faith that will arise during the Great Persecution. Holding onto faith will require the correct mental perspective informed by scripture regarding the true situation at that time. Even Moses became distraught at Pharaoh's lack of positive response amid the increased pressures on the children of Israel (Ex.5:22-23), but we have the advantage of hindsight so that we know from the Bible what the Lord's plan was all along. We know from scripture how it was that the Lord would work everything out for good in spite of repeated trouble and testing. And we know too, unfortunately, that the people continually failed to trust the Lord in spite of the many extraordinary miracles they witnessed. As believers who may experience the things to come, we need to remember this example (cf. 1Cor.10:1-13). We need to prepare ourselves, not with canned goods in the basement but with Bible truth in the heart, to endure what the Lord has told us about through scripture ahead of time, remembering not to take these terrible times and events personally, but rather to appreciate the inner workings of the overall plan of God upon these final events of history before the return of our Lord Jesus Christ.⁵⁰ The believers of that time who do survive with faith intact will be those who were prepared to stand against their country (cf. Rev.18:4), family (cf. Matt.10:36; Jn.16:1-4), church (cf. Jn.16:2), and economic well-being (Rev.13:17). For as bad as the Great Persecution will be from the very start, we may expect it to grow progressively worse before our Lord returns.

d. Don't value your life over your faith (Matt.16:24-27): Love the Lord with all your heart. Don't put physical things, even those essential for minimal survival, over the truly more important spiritual ones. If it comes to it, it is far better to lose one's life for His sake than to gain the world without Him at the price of forfeiting the eternal life that is in Him (Matt.10:37-39). The Tribulation in general and the Great Persecution in particular will be a refining process (Dan.11:35; cf. Dan.7:18-27), whereby the Lord will not only demonstrate who are truly His but will also glorify Himself through what those who prove faithful in this trial are willing to suffer for His Name. The entirety of human history is “God's threshing floor” (Matt.3:12), used by Him to demonstrate beyond any doubt what we really do choose, and how emphatically we choose it (the basis for rewards on the part of believers). At no time will this be more true than during the Great Persecution. If we really are thinking like God is thinking, instead of becoming

⁵⁰ See part 4 of The Satanic Rebellion: Background to the Tribulation: “Satan's World System, Past, Present, and Future”, section I, “Strangers in the Devil's Realm”.

disconsolate under the pressures, inconveniences, trials, tribulations, and loss of the Great Persecution, we will see beyond the veil that shrouds this life from the next and realize that the rewards we are earning through patient endurance and joyous acceptance of our Lord's will for us are not to be compared to any of the troubles we are presently suffering, even if they cost us a few short years of our physical lives, lives which would be completely pointless in any case apart from our faith in and faithfulness to our dear Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who died for us (Rom.8:18; 2Cor.4:17).

e. Don't be afraid (Lk.12:32-34): Let hope and joy rule your heart as you continue to look forward in eager anticipation to the glories of the Kingdom to come rather than focusing upon the miseries of the present. The beast and his father the devil along with all their followers can only kill the body, not the spirit (Matt.10:26-31), and can only do that if the Lord allows – our deaths are always precious in His sight and we can expect that to be doubly true during this unprecedented period of martyrdom (Ps.116:15). Given that as we have seen above the likelihood is for fully one half of those whose faith survives the Great Apostasy to perish in glory as martyrs for our Lord during the Great Persecution, our hope of eternal life and joy in our eternal reward ought always to temper any prospect of earthly survival in light of the very real possibility of martyrdom (cf. Zeph.2:3; Jer.45), ever making it our first priority to demonstrate faithfulness to the One who is ever faithful to us.

Therefore let all those who are suffering according to the will of God entrust their lives (while doing what is good) to a Creator who is faithful.

1st Peter 4:19

Demonstrate faithfulness unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.

Revelation 2:10b

In all of this, then, we need to keep in mind that the Tribulation is an essential part of the Plan of God and could never happen in the first place apart from His specific will (2Thes.2:6-8; Rev.5:1-5). That is true both on the worldwide level and in the case every individual believer, no matter what the Lord has in store for us personally. As we have seen in our comparison of the competing tribulational trends (see the chart in the introduction above), the Tribulation constitutes a key part of God's demonstration of Satan's complete evil and ultimate powerlessness on the one hand, and of His own righteousness and faithfulness on the other (with the Millennium which follows providing the ultimate counterpoint to a world ruled by the devil in contrast to a world ruled by God). The Tribulation thus has an important role to play in the overall Plan of God and in His refutation of Satan. For it will be seen more clearly than ever before during those final seven years that the devil is in no way "for" mankind as he seeks to destroy the world, while at the same time we will observe God's miraculous protection of a holy remnant in the world in spite of otherwise complete satanic control. And not only that, but the Tribulation will also demonstrate that in spite of the greatest pressures of human history, there will indeed be those who continue to remain faithful to the Lord, notwithstanding the incredible enticements of its first half (which is destined to sweep so many away in the Great Apostasy), and the unprecedented pressures of its second half (wherein half of the faithful will be subjected

to martyrdom). In short, though we may be forced during those dark days ahead to “make hay without straw” for what seems a never-ending stretch of time, we should recall that in the analogy of the days preceding the Exodus, Pharaoh, a type of antichrist, was really making the Lord the issue in this persecution (cf. Ex.5:17). Those abused during the Great Persecution will likewise and most assuredly be persecuted *because of Jesus Christ*, and this is at once the greatest compliment to a believer’s faith and the greatest opportunity to demonstrate that faithfulness, separating for all the world to see the seed in good soil from that which fell upon the rock.

Here is a trustworthy saying: If we died with Him, we will also live with Him; if we persevere, we will also reign with Him. If we disown Him, He will also disown us; If we are faithless, He will remain faithful, for He cannot disown Himself.

2nd Timothy 2:11-13

1. The Martyrdom of the 144,000: Revelation 14:1-5

(1) And I looked, and behold, the Lamb stood upon Mount Zion, and with Him were the 144,000, having His Name and the Name of His Father written upon their foreheads. (2) And I heard a sound from heaven like a sound of many waters and a sound of thunder, and the sound which I heard was like that of lyre-players playing on their lyres. (3) And they (i.e., the 144,000) are singing a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and before the elders, and no one was able to learn the song except the 144,000 [singing] in unison, they who had been purchased from the earth. (4) These are they who have not fallen into sin with women (i.e., been seduced by them), as shown by the fact that they are virgins. These are they who were purchased first from among men for God [the Father] and for the Lamb. (5) And no lie was found in their mouths, as shown by the fact that they are blameless.

Revelation 14:1-5

The 144,000: The first martyrs of the Great Persecution will be, as seen above, the 144,000. Along with Moses and Elijah, these Jewish evangelists will be the most conspicuous believers in Jesus Christ, and for that reason alone an obvious first target of antichrist’s unprecedented pogrom. This precedence in martyrdom is why they are described in verse four as having been “purchased *first* from among men”. The worldwide proclamation of the gospel first prophesied in Mark 13:9 is the event we see actually taking place in Revelation 14:6 immediately following our present context. Therefore the experience of inquisition described in Mark 13:10 and following can be understood as having a special applicability to the 144,000. Following the beast’s war upon Moses and Elijah, his cessation of the temple rites, and his pursuit of believing Jews into the desert, we may expect the Great Persecution to commence in earnest with the rounding up of the 144,000 worldwide and their subjection to a series of highly publicized “show trials” of the sort described in Mark and in the other gospels as a result of which these evangelists will be publically and conspicuously put to death (e.g., Matt.10:5-42; 24:4-28; Lk.9:1-27; 10:1-

24; 21:12-36).⁵¹ It is entirely conceivable that while the main body of martyrs will be too large to entertain such a possibility, that the 144,000 will indeed be transported to Israel and made to stand before the “abomination that causes [spiritual] desolation” on the temple mount in Jerusalem before being formally convicted and executed. It will thus be very important for them to keep the words given by our Lord firmly in mind throughout this ordeal (as well as for those called to follow later in their footsteps in similar or identical circumstances). This will be true in particular in regard to His command to leave their verbal defense to the Holy Spirit (Matt.10:17-20; Mk.13:9-11; Lk.12:11-12; 21:12). For, as suggested above, it is probable, in the absence of Moses and Elijah, now miraculously translated into heaven, that the beast and his false prophet will attempt to blame the 144,000 for all of the troubles that have befallen the world as a result of the trumpet judgments (for we have seen how Moses and Elijah actually administered some of these judgments as well as other judgments similar to them). And we may expect this justification to be extended later to the Great Persecution in general, with all believers being similarly made scapegoats for the judgment that has so far fallen upon the unbelieving world by way of warning (but which cannot be compared to the intensity of the bowl judgments soon to come as just divine retribution for the Great Persecution itself), as well as for the conspiratorial attempt to assassinate the beast. Since the 144,000 and all the martyrs will be slandered and wrongly held accountable in this way, it is all the more understandable why Jesus tells them to let God the Holy Spirit do the talking in defense – God’s authority in Jesus Christ is the true issue here (cf. the Lord telling Samuel not to be upset at the people’s request for a king since “It is Me they have rejected”: 1Sam.8:7-8).

In the verses translated here, Revelation 14:1-5, we see the 144,000 in their interim, pre-resurrection state, fresh from their martyrdom on the earth. That this is not a preview of the second advent as is sometimes supposed is made clear by the fact that 1) John hears the sound of their singing coming “from heaven” (v.2); 2) they are said to have been redeemed “from the earth” (which shows that they are not presently on it: v.3); and 3) the presence of heavenly objects and persons such as the throne of God, the four living creatures, and the angelic elders (v.3). Therefore the Mount Zion referred to in verse one is the heavenly Mount Zion rather than the earthly one (Heb.12:22-24; cf. Gal.4:14; Rev.3:12; 21:10). Indeed, we have already seen the presence on this heavenly Mount Zion of the temple and the ark of the covenant (Rev.11:19; cf. Rev.14:15-17; 15:5-8; 16:1; 16:17), whose mention is likewise in keeping with the clear counterpoint being given here of the true heavenly realities which contrast so sharply with the earthly desecration of the temple mount by antichrist. We see that same counterpoint, that same contrast, in the description of the 144,000 who, though just martyred under the most trying of circumstances, now stand before the Lamb in unimaginable bliss. Killing them has merely resulted in blessing beyond description.

We may also observe from this passage the principle that special service to the Lord never fails to produce exceptional rewards. This is certainly true of the 144,000 and should be of immense

⁵¹ For all of these issues involving the 144,000, please see in The Coming Tribulation: Part 2B: The Heavenly Prelude to the Tribulation, section V, “The Sealing of the 144,000”.

encouragement to everyone caught up in the Great Persecution (not to mention personal tribulation at any time in history). For we see here three unique privileges bestowed upon these martyrs. First, we see them with Jesus in what can only be described here as close and intimate fellowship. Quoting Isaiah 8:18 (a passage which also mentions Mt. Zion), Hebrews 2:13 unequivocally ascribes to Christ the future assembly of all the “children” given to Him by the Father. This is the common blessed destiny of all who have put their faith in the Son of Man, but here we see the 144,000 enjoying a special preview of that eternal fellowship even before the resurrection and second advent (quite an exceptional honor). Second, the Holy Spirit seal they had received upon their foreheads in chapter seven now is legible as the Name of the Son and of the Father. All who have chosen for Jesus will receive “the Name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem (which is going to come down from heaven from My God), and My new Name” (Rev.3:12), but here we see the 144,000 enjoying this special preview of that eternal demonstration of being God’s own unique possession (quite an exceptional comfort). Third, John also hears them singing a special hymn of praise before the throne (i.e., a “new song”).⁵² While we will all sing the praises of our Lord throughout all eternity (cf. Rev.5:13), here we see the 144,000 performing in unison⁵³ this special song in a way in which no one else is able to duplicate, suggesting, rather than an inability to learn the words (which are recorded here for us even now), that they are all given some special musical talent to render this unique song (quite an exceptional blessing). It should be noted in passing that the 144,000 do not have “harps” or “lyres”. The Greek adverb *hos* merely tells us that their vocal ability to perform this melody is such that it can only be described by John as if they were using instruments.

Finally, some explanation is required of the statements regarding the “virginity” and “blamelessness” of the 144,000. We have already had occasion to show in part 2B of this series how that these men were indeed all virgins, a special sacrifice undertaken in order to carry out their unique ministries (cf. “eunuchs for the Kingdom of God”: Matt.19:13), but, clearly, no human being has ever been sinless, apart from our Lord.⁵⁴ As to their present status, standing before the throne in the presence of the Lamb, they most assuredly *are* blameless and incapable of any prevarication (as indeed we all shall be then and should strive to be now: Eph.1:4; 5:27; Phil.2:15; Col.1:22; Jude 1:24). As to their former lives, “blamelessness”, while not allowing for sinless perfection, does speak to their incredible integrity of lifestyle, an important ingredient in

⁵² cf. Ps.33:3; 40:3; 96:1; 98:1; 144:9; 149:1; Is.42:10; see also the treatment of this phrase as it occurs in Rev.5:9 in part 2B of this series.

⁵³ Our best biblical manuscript, Sinaiticus (or *a* as it is often represented in critical editions), has, in addition to the number, the word *mian* (μῑαν). This is the accusative feminine of the Greek integer “one”, but is being used here adverbially to mean “as one” (a usage paralleled in *koine* inscriptions).

⁵⁴ See Bible Basics: Part 3B: Hamartiology: The Biblical Study of Sin, section II.2, “The Universality of Sin”.

the specialized ministries they undertook. The statement “no lie was found in their mouths”, while not allowing for a life without ever so much as bending the truth, does speak to the absolute integrity of their message, as they witnessed in all sanctification to the truth of Him who is the truth throughout their earthly ministries. In each of these two pairs of phrases, the Greek conjunction *gar* (*γαρ*) is being used to adduce the grounds for the first phrase. That is to say, the grounds for concluding that the 144,000 had perfect integrity of message is their blamelessness (i.e., their good conduct supported their message; cf. Jas.3:2), and likewise the grounds for concluding that the 144,000 had a perfect record in abstention from illicit sex (apparently a widespread part of antichrist’s new religion; cf. Num.25; 2Pet.2:15; Jude 1:11) is the fact of their virginity (i.e., their virginity is the proof). One thing seems clear from the blessed description of the 144,000 as they stand and sing in the presence of the Lord: despite the difficulties of their lives and of their deaths, none would have had it any other way, for they have been highly rewarded for glorifying God in this special way.

[Jesus] said this indicating by what sort of death (i.e., one of martyrdom analogous to our Lord’s) [it was that Peter] would *glorify God*. And having said this, He says to him, “Follow me!”
John 21:19

2. The Three Angelic Proclamations: Revelation 14:6-13

Prior to the commencement of the seven punitive “bowl judgments”, God in His great mercy will give the unbelieving world one final chance to turn from its evil, and towards Him and salvation through Jesus Christ instead. This final series of warnings will be heard worldwide through angelic proclamation, a true indication of the gracious and forgiving character of our God (cf. Is.18:3). First, the “eternal gospel” is given with a warning appended to “fear God” because “the hour of His judgment has come”. Then, a second angel warns of the coming destruction of Babylon, the mightiest and wealthiest of the nations of the world. Lastly, a third angel spells out in great detail the terrors that await those who persist in worshiping the beast instead of the one true God. The stubborn refusal of the vast majority of the world’s population in the face of the bowl judgments to come can be seen at Revelation 15:9 and 15:11, as a “hardness of the gentiles” comes to replace the “hardness in part” of Israel (Rom.11:25) in these the waning days of the times of the gentiles (Lk.21:24; cf. Rev.11:2), a reversal of roles to the pre-Church status quo already having been witnessed on the positive side with the reestablishment of Jewish leadership through the ministries of Moses and Elijah, and the 144,000.

a. The Way of Salvation Proclaimed: Revelation 14:6-7

(6) And I saw an angel flying in mid-heaven, [one who] had an eternal message of good news (i.e., “gospel”): “Give the good news to those dwelling on the earth, even to every nation and every tribe and every language and every people (7) [and do so] in a loud voice, [telling them to] ‘Fear God and give Him glory, because the hour of His judgment

has come, and worship Him who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and the fountains of water”⁵⁵.
Revelation 14:6-7

Immediately following the martyrdom of the 144,000 who had carried the gospel message to the four corners of the world (albeit primarily to Jews), we now have the final evangelistic effort of the Tribulation, the last chance for the unbelieving world to turn from evil and respond to the truth, one which was prophesied by our Lord Himself as presaging the coming of the end:

And this good news (i.e., “gospel”) of the kingdom shall be proclaimed in all the inhabited world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.

Matthew 24:14 (cf. Mk.13:10)

From this point forward, for those who choose to reject this good news and harden their hearts beyond any possible future repentance there will be only spiritual darkness (Jn.9:4 cf. Is.21:12), until the Light of the world Himself returns. It is important to point out that the order to give the good news comes from this angel but that it is not he alone who carries out the command. We must assume that this is a high ranking angel, and, while scripture is not specific, the fact that there are seven angels mentioned in this context (i.e., Rev.14:6; 14:8; 14:9; 14:14 [an angel representing our Lord]; 14:15; 14:17; 14:18), strongly suggests that these are the archangels (a supposition which certainly is in keeping here with the issuing of a command that will take a very large complement of other angels to fulfill).⁵⁶ The gospel message recorded here is very similar to the essence of the message given by our Lord during the initial days of His earthly ministry: “Repent, because the kingdom of heaven is near” (Matt.4:17). Then as now and at that future time, the first order of business is to get the attention of the unbelieving world by fixing their gaze upon God (i.e., the need to fear Him and the nearness of the kingdom respectively), and then to respond with a basic change of attitude (“repent” and “worship” respectively). In our Lord’s day, He Himself was the one giving the message, so that the issue of Jesus was a personal one. In this passage, we should not fail to note that as the person of the Trinity responsible for physically creating the world (as well as maintaining it: Jn.1:3; 1:10; 1Cor.8:6; Col.1:16; Heb.1:2), Jesus Himself, the Giver of life, is the One “who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and the fountains of water”, necessities for basic human life as even the most calloused unbeliever would have to admit. Hearing loudly and clearly and in their own language the essentials of the good news, words of life which, if followed with a mustard seed size grain of faith will lead to life, the world of that time will have even less excuse than that of today for their failure to repent and turn to Jesus Christ for eternal life (cf. Rom.10:13).

⁵⁵ The translation here follows the text of Sinaiticus (or a), which does not have the participle “saying”, but does have the verb meaning “to proclaim the gospel” in the imperative or command mood rather than in the infinitive. Confusion about the fact that this angel is giving the command to others apparently led to textual confusion in later versions.

⁵⁶ See the discussion in Bible Basics: Part 2A: Angelology, section II.9.3, “Archangels”.

(22) Turn to me and be saved, every[one from the] ends of the earth, for I am God, and there is no other. (23) By Myself I have sworn. From my mouth a righteous word has gone forth which will not be revoked, that every knee will bow to Me, and to Me every tongue will swear. (24) And so they will acknowledge Me: “Only in the Lord are righteousness and might.” Before Him will come all who raged against Him and they will be put to shame.

Isaiah 45:23-24

b. The Coming Judgment on Babylon Proclaimed: Revelation 14:8

And yet a second [angel] followed, saying, “Babylon the Great has fallen! For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the [divine] wrath [to come on account] of her prostitution”.

Revelation 14:8

The fall of Babylon, vividly described in chapters 17-18 of Revelation, will be covered in detail in part 5, the next installment of this series. It is sufficient to mention here that this next warning, also heard worldwide and the second in a series of three, is intended to warn the world of the imminent destruction of Babylon, antichrist’s original home country (see part 3B, section II.1.c, “Antichrist’s national origin”). While all unbelievers who live in Babylon at this time would be wise to respond to this warning, those who live elsewhere would also be wise to take heed themselves in the face of God’s humbling of the mightiest of the nations of the world. For believers who have suffered the most at Babylon’s hands during the Great Persecution (see section VII.9 above), the impending judgment against her is also meant as an encouragement, for they will soon see just recompense weighed out upon her in full measure. For the Lord will soon give Babylon to drink of His wrath (Rev.16:19; 18:3; cf. Rev.14:10; 14:19; 15:1; 15:7; 16:1; 19:15). The asyndeton between the two sentences in this proclamation shows that divine judgment upon Babylon is coming about as a direct result of the corrupting influence (“prostitution”) which she has exercised upon the nations of the world.⁵⁷ As we have already seen, one of Babylon’s chief outrages is her nurturing and sponsoring of antichrist’s religion (inherently intertwined with his evil politico-economic system; i.e., she is a “land of idols”, cf. Jer.50:38-39), along with the Great Persecution which that religion has spawned and is administering (see section VII.9 above). Given the intensity and worldwide nature of this pogrom aimed at all believers, and the fact that the Great Persecution is the dominant theme throughout this entire section of Revelation (i.e., Revelation verses 13:11-18; 14:1-5; 14:9-13; 14:14-16; 15:1-8 are all focused upon that event either directly or indirectly), we can be sure that the divine “wrath” in which the nations of the earth are said to be about to share is forthcoming primarily because of their participation in the persecution of believers sponsored by Babylon.

⁵⁷ i.e., there is no connective here as is normally the case in Greek, a device which is often used to call special attention to what follows. The relative pronoun *he* [η] is absent in the best manuscripts.

For in very short order the entire world, not just Babylon, will begin to pay a severe price for their treatment of the Body of Christ (cf. Rev.14:10; 14:19; 15:1; 15:7; 16:1; 19:15).

c. The Need for Fortitude in Persecution Proclaimed: Revelation 14:9-13

(9) And yet a third angel followed them, saying in a loud voice, "If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives [his] mark upon his forehead or upon his hand, (10) he himself will also drink from the wine of God's wrath which has been mixed undiluted in the cup of His anger. And [that person] will be tormented in fire and sulfur before angels, [and] saints,⁵⁸ and before the Lamb. (11) And the smoke of their torment will go up forever and ever, and they have no rest day or night, those who worship the beast and his image and whoever takes the mark of his name." (12) [But] the saints have perseverance, [even] those who in this way (i.e., by refusing the mark and worship of the beast) keep God's commandments and [retain] their faith in Jesus. (13) And I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on so that they may rest from their labors", says the Spirit. "For their deeds follow with them."
Revelation 14:9-13

The third archangel's proclamation (which will likewise be carried around the world by his subordinates) complements the second. While the first proclamation served the purpose of a final positive call to turn to God, the second and third proclamations serve to demonstrate the alternative to repentance, with the second approaching things from the national point of view (i.e., the impending fate of Babylon, the nation whose efforts have made the Great Persecution possible) and with this third and final proclamation making the issue clear from the individual point of view (i.e., the imminent divine judgment about to fall upon everyone worldwide who has supported the Great Persecution through their participation in the beast's religion). Since everyone in the world will hear these proclamations, no one will be in a position to claim ignorance when at last they stand before the judgment seat of God. It is a sobering thought to consider the state of the unbelieving world at this time, for having witnessed God's powerful warning judgments of the Tribulation's first half, and now having heard with their own ears this series of admonitions about the impending punitive judgments to come, they nonetheless will refuse to turn away from following antichrist and his father the devil. And not even under the pressure of those final, terrible judgments will they deign to repent (Rev.16:9; 16:11). Indeed, instead of throwing themselves on the mercy of God, their reaction will be to curse Him (Rev.16:21). This reaction serves to demonstrate that, far from being arbitrary, the wrath of God upon these implacable rebels is not only entirely justified under the circumstances, but

⁵⁸ The absence of the definite article in the Greek text preceding the words "angels" and "holy [ones]" allows for the possibility that the adjective is being used here as a substantive, referring to resurrected believers. There is no reason for believers to be absent from this picture (cf. Rev.20:4), and the phrase "holy angels" is relatively rare in scripture, occurring only twice in the New Testament and in both instances in company with the definite article which is absent here (Mk.8:38; Lk.9:27; cf. Acts 10:22).

abundantly so, both because they have received numerous, clear divine warnings, and also because their intransigent attitude in the face of that wrath proves beyond any doubt that indeed their participation in the beast's religion makes them just as guilty as those most actively involved in directing the Great Persecution.

Torment in fire and sulfur: Rather than focusing upon the earthly (and for that reason short-lived) consequences of their choice of antichrist over the true Christ, this third archangel's warning places the eternal future of all proponents of the beast in the forefront. The everlasting state of those who reject God and His Son is most assuredly not, as some would wish to maintain, one of oblivion but rather one of eternal punishment. The torment in fire and sulfur described here is a reference to the lake of fire (Matt.25:41; Rev.19:20; 20:10; 20:15; 21:8; cf. Is.66:22-24; Mk.9:48), the final abode of all unbelievers following the last judgment which takes place not at the end of the Tribulation but at the end of the Millennium at the termination of pre-eternal human history (to be discussed in detail in part 6 of this series). These verses are quite explicit in saying that "if anyone worships the beast" (v.9), and "whoever takes the mark" (v.11) will suffer this horrendous, eternal damnation. Scripture thus puts the issue in unmistakable terms. Taking the step of becoming an active participant in antichrist's religion will constitute an irrevocable decision that leads inevitably to the lake of fire. This is not because of any deficiency in the grace or mercy of God, but rather because, with the consequences made so crystal clear through the preceding events of the Tribulation, the ministries of Moses and Elijah and the 144,000, the trumpet judgments, and not least these three universal proclamations, any and all who can in spite of everything make themselves turn away from the truth to such a degree that they embrace the worship of the devil and antichrist have, like the Pharaoh of the Exodus, hardened their hearts past the point of no return. Such eternal condemnation is thus self-willed and self-chosen in direct defiance of Christ's sacrifice, God's grace, God's mercy, and God's first, best will for their lives (Ezek.18:23; Matt.18:14; Jn.12:47; 1Tim.2:4; 2Pet.3:9). By their own free will, those who agree to worship the beast and take his mark have their names blotted out of the Lamb's book of life (cf. Dan.12:1; Rev.13:8; 14:9-11; 16:2; 17:8; 19:20; 20:4).

One further point needs to be addressed here. While the description in our context of the fate of those who take the mark of the beast is a preview of their ultimate state, it is also true that those who have worshiped the beast and allowed themselves to be so marked will not be allowed to enter the millennial kingdom of Jesus Christ. Sometimes called "the baptism of fire" (after the phrase used by John the baptist: Matt.3:11; Lk.3:16; cf. Mk.1:8), this post second advent event, to be covered in detail in the next installment of this series, is also often misunderstood. A fiery removal of unbelievers from the earth occurs both at the inception and at the conclusion of "the Day of the Lord" (cf. 2Kng.1:9-15).⁵⁹ What concerns us here, however, is not the final removal of unbelievers to face the last judgment, but the removing from the incipient millennial kingdom of those who have already willfully and irreversibly rejected its King, namely, all those who have

⁵⁹ An example of prophetic conflation of end time events for simplicity's sake, a phenomenon which we have studied before: see Part 1 of this series, section IV.1.b, "The 'Day of the Lord' Paradigm".

taken the mark of the beast still alive following the battle of Armageddon (Rev.19:11-21; cf. Zech.14:12-13; Rev.14:17-20).

(10) For the ax has already been put to the trunk of the trees. Accordingly, every tree which does not produce good fruit is about to be cut down and thrown into fire. (11) Now I am baptizing you with water for the purpose of [your] repentance. But the One coming after me is more powerful than me and I am not worthy to carry His sandals. It is He who is the One who will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. (12) His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will sweep clean His threshing floor, and will gather His wheat into the barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.
Matthew 3:10-12

Comment: The trees that fail to produce good fruit are the unbelievers at the second advent who have the mark of the beast (as well as unbelievers at the end of the millennial kingdom who have failed to respond to the offer of salvation even under the reign of the Messiah). In the ancient world, before it was ground the useful part of a head of grain was separated from its accompanying chaff by repeatedly casting it up into the air so that the wind would catch the chaff and blow it away while the heavier grain came back down onto the central part of the threshing “floor”, ideally a smooth, flat rock surface on a hilltop (where the wind could blow across it unimpeded). Once separated, the grain could be gathered, stored, and processed, while the chaff was good for nothing except for burning. The fire with which these beast worshiping unbelievers are to be “baptized” is said to be “unquenchable”, so that this passage too looks forward to the lake of fire, the ultimate eternal end of all those who receive the mark.

(6) Since indeed it is just for God to repay with tribulation those who are subjecting you to tribulation, (7) and to give you who are being distressed relief along with us at the revelation of our Lord Jesus from heaven with His powerful angels, (8) wreaking vengeance in a flame of fire upon those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. (9) These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction away from the presence of the Lord and the glory of His power, (10) when He comes on *that* [great] *day* to be glorified in the midst of His saints (i.e., resurrected believers) and to be marveled at among all those who have believed – as our testimony has been believed in your case.
2nd Thessalonians 1:6-10

Comment: As in Matthew 3:10-12, “that day” is the Day of the Lord (and the prophecy is thus applicable both to its inception and termination). Further, the specific description of the eternal state of these unbelievers is said to be “away from the presence of the Lord and the glory of His power” (v.9), indicating clearly that while their last judgment will indeed take place in His presence (cf. “*before* angels, [and] saints, and before the Lamb” in Rev.14:10 above), the lake of fire itself will be far removed from the blessed new heavens and new earth which the righteous will inhabit in glory with the Lord forever.

(15) For behold, the Lord will come with fire, and His chariots will be like a whirlwind, to bring down His wrath in anger and His rebuke in flames of fire. (16) For with fire the

Lord is going to execute judgment – and with His sword – upon all flesh, and many will be those slain by the Lord. (17) Those who sanctify and purify themselves for the gardens following the lead of the one [characterized] by violence, eating the flesh of swine, and of whatever is an abomination, and of rats will be swept away together (i.e., at the Second Advent), says the Lord.

Isaiah 66:15-17

Comment: Here we see the Lord’s glorious second advent return (v.15) and the dual destruction by means of sword (i.e., at the battle of Armageddon: Rev.19:21), and by fire of unbelievers who oppose Him. That the fiery destruction is the baptism of fire directed towards all who have taken the mark can be seen from verse 17 where the description of abominable cult activity refers to those who worship the beast and take part in his religion’s foul rites and activities, including the Great Persecution (i.e., “[characterized] by violence”).

And I will place a sign among them, and I will send survivors from among them to the nations, to Tarshish, and Put, and Lud, those who draw the bow, Tubhal, and Yavan, the islands far away who have not heard my Name, and have not seen my Glory. Thus will they proclaim my Glory among the nations.

Isaiah 66:19

Comment: The sending forth to the gentiles of evangelists from the Israelite survivors (i.e., those who are converted to Christ at His second advent: Zech.12:10-14; Rev.1:7; cf. Rom.11:25-27), shows that there will be survivors among the gentiles as well, unbelievers who did not take the mark of the beast nor worship him despite the pressures of the Great Tribulation (cf. Is.2:2-3).

I will bring you from the nations and gather you from the countries where you have been scattered – with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm and with outpoured wrath. I will bring you into the desert of the nations and there, face to face, I will execute judgment upon you. As I judged your fathers in the desert in the land of Egypt, so I will judge you, declares the Sovereign Lord. I will take note of you as you pass under my rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant. I will purge you of those who revolt and rebel against me. Although I will bring them out of the land where they are living, yet they will not enter the land of Israel. Then you will know that I am the Lord.

Ezekiel 20:34-38 NIV (cf. Jer.31:2)

Comment: The basis for the distinction between those who enter the land and those who do not after the regathering that follows the second advent is most likely also the presence of the mark of the beast. For those who are excluded as they “pass under the rod” are referred to as “those who revolt and rebel against me”, and there is no greater rebellion against the Lord than accepting the irrevocable mark of Satan worship. Here too, therefore, we see even among Israel those who will be expunged from the Messiah’s kingdom during the baptism of fire. Jews, if anything, will have less of an excuse for taking the mark than gentiles, given the strict contrast of this abominable procedure to the specific teachings of the Mosaic Law (e.g., Duet.11:18).

At that time, Michael the great prince (i.e., archangel) will take his stand [in your defense], [even] he who stands [in defense] over the sons of your people. For [that time] (i.e., the Great Tribulation) shall be a time of distress such as has never occurred since people first existed [on the earth] until that time. But during that time your people will escape, [that is,] everyone who[se name] is found written in the book [of life] (i.e., present and future believers).
Daniel 12:1

Comment: As we saw in section VI.1 above, the book of life contains the names of every human being, and these names are blotted out of the book only through active or passive rejection of God's solution to the problem of sin and death, the person and work of our dear Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. In this verse we see everyone who has not *actively* rejected Jesus through taking the mark and worshiping the beast admitted into the millennial kingdom, either through resurrection (believers at the time of the second advent), or through exemption from the baptism of fire (through having refused the mark of the beast; Rev.13:8; 17:8b cf. Josh.6:25; Matt.25:37-40). This leads us also to suppose that taking the mark of the beast will be an informed and therefore an adult decision, suggesting that many of those who are spared the baptism of fire will be children who have not yet been officially enlisted into the beast's religion (cf. Is.2:2-3; 66:17).

The combination of those killed on account of the harsh conditions of the Tribulation, the trumpet and bowl judgments, Armageddon, and the baptism of fire shows the truth of the predictions that the Lord will make mankind "as rare as gold of Ophir" (Is.13:12), and that "unless those days had been shortened, no flesh would have survived" (Mk.13:20). As it is, believers will enter the new millennial kingdom of the Messiah in resurrection, rising to meet our Lord on His return, and those who survive until the coming of the King will not precede those who die as martyrs and witnesses for Him (1Thes.4:15-17). Herein lies the greatest tragic irony of the baptism of fire related in our context: while the unbelieving world had given themselves up to the beast in order to save their lives, they will only have guaranteed themselves a fiery end, while the believers who were willing to lose their lives rather than do so, will have gained eternal life (Matt.10:39; 16:25; Mk.8:35; Lk.9:24; 17:33). The believers did not set their hearts on the lust, and rust, and dust of this world, on the wealth that cannot be taken beyond this world, but have taken their works with them (Rev.14:13), and have gained rewards that are eternal (1Pet.1:3-9; cf. Ps.49). This is the holy perspective upon which the perseverance necessary during those trying days to come must be based (Rev.14:12).

And I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on so that they may rest from their labors", says the Spirit. "For their deeds follow with them."
Revelation 14:13

3. The Harvest of the Martyrs: Revelation 14:14-16

(14) And, behold, a white cloud. And sitting on the white cloud was what looked like a man with a golden crown on his head and a sharp sickle in his hand. (15) And another angel came out of His temple, shouting in a loud voice to the one sitting on the cloud, “Send [forth] your sickle and reap, because the hour of the harvest has come, and the harvest [crop] is ripe” (lit., “dry”). (16) And the one sitting on the cloud set his sickle to the earth, and the earth was harvested.

Revelation 14:14-16

This is the first of three allegories whose purpose it is to provide graphic previews of what is yet to come, all related in one way or another to the Tribulation’s eponymous event, the Great Persecution. In Revelation 14:14-16, we have the harvest of the martyrs, a description of the Great Persecution from the heavenly perspective as it relates to those who give up their lives for Jesus Christ. In Revelation 14:17-20, we have the vintage of the persecutors, a description of the grim end at the battle of Armageddon about to befall those who have supported the beast and enabled this persecution. Finally, Revelation 15:1-8 gives us a description of the triumph amid suffering of all believers persevering through the Great Persecution (verses 2-4), enclosed by the real-time heavenly preparations for the preliminary divine answer to Satan’s and antichrist’s horrendous abuse of the saints, namely, the punitive “bowl judgments” which precede and portend the even more emphatic and decisive divine judgments of the second advent and the baptism of fire.

The harvest metaphor, often used in scripture to describe gracious divine selection (e.g., Is.17:5-8; 27:12; Matt.9:37-38; 13:39; Mk.4:26-29; Lk.10:2; Jn.4:35), here depicts as ready for reaping the believers who are being martyred in the Great Persecution. They have fulfilled their purpose for the Lord on earth, and are now being removed by Him at just the proper time, the time of His perfect choosing. Thus we should remember in our concern for these believers and for ourselves as we contemplate this possibility in our own lives that things really are not as the world sees them. Antichrist and his father the devil will delight in the holocaust of believers, but God is working everything out for good, taking home to glory those whom He ordained for this in eternity past in a manner that brings special glory to the One they love, the One who died for them on Calvary. The death of every saint has always been precious to the Lord (Ps.116:15), but that the martyrdom of these tribulational believers constitutes a special case can be seen from the extraordinary symbolism employed here. In the verses above, the archangel who symbolically harvests the martyrs from the earth, is made to represent our Lord Jesus Christ as can be seen from his human rather than angelic appearance, the golden crown upon his head, and the cloud upon which he sits (since this foreshadows Jesus’ return: Dan.7:13; Matt.24:30; Mk.13:26; 14:62; 1Thes.4:17; Rev.1:7). The crown here is not the kingly crown or *diadema* (cf. Rev.19:12), but instead the victor’s crown or *stephanos*, the same word used for the crown of life promised to believers who are “faithful unto death” in Revelation 2:10, and thus a symbol of the

great reward that will fall to the lot of those who die in this way.⁶⁰ What we have here is thus a blessed and special allegory for all who may face martyrdom during the Great Persecution, designed to demonstrate to us in advance how precious in particular the deaths of these martyrs will be to the Lord Jesus, and how personally and intimately concerned He will be with gathering them in at just the proper time and in just the proper way.

4. The Vintage of the Persecutors: Revelation 14:17-20

(17) Then another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he too had a sharp sickle. (18) And another angel came out from before the altar, [the one] having authority over the fire (i.e., of judgment), and he shouted in a loud voice to the [angel] with the sharp sickle, saying "Send forth your sharp sickle and gather up the clusters of the earth's vineyard, because its bunches [of grapes] are ripe". (19) And the angel cast forth his sickle onto the earth, and he gathered up the vintage of the earth and threw [it] into the great winepress of God's wrath. (20) And the winepress was trodden down outside of the city. And blood from the winepress went forth up to the horses' bridles for a distance of twelve hundred stadia (i.e., approx. 143 miles).
Revelation 14:17-20

In Revelation 19:15 we similarly see our Lord "trampling down the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty", making it clear that the passage above is a preview of Armageddon, with the "blood" of the grapes representing the literal blood or death of those who oppose Him, spattered on His robes in the slaughter of that great day (Rev.19:13; cf. Is.63:1-6 with Gen.49:11). While the harvest is a positive metaphor of ingathering, the symbolism of the vintage and the "blood of the grape" is always concerned with divine judgment (e.g., Jer.25:30-31; and the sickle would otherwise be an inappropriate instrument for gathering grapes).

Send forth the sickle for the harvest is ripe! Come down into the winepress for it is full and the vats overflow. For great is their wickedness. Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of doom! For the day of the Lord is near in the valley of doom.
Joel 3:13-14

The city mentioned in Revelation 14:20 above is Jerusalem, the focal point of the battle of Armageddon, and the distance of 143 miles (not 190-200 miles as many versions have it following a lesser manuscript tradition) is the approximate extent of the inhabited portion of the state of Israel from the northern border to the central Negev. This indicates that while Jerusalem will be the gravamen of the campaign, our Lord's destruction of the armies of antichrist will surge like a flood throughout the entire land of Israel. The fact that the first angel of this pair has "authority over the fire" is also an indication of coming judgment and presages the baptism of fire which will remove from the earth those who while they may not have taken part in the

⁶⁰ For crowns as indicating levels of eternal reward, see Peter #18, "Eternal Rewards", and section I.7 of Coming Tribulation part 6, "The Judgment and Reward of the Church".

invasion of Israel nevertheless have supported antichrist and taken his mark. The altar, as we have seen before, is the altar of incense, and was used previously in Revelation to show that the prayers of the saints during these difficult times are indeed being answered (Rev.8:3-5). We therefore see in this second allegory the encouraging fulfillment of the ultimate deliverance for which all believers on earth during this time have been fervently praying for so long.

5. The Vindication of the Martyrs: Revelation 15:1-8

(1) And I saw another sign in heaven, great and wondrous, seven angels with the seven final plagues, [final], because with them the wrath of God shall have been brought to a full end. (2) And I saw [something] like a sea of glass, [but this time it was] mixed with fire, and those who were [in the process of] winning the victory over the beast and his image and over the number of his name were standing on the sea of glass holding lyres of the Lord God, (3) and they were singing the song of Moses the servant of God, even the song of the Lamb, saying,

“Great and wondrous are your deeds, O Lord God, the Almighty!
Just and true are your ways, O King of the ages!

(4) Who shall not fear you, Lord, and give glory to your Name?
For You alone are holy.

For all the nations will come and worship before you.

For [these] judgments shall have been made manifest before You”.

(5) And after this I looked and the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven was opened. (6) And the seven angels with the seven plagues came out of the temple dressed in linen, shiny and clean, and with golden belts tied around their waists. (7) And [one] of the four living creatures (i.e., a cherub) gave the seven angels [seven] golden bowls, filled up with the wrath of God who lives for ever and ever. Amen. (8) And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from His power, and no one was able to enter into the temple [again] until the seven plagues of the seven angels had been completed.

Revelation 15:1-8

Here we have a real time depiction of the suffering of believers in the crucible of the Great Tribulation and the divine response in the preparation of the final seven plagues of wrath, judgment, and vindication (of the believers). These last seven plagues, do, as verse one declares, complete the wrath of God since the seventh plague is synonymous with the series of judgments that precede and include Armageddon and the second advent, wherein Satan, antichrist, the false prophet, and all those who have aided and abetted them in their evil deeds are removed from the earth (cf. Rev.16:17ff.). John’s description of these events as a vision of a great and wondrous sign shows that, as was the case in the last two passages, what we are dealing with here is allegorical in part. John saw a similar “sign” (i.e., of the dragon) at Revelation 12:1-3, but that sign was “great” in the sense of being terrible, for it portended and portrayed the beginning of the Great Persecution, while this sign is not only truly “great” but also “wondrous”, for it portends and portrays God’s mighty deliverance of those being persecuted. The seven angels who administer these final plagues of wrath, judgment, and vindication are the archangels, the same

seven angels who were depicted in the previous two allegories of the harvest of believers and the vintage of the wicked (i.e., they are described here as “*the*” seven angels: Rev.15:7). Their rank is indicated in part by the similarity of their dress to that of the Messiah (likewise girt with a golden sash: cf. Rev.1:13). Additionally, they receive their orders directly from one of the cherubim, the highest ranking of the angelic orders.⁶¹ The charge with which they are here entrusted is so dramatic that after they have received their commissions we see the heavenly tabernacle, God’s temple in heaven, filled with smoke, a sign that God Himself has now taken over active and decisive control of events, and that nothing will now stay His purpose until His saints are vindicated and rescued, and judgment paid out to His enemies. No one will be able to enter into His presence until these final plagues are carried out (cf. Ex.40:34–35; 1Kng.8:10-11; Ezek.10:3-5; Is.6:4).

The Song of Moses: The song of Moses is a song of deliverance (Ex.15:1-18), of salvation and vindication from the hands of unbelieving persecutors, from Pharaoh (a type of antichrist as we have seen) and the Egyptians in the historical analogy, and from antichrist and those with his mark in our context. Moses’ song celebrated God and His delivering of the children of Israel both from the point of view of His glorious power and goodness in doing so, and also from the point of view of their miraculous deliverance and appreciation for it. Such is the case in the passage above. There is a critical difference, however, which is often misunderstood because of a misreading and mistranslation of the text. As pointed out above (in section VII.2, “Key Passages” dealing with the Great Persecution), this is a portrayal of believers who are still alive on earth and suffering in the crucible of the Great Persecution, for the glassy sea is heaven’s “looking glass” into events transpiring on the earth.⁶² Therefore the depiction of these believers as standing *on* the sea tells us clearly that they are still on the earth at this point. The fire represents the fiery trial of persecution they are currently enduring and demonstrates their need of immediate deliverance.⁶³ So here we see these heroic believers enduring, persevering, and *anticipating* the deliverance to come while yet in the midst of the crucible – Moses and the Israelites praised God for deliverance *through* the sea; these believers are still *in the midst of* the fiery sea (cf. Daniel’s three friends fellowshiping with the Lord while yet in the fiery furnace: Dan.3:25), and praise Him for what He is about to do for them, humbling the nations and delivering them from the grasp of antichrist. For them, this is just as certain as if it had indeed already happened. Here is true proof of faith and faithfulness, when with the eyes of faith we can look beyond the sorrows, the terrors, and the hardships of the here and now into the glorious

⁶¹ See Bible Basics: Part 2A: Angelology, section II.9.3, “The Organization of Elect Angels”.

⁶² See Part 2B of this series, section I, “The Sea”.

⁶³ The lyres too are symbolic (cf. our discussion of the 144,000 above), indicating the pleasing nature of this song as it rises to heaven into the presence of the Lord (cf. the incense of Rev.8:3-4).

future, though veiled from our earthly eyes, and glory in our Lord's sure deliverance even before the fact.

These all died [while still walking] in faith, though they had not received the [fulfillment of their] promises. But [while they lived] they did catch sight of [these promises] from a distance and saluted them, [so to speak], thus making it plain [to all the world] that they were [in effect] strangers and sojourners on the earth. For people who express [their faith] in this way make it quite evident that they are eagerly in search of a homeland [other than the world they now pass through]. Indeed, if these [believers'] hearts had yearned for the [land] from which they had departed, they would have had [ample] opportunity to turn back. But they were zealous for a better place, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God. He has, in fact, prepared a city for them.

Hebrews 11:13-16

That city is the New Jerusalem, and these tribulational believers, singing God's praises in the midst of the most intense persecution in history, surely belong to the number of those of whom our God is not ashamed. May we be worthy of that number, and prepared to behave with equal courage in the difficult and trying days ahead.

And there will be signs in the sun and the moon and the stars, and on the earth there will be [great] distress among the nations [who will be greatly] bewildered by the roaring of the sea and [its massive] waves, [and] men will lose heart out of fear and expectation of what is about to come upon the inhabited world. For the luminaries of the heavens will be [powerfully] shaken. And then you will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and much glory. ***When these things begin to happen, stand up and raise up your heads, because your redemption is near.*** Look at the fig tree and all its leaves. When they have already come out [like this], you can see for yourselves by examining it that summer is near. So also when you see that all things have come to pass, know that the Kingdom of God is near.

Luke 21:25-31