

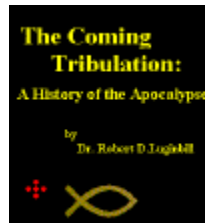
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The Coming Tribulation: A History of the Apocalypse

Part 4

The Great Tribulation: Revelation 11:15 - 15:8

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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 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⁾

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 become 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 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):

Tribulational Trends

(a comparative chart)

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*, δράκων). 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 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 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 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 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

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, 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, 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 διάβολος, “slanderer” or “accuser”; cf. Hebrew *Satan*, שָׂטָן, “adversary [who 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

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).

- 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*, νικάω). 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 instead have 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 (cf. Rev.18:8). 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 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):

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 "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 Lord's words when set against the context of Revelation 12 and the related passages we are considering here that the mountains on 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.

(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*, שֶׁטֵף, 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 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 Χριστός (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 as far as we can tell, 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, worshiping 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

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-`-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 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 (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

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 worshipping 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 *skēn-* (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 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 (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.

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 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

