

The Coming Tribulation: a History of the Apocalypse

Part 3: The Tribulation Begins

Subpart A: From the Seventh Seal to the Two Witnesses

Revelation 8:1 - 11:14

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Introduction: Four major trends, two divine and two satanic, dominate the events of the Tribulation's first half (the subject of our present study). Within each of these two pairs, we find one trend concerned with the spiritual matters and one with the temporal events which characterize those first three and one half years. These four trends are, on the spiritual level, the massive falling away from truth on the part of believers on the one hand (the Great Apostasy: section II), and the unique movement of worldwide evangelism on the part of the 144,000 on the other (represented by the two witnesses who direct them: section V), and, on the level of world events, the rise to power and military expansion of antichrist on the one hand (Part 3B), and God's warning judgments to the world on the other (the Trumpet Judgments: section III):

	Satanic		Divine
Spiritual level:	The Great Apostasy	< >	Worldwide evangelism
Temporal level:	The Rise of Antichrist	< >	Worldwide warning judgments

With the removal of Holy Spirit restraint (covered in detail in the previous installment of this series, part 2B), the increasing lawlessness of the world will be preeminently evident in its rejection of truth (even on the part of former believers who will fall into apostasy in great numbers). This rejection will fly in the face of the unparalleled evangelism of the world Jewish community by the 144,000 under the direction of Moses and Elijah. A similar opposition of trends will be seen in the unprecedentedly swift and complete accession to power on the part of antichrist, coupled with his correspondingly impressive political and military successes, contrasted to the equally extraordinary worldwide judgments that will emanate from God, designed to warn the world of these dangers. These pairs of trends are entirely interconnected. For just as the warning judgments will also serve as a call to repent and turn back to God, so the rejection of the remarkable evangelism which will fill the world at that time will serve to invoke God's judgment. And just as this wholesale rejection of truth on the part of believers and unbelievers alike at that time will leave them completely vulnerable to antichrist's charisma and appeal, so his rise would be impossible without this prior worldwide diminution of respect for the truth.

I. The Seventh Seal: Revelation 8:1-5

Revelation 8:1-5:

(1) And when He opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. (2) And I saw the seven angels who stood before God, and seven trumpets were given to them. (3) And another angel with a golden censer came and stood by the altar, and much incense was given to him so that he might offer it for the prayers of the saints

on the golden altar in front of the throne. (4) And smoke from the incense went up from the hand of the angel before God for the prayers of the saints. (5) Then the angel took the incense holder and filled it with fire from the altar and threw it to the earth. And there occurred thunderous voices¹ and flashes of lightning and an earthquake.

As our Lord opens the last seal in the scroll which decrees His revelation to the world, the unveiling thereby of the details contained within it of all the horrific events which must precede His glorious return produce an awed silence in the heavenly temple which is said to last for “half an hour”. As is common in biblical usage, hours, days, weeks, etc. often stand for larger time periods in purely human terms (a device whereby the insignificance of worldly events as compared to heavenly control and divine sovereignty over time is emphasized; e.g., Num.14:34).² Such is undoubtedly the case here as well, and it is best to see this particular “half hour” as a one half year delay in the unleashing of the Tribulation, a circumstance which postpones the beginning of the end times from the spring (the time of the crucifixion; see the previous footnote for reference) to the fall, thereby bringing it about that both the beginning of the Tribulation and its end at our Lord’s return seven years later will coincide with the time of the Jewish fall festivals (Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and Succoth [“booths”]) to which festivals these events symbolically correspond.³

1. The Seven Archangels with the Seven Trumpets: Although not explicitly identified as such here, these seven angels “who stand in state before God” (literally a Greek perfect tense), are, in fact, archangels (cf. “I am Gabriel, who stands before God” in Lk.1:19). That is why they are “the” seven angels, the definite article here serving to distinguish them from the angelic rank and file. It will be remembered from our previous treatment of angelic duties that the archangels (also known as princes [*sariym*], and rulers [*archai*]), occupy a primarily martial office (we may think of them as equivalent to “generals”).⁴ Their duties include not only combat with satanic forces (Dan.10:13-14; Rev.12:7-8), but also making proclamations (i.e., “orders”, often accompanied by the military trumpet: cf. 1Thes.4:16), and, as in our context here, the administration of divine judgments upon the earth. As can be seen both from this passage and from Revelation 15:7, they constitute a college of seven (Gabriel and Michael being the only two

¹ Literally, “thunders and voices”, but these are one and the same (i.e., this is a hendiadys); the voices are words of God, incomprehensible to the world at large, which are comparable to thunder, though discernible from it (cf. Jn.12:28-30; and see below).

² See The Satanic Rebellion: Part 5: “Judgment, Restoration and Replacement”, section II.8, “Evidence for “The Seven Days of Re-Creation”.

³ See The Satanic Rebellion: Part 5: “Judgment, Restoration and Replacement”, section II.8.c “The Jewish Ceremonial Calendar”.

⁴ See The Satanic Rebellion: Part 4: “Satan’s World System”, section III.3.b.3, “Archangels”.

named in scripture) who stand before the heavenly throne, ever ready to carry out God's mandates. They are the highest ranking angels to undertake such missions on earth, the cherubs remaining with the chariot throne, and the elders before it in the third heaven (Dan.8:16; 9:21; 10:13; 10:20-21; 12:1; Lk.1:19; 1:26; Eph.1:21; 1Thes.4:16; Jude 9; Rev.7:2; 15:7). The archangels often have paraphernalia appropriate to their particular missions; e.g., trumpets for proclamation (as here in our context where they serve a monitory function); the seal of God for special marking (as at Rev.7:2); bowls for pouring out judgment (as in Rev.15:7).

2. The Incense for the Prayers of the Saints: Under the Mosaic law, the preparation of incense and its use was very carefully prescribed (Ex.30:34-38; cf. Lev.10:1-2; Num.3:4; 26:61; 2Chron.26:16-20) – and for good reason. In the symbolic function of Jewish ritual, which, as we saw in our previous study, closely mirrors the heavenly realities (cf. Heb.10:1), the offering of incense represents acceptability in approaching God through intermediary means (Ezek.20:41; cf. Lev.16:12-13). The incense is “salted”, pure, and holy (Ex.30:35; cf. Lev.2:13; Matt.5:13; Mk.9:50; Lk.14:34-35), and, in the analogy, the work of Christ in the fiery judgment of the cross is like this incense, sending up a “pleasing aroma” into the presence of the Father as it burns (cf. 2Cor.2:16). Therefore the redolent smell of the earthly incense when burned has its primary application as a memorial to the sacrifice of sacrifices on the brazen altar of the cross, expressing the complete acceptability in the Father's eyes of our Lord's death on our behalf:

And walk in love, just as also Christ loved you and gave Himself up as sacrifice and offering for a sweet smell to God. Ephesians 5:2

Since, as this image of the incense shows, our Lord's substitutionary death is completely acceptable to the Father, a sweet savor (which the incense reproduces) satisfying His righteous demand for the propitiation of all our sin, it has also opened up the floodgates of grace for all who turn to God through faith in Jesus Christ. For this reason, the image of the incense has a further application, namely, to express the validation or *rendering* acceptable of everything done in His Name. That is clearly the main thrust of the image of the incense used here in Revelation 8:4, where its sweet savor is said to rise up *for* the prayers of the saints.⁵ In other words, these prayers are made and considered completely valid through this heavenly incense – though not through the incense per se, but rather by the empowering sweet aroma of the victory of Jesus Christ on the cross which the incense represents.

3. The Angel with the Censer and the Golden Altar: The angel here, is not identified by rank, but is clearly subordinate to the elders (from whom he receives the incense), and is likewise not a member of either the college of the cherubim or the archangels. Given the important nature of

⁵ Probably because of a failure to understand that the incense empowers prayers (lit., is “for [the benefit of] the prayers”), the use of the dative case here has proved puzzling for many commentators. The dative case in Greek is frequently used in this sense of “for the benefit of” (often termed the “dative of advantage”, essentially equivalent to our English preposition “for” in this sense).

his duties, he may very well be of the fourth elect angelic rank, the “authorities”.⁶ This angel mediates the offering of the incense – not the prayers of the saints. Angels frequently carry out God’s responses to the prayers of His people (e.g., Dan.10:12-14), but it is Jesus Christ who is the Mediator between God and man (Gal.3:19-20; 1Tim.2:5; Heb.8:6; 9:15; 12:24), and it is through His work, the sweet aroma of the cross, that our prayers are rendered valid and acceptable to the Father.

The earthly counterpart for the altar mentioned here is not the “brazen altar” (which speaks of the cross), but the golden altar of incense in the holy place (see part 2B). This second, earthly altar which stood beside the inner veil of the Holy of Holies was necessary to represent the heavenly altar we see here, and was so closely connected with the Holy of Holies that Paul in Hebrews can accurately describe it as actually “in” the Holy of Holies (Heb.9:4). That is entirely appropriate when we consider the symbolism of the golden altar, namely, a picture of the glorified Christ entering into the presence of the Father on our behalf.

As we pointed out in our last installment of this series, there is no place for a brazen altar of sacrifice in heaven. To redeem sinful mankind, Christ had to come to earth, taking on true humanity in order to die for all humanity. After this victory of victories, having passed through the veil of the heavens, Christ is shown through His session at the Father’s right hand to have successfully and acceptably performed His blessed sacrifice on behalf of us all. But while a brazen altar in the presence of the Father would be inappropriate for this reason, the presence of this memorial altar of incense is most fitting, in order to recall and to affirm the validity of His sacrifice (recalling in its fire the intensity of His suffering, and in the aroma it produces the acceptability of that work). That is the chief function of both the earthly and heavenly golden altars, whereon no animal sacrifice is ever placed, only the incense whose fragrant aroma brings these wonderful truths back to memory. The heavenly golden altar thus stands for the verification and proclamation of the acceptability of Christ’s work, both symbolizing the resurrected and glorified victorious Messiah entering into the presence of the Father on our behalf (exactly the same symbolism portrayed by the earthly golden altar), and recalling His work in the sweet savor of the incense burned thereon.⁷

In the golden altar, therefore, we have a clear picture of our Lord Jesus Christ in His role as our High Priest, the One who has accomplished the critical sacrifice, having entered into the true Holy of Holies, and having won for us our redemption through His own blood (Heb.7:11-28).

The sum of what we have said is this: we have a High Priest of such [amazing] quality that He has [actually] taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of Majesty in heaven,

⁶ See The Satanic Rebellion: Part 4: “Satan’s World System”, section III.3.b.4, “Authorities”.

⁷ See The Satanic Rebellion: Part 1: “Satan’s Rebellion and Fall”, section II.5.b, “The Illustration of the Tabernacle”.

a Minister of the holy things and of the true tabernacle which the Lord has pitched, not man. Hebrews 8:1-2

While the Levitical high priest offered every year an animal sacrifice on his own behalf and then sacrificed for the people, Christ offered Himself once for all (Heb.9:11-12; 9:24-28), and it is as a result of His selfless sacrifice that we now have access to this very throne room of heaven through His priestly mediation. As a result, we see here in our context our prayers being quickened by His work on the cross which the incense recalls, a sweet smell to our God. Jesus, our advocate seated at the right hand of the Father, makes intercession for us, for our prayers (Heb.7:25; 1Jn.2:1; cf. Jn.14:13-14), and it is this blessed reality which is being portrayed symbolically in the image of the heavenly incense. The incense, a memorial to His sacrificial death and the Father's acceptance of it, here is seen to blend indistinguishably with the prayers of those He has bought, rendering them valid and acceptable as they rise up before the Father.

4. The Saints and their Prayers: As we have seen many times in the past, the true biblical meaning of the word "saint" is much different from the general notion of it in our popular culture.⁸ In biblical terms, a saint is a believer in Jesus Christ, the word itself calling attention to the fact that God has separated that person from the profane world through grace as a result of saving faith. None of the many words used to describe believers is more appropriate in our present context of the incipient Tribulation, because during that terrible time to come as at no other time before or since the believer in Jesus Christ will be clearly seen and see himself/herself to be spiritually divorced from this world even as he/she is yet physically in it. For while it has been all too possible in (relatively) good times for believers to appear and function as if they were just another part of the world, during that time to come the immense intensity of suffering, of demonic attack, of spiritual polarization, and of pressure to apostatize will render partial complicity with the world a virtual impossibility – except at extreme risk to one's faith (cf. Lk.18:7-8; 21:36). During the Tribulation, as we have repeatedly said, there will be almost no middle ground, so that believers who hold fast to their faith will be clearly visible as saints indeed, not perfect in this world, but unmistakably separated from it in their reliance upon Him whose Kingdom is not of this world (Dan.11:32-35; cf. Dan.7:18-27).

While this passage teaches the principle of the rendering of our prayers acceptable to the Father through the Son's sacrifice, a pleasing aroma before our God, the specific prayers in question here have to do with judgment upon evil and the bringing of justice through divine rule to the earth. To put things in terms of "the Lord's prayer", these prayers are those which respond to the first half of that model prayer (Matt.6:9-10), rather than to the second half (Matt.6:11-13). For while the second half of our Lord's model prayer for us deals with the three essential spiritual aspects of our own personal situations (i.e., provision ["bread"], forgiveness ["debts"], and protection ["deliver us"]), the first half deals with our anticipation of and petitioning for the

⁸ See especially Peter's Epistles, lesson #8, "The Results of our Election", and lesson #13, "Sanctification".

establishment of God's rule on earth, whereby evil will be judged and justice established in the millennial Kingdom of our Savior:

Our Father, the One in heaven,
Let your Name be regarded as holy,
Let your Kingdom come,
Let your will be done as it is in heaven so also on earth. Matthew 6:9-10

A worldwide fear and respect for God, the establishment of His Son's Kingdom on the earth, and the implementation of divine rule on earth, His "will", is an appropriate desire and longing for all believers at all times in history, given the ubiquitous evil of this world now in the grip of the evil one.⁹ And inasmuch as all growing believers will experience first hand the opposition of the evil one and his minions in this evil world, we all have reason to offer such prayers on occasion (cf. Ps.94; 2Thes.1:4-10).¹⁰ But during the Tribulation, this longing for God to put things right throughout the world, to put the "fear of God" into all His creatures, to establish His direct rule over the earth, and to render divine justice worldwide, will be a particularly acute and universal desire among those who continue to call upon His holy Name. These are the prayers we see rising up before Him in our context, prayers offered since the world of man began, but growing in number and intensity throughout the Tribulation. God has always answered these prayers in His own way, and now, commencing with the beginning of the Tribulation, is answering them literally and word for word. For the Tribulation is, as we have said many times before, the time of "birth pangs" which must precede the Messiah's return and the glorious day of His reign. Judgment must come before blessing, and it is through His divine judgments of the Tribulation which precede the blessings of the coming Kingdom that all of these prayers find their ultimate fulfillment.

And when He (i.e., the Lamb) opened the fifth seal, I saw below the altar the living persons who had been slain because of the Word of God and because of the testimony which they had maintained. And they cried out with a loud voice, saying "How long, O Master, holy and true, will you [wait and] not render judgment and vindication for our blood upon those who dwell on the earth?" Revelation 6:9-10

Our Lord's return, including all the events which precede and follow it, will answer these prayers in full, and our anticipation of this truth is a solace that will help sustain our faith, should it be our lot to patiently endure those most difficult seven years in prayerful yearning for the One who will set all things right.

⁹ See [The Satanic Rebellion: Part 4: "Satan's World System"](#).

¹⁰ All of the so-called "Psalms of imprecation" are at their base just such calls upon the Almighty to judge evil and evildoers, a valid and appropriate sort of prayer which takes the matter out of the believer's own hands and commits it to God (just as we all should do at all times).

(6) "Hear what the unrighteous judge [in this parable] says! (7) And [if the judge is compelled to do right] will not God perform vindication for His elect who call out to Him day and night? Indeed, He is patient with them (i.e., in their perseverant praying). (8) I tell you that He will perform their vindication swiftly. But when the Son of Man returns, will He find faith on the earth?"

Luke 18:6-8

In light of our Lord's extremely direct words above, we need to steel ourselves in advance for whatever may come, and make a pledge to ourselves to commit all our grievances against this evil world and its evil administrators into God's hands, trusting with rock-solid faith in the eventual and timely resolution of all our concerns at the hands of our Lord Himself. This is, of course, the proper attitude and the proper approach for Christians at all times. How much more will that be true of those upon whom the intense pressures and persecutions of the Tribulation fall! For no matter how oppressive and grinding those pressures may be, we know with certainty in our hearts that our prayers for relief and for justice are rising like the sweet aroma of burning incense before the heavenly throne, made valid and acceptable by what Jesus did for us (Ps.141:2).

5. The Thunderous Voices, Lightning, and Earthquake: The casting down from heaven of fire from the altar (a clear symbol of divine judgment) which occasions these results is the first definite indication that the Tribulation has now begun.

“There will be *great earthquakes* along with famines and pestilence in various places. And *great and terrifying signs* will appear from heaven.”

Luke 21:11

All other potential prior indications of the Tribulation's exact beginning are merely that, trends and possible events which should put us on alert, but which will not provide us with indisputable information about the specific time of the Tribulation's commencement.¹¹ These terrifying portents will be the first indisputable warning to the world of impending judgment to come, and, for those few who will take warning, a clear and unmistakable call to repent and turn to God. For the coming Kingdom will now be very near at hand, and it's righteous Judge standing directly before the door (Rev.3:20; cf. Matt.24:33; Mk.13:29).

But what exactly do these heavenly signs that the Tribulation has begun actually entail? First, the voices, flashes of lightning, and earthquake all occur *on the earth* as a result of the angel's action in throwing the heavenly fire of judgment earthward. Secondly, taken together they form a panorama of warning, which is audible (the voices), visible (the flashes of lightning), and palpable (the earthquake). It will be impossible for any inhabitant of earth to ignore them, for, thirdly, these signs will be perceptible *worldwide* (that is, throughout the earth taken as a whole,

¹¹ See The Coming Tribulation: Part 2B: “The Heavenly Prelude to the Tribulation”, section VII, “Signs of the Coming Tribulation”.

the only meaning which “earth” may bear here [just as in all of the other 70 plus occurrences of the Greek word *ge* [γη] in Revelation]). Fourthly, it must be understood that the “voices, flashes of lightning, and earthquake” are all literal. When the Tribulation does commence, these unprecedented worldwide phenomena will be an unmistakable sign to everyone upon the earth that the Tribulation has begun (whether or not they choose to appreciate that fact).

The “thunderous voices” are loud, roaring noises, resembling yet distinct from thunderclaps. These are in fact the very words of God (cf. the voices which proceed from the throne of God: Rev.4:5). They will not, however, be verbally comprehensible to most of the inhabitants of the earth (cf. Jn.12:28-30; 2Cor.12:4; Rev.10:3-4; 11:15; 11:19; 14:2).¹² The flashes of lightning will likewise be spectacular to a degree unequaled in human experience, not in the least because they will be perceived simultaneously around the globe. And it is this feature of the earthquake as well which will be unmistakably remarkable, for it will be the first truly worldwide earthquake in the history of mankind – but not the last. In company with the other two elements in this trio of monitory phenomena, worldwide earthquakes will also occur in the middle of the Tribulation as a sign that the Great Tribulation has begun, and just prior to Armageddon to presage our Lord’s return at the Second Advent. In both the second and third occurrence of this triple warning we see an accelerating trend, with the Great Tribulation warnings being accompanied additionally by a worldwide plague of hail (Rev.11:19; cf. Rev.8:7), and with the Second Advent warnings being proportionally even more astonishing and devastating both in terms of its earthquake (Rev.16:18-20; cf. Is.29:6; Ezek.38:19; Hag.2:6-7; Zech.14:3-5; Heb.12:26; Rev.6:12-17) and its own plague of hail (Rev.16:21).

No doubt, at that future time of the Tribulation’s commencement the unbelieving world will attempt to explain away these amazing events as some combination of meteorological and geological peculiarities. But we may see in these clear warning signs a blessing from God in that they will leave those who truly are disciples of His Son in no doubt about the fact that the Tribulation has definitively begun. There will certainly be other indications in the days and months that follow which will affirm the validity of this fact (i.e., all of the other prophesied tribulational events which it is the purpose of this series to explicate). But it may well be asked in the case of those whose hearts are so hardened that they refuse to heed this first three-fold miraculous warning whether any proof will ever be enough? For those who can deny the significance of unprecedented lighting which illuminates the entire world (cf. our Lord Jesus Christ who is the true Light of the world: Jn.1:4; 8:12; 9:5; 12:46), for those who can deny the

¹² The question as to whether believers will understand these “voices” is an open one. Christ certainly understood the “voice” of the Father in the example quoted (Jn.12:28-30; cf. Matt.3:17; Rev.10:3-4), but it is unclear whether John and His other disciples did (they may well have received instruction from our Lord after the fact in an analogous manner to the parables). Paul understands the Lord’s “voice” in Acts 9:3-7 (where it is accompanied by flashing light), but his companions do not (Acts 22:9). We are given no clear indication here about believers’ perception of these future messages and can only say that this question must wait upon the event to reveal the answer.

significance of the reverberating voices heard round the world (cf. God the Father whose words have gone out into the entire world: Ps.19:1-6; Is.55:10-11), and for those who can deny the significance of such a unique earthquake which is simultaneously felt everywhere in the world (cf. the Spirit's invisible yet universally felt power: Gen.1:2; Zech.4:6; Jn.3:8), no warning, no matter how seemingly undeniable, is likely to be sufficient. But for us who do heed the words of our God, this triple sign will be a very clear message about what it means to be on the wrong side of His mercy. For us who fear and respect Him, there is truly nothing to fear from this world, but for those who do not reverence or fear Him so as to heed these warnings, there is every reason to be afraid. For it is indeed "a terrible thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb.10:31).

See to it that you do not ignore the One who is speaking [to you]. For if those [of the Exodus generation] did not escape when they ignored the one who was giving them warning from the earth (i.e., Moses), how much more shall we [not escape, if we] turn away from the One [giving us warning] from heaven? His voice shook the earth at that time [at Mount Sinai], but now He has made [us] this promise, saying, "Yet once more shall I shake not only the earth, but also heaven". And this "once more" clearly indicates the [coming] transformation of things which may be shaken as things which have been made [by Him], so that the [coming] things which cannot be shaken may abide forever. Since, therefore, we have received a Kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude so that through it we may serve God in a pleasing way with reverence and fear. For our God is a consuming fire. Hebrews 12:25-29

II. The Great Apostasy

1. Definition, Etymology, Process and Prophecies of the Great Apostasy

a. Definition: The Great Apostasy is a massive falling away from the faith by a third of Christians predicted to begin during the Tribulation's first half and destined to reach its culmination during the Great Persecution of the Tribulation's second half (Rev.12:4; also in Matt.25:1-13, where the five virgins whose oil fails represent the one third who apostatize, while those whose oil suffices are the believers who remain alive and faithful until our Lord's return: the martyrs, the other third, are omitted in that parable). The Great Apostasy is prophesied both by our Lord and by His apostles, and is to be found in certain Old Testament passages as well (see below). Although often subsumed in descriptions of the Great Persecution (which is responsible for producing the intensive final phase of apostasy), the Great Apostasy is a crucial event of immense significance in its own right. This is evident from Paul's use of it as one of the two most identifiable features of the Tribulation. In 2nd Thessalonians, Paul cites the fact that the Great Apostasy had not yet happened (along with the fact that antichrist had not yet been revealed) to disprove false claims that the resurrection had already occurred (2Thes.2:3). It would be impossible, Paul argued, for the resurrection, an event *coterminous with* our Lord's return at the end of the Tribulation, to precede events which must occur *during* the Tribulation. Clearly then from Paul's reasoning the Great Apostasy (again, along with the unmistakable

appearance of antichrist on the world stage) will be an event of such shocking magnitude that no Christian will be able to live through it and still be in any doubt about whether or not it has happened (cf. the similar analysis used by our Lord in Matt.24:3-14, and by Peter in 2Pet.3:1-13).

Rather than an event which will occur on a specific day, the Great Apostasy is a progression which reaches its climax during the Great Persecution, and which is inextricably linked with that persecution, for it is the intensified pressure of persecution that brings apostasy to its peak (Matt.24:4-14). As the book of Revelation is first and foremost “the revelation of Jesus Christ” (Rev.1:1) whose return in glory has the relief of the persecuted and the judgment of the persecutors as one of its main immediate results (cf. 2Thes.1:4-10), it is understandable that Revelation should emphasize persecution over apostasy. This is undoubtedly why most of the passages in Revelation dealing with this dual phenomenon concentrate on its persecution aspect (cf. Rev.6:9-11; 7:9-17; 12:12-17; 13:10; 13:11-18; 14:13; 14:14-16; 15:1-4; 16:5-6; 17:6; 18:24; 19:1-2; 20:4).

That said, there is one passage in Revelation which does give us specific information about the Great Apostasy, and while we shall not neglect Revelation 12:4 in its proper place in part 4 of this series, it is appropriate for that verse to constitute the starting point for our discussion of this great “falling away” from the faith.

And [the dragon’s] (i.e., the devil’s) tail swept away a third of the stars of heaven (i.e., both fallen angels and fallen believers) and threw them to the earth (i.e., their rebellion or apostasy and consequent association with them in their fall). Revelation 12:4a

This description in Revelation 12:4 of the great dragon (the devil) sweeping away a third of the stars of heaven and casting them to the earth has a dual application. The “stars” refer both to fallen angels and to apostate believers (for the former, see Judg.5:20; Job 25:5; 38:7; Is.14:12-13; 40:26 [cf. Lk.2:13]; Lk.10:18; Jude 1:13; Rev.1:16; 1:20; 2:1; 3:1; 8:10-11; 9:1; 12:1-4; for the latter, see Dan.8:10; 12:3; 1Cor.15:40-42; Phil.2:15; Heb.11:12; Rev.12:1). Just as Satan seduced one third of angelic kind into joining him in his rebellion against God before human history began and thus caused them to “fall”, so during the crucible of the Tribulation he will seduce one third of believers away from Christ and likewise “sweep them down to the earth” (i.e., cause them to fall from their holy, heavenly status). We have had occasion in the past to explain this passage’s meaning for the Satanic Rebellion (and the reader is encouraged to review that discussion).¹³ But that Revelation 12:4 also applies to believers caught up in the Great

¹³ See The Satanic Rebellion: Part 4: “Satan’s World System”, section III.3.b.3, “Elders”.

Apostasy is evident from the very close parallel provided by Daniel, where the “little horn” (i.e., antichrist, a type of the devil and his agent on earth) is given the leading role in this process.¹⁴

And [the little horn] (i.e., antichrist as a type and representative of the devil) magnified himself against the host of heaven (i.e., the family of God, men and angels both), and he cast down to the earth some of the host (i.e., antichrist seducing believers into apostasy) and some of the stars (i.e., Satan having seduced angels into rebellion) and he trampled them underfoot (i.e., their rebellion or apostasy in association with evil leading to their subsequent destruction; cf. Dan.7:7; 7:19; Rev.11:2). Daniel 8:10

By thus sub-categorizing the fallen “host” into **both** apostate believers **and** fallen angels, Daniel 8:10 makes it clear that we are to make use of a similar dual application in the case of our parallel passage, Revelation 12:4 (exactly as suggested above). Like Revelation 12:4, Daniel 8:10 may seem to conflate the timing of events (i.e., pre-history for the fall of one third of the angels, future history for the fall of one third of tribulational believers), but, in fact, the context of Revelation 12:4 explicitly reveals that the final fulfillment of this prophecy (cf. Rev.12:7-9), that is, the actual, literal casting of Satan and his angels from heaven down to the earth is contemporaneous with the beginning of the Great Apostasy’s period of culmination, namely, the Great Tribulation, precisely the time when the pressures of the Great Persecution which characterizes that three and a half year period will bring the process of apostasy to a fever pitch. In so far as they apply to the believers who are going to “fall away” during the Tribulation, therefore, Daniel 8:10 and Revelation 12:4 between them provide us with two particularly crucial details about the course of the Great Apostasy:

1) The Great Apostasy will come about as a direct result of intensified satanic activity administered by antichrist and directed against believers.

2) Fully one third of the believers on earth at that time will “fall away” from the faith.

In regard to the first point, it should be noted that such intensified diabolical activity was previously restrained to a very large degree (as indeed antichrist himself, Satan’s “man of lawlessness” has been kept from appearing before his time: 2Thes.2:3-12), but will be possible during the Tribulation on account of the suspension of the Holy Spirit’s worldwide ministry of restraint (2Thes.2:6-7).¹⁵ Secondly, the “one third” figure is also something that should give us

¹⁴ The typological blending of Satan and antichrist seen here is not unparalleled in biblical prophecy (cf. the “king of Babylon” in Is.14:3-23, who likewise represents the careers of both the devil and his earthly pseudo-Messiah). For more on the use of typology in biblical prophecy, see The Coming Tribulation: Part 1: “Introduction”, section IV.1.d, “Typology and Sequence in Old Testament Prophecy”.

¹⁵ See The Coming Tribulation: Part 2B: “The Heavenly Prelude to the Tribulation”, section III, “The Restraining Ministry of the Holy Spirit”.

pause (compare Dan.11:33-35 and Zech.13:8-9). Understand that this represents one third of the number of *actual* Christians, not of the total population of those worldwide who may at that time identify themselves as Christians. The difference between these two figures (of actual versus putative Christians) is likely to be immense. No one can know the hearts of men except God, but if past history and experience provide any guide at all, it is very likely that only a small percentage of those who classify themselves as Christians when asked about their religious affiliation will genuinely be followers and disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ. Abraham, after all, gave a deliberately minimalist “worst case” assessment of the number of the “righteous” in Sodom, yet still managed to overestimate their true number (Gen.18:32).¹⁶ The massive number of merely nominal Christians who will quickly put aside all pretense to Christianity during that future time of testing (and then join whole-heartedly in the beast’s religious movement) are *not* a part of this “one third” number. The apostates in question here are, on the contrary, genuine believers in our Lord who will exchange their precious faith for worthless and temporary worldly concerns under the pressures of that terrible time to come (cf. Dan.11:30-35).

Since men began to call upon the name of the Lord (Gen.4:26), and since the early days of the Church era (Phil.3:18; 2Tim.4:10), there have always been those who started well, but stumbled in their faith for one reason or another and so fell away from Christ (Matt.13:20-21; Mk.4:17; Lk.8:13; cf. Gal.5:4-7; 1Tim.4:1). But that fully one third of the true Church militant (which is itself only a fraction of the “church-visible”) should turn away from Jesus Christ is a terrifying and sobering prospect which should leave those of us who have been commanded to prepare spiritually for the cataclysmic events to come in no doubt about the importance of the task before us (Matt.24:13; Lk.18:8; 21:36). The import of the message of the “one third” who turn away from the Lord into apostasy is clear: there will be tremendous spiritual peril during the Tribulation for any and all whose faith is not solidly grounded on the Rock (Matt.7:24-27; Lk.6:46-49). Time and space do not permit us here to revisit the refutation of the false doctrine of “eternal security” (which denies even the possibility of believer apostasy), but an objective reading of any of the numerous New Testament passages which conflict with it should be sufficient to make clear the principle that our salvation requires us to faithfully maintain our faith in Jesus Christ steadfast until the end (e.g., Matt.7:24-27; 10:33; Lk.6:46-49; 14:34-35; Jn.15:5-6; Rom.11:17-23; 1Cor.6:9-11; 10:6-12; 15:2; 2Cor.13:5; Gal.5:19-21; Eph.5:3-7; Col.1:21-23; 1Tim.6:9; 6:20-21; 2Tim.2:12-13; Heb.2:1-3; 3:6-19; 10:35-39; 2Jn.1:8-9).¹⁷ It will only be those who do endure in faith until the end that will be saved (Matt.24:13), and the Tribulation

¹⁶ Abraham had thought there were at least “ten righteous”, but only Lot, Lot’s wife, and their two daughters were escorted from Sodom – and Lot’s wife, upon “looking back”, turned into a pillar of salt (Gen.19:26). Given the behavior of his daughters later in the same chapter, we would be right to question whether any were righteous apart from Lot (see 2Pet.2:6-9), an exigency which would render Abraham’s assessment a ten-fold over-estimate.

¹⁷ See Peter’s Epistles lessons #26, “Reactions to Personal Tribulation”, and #27 “Three False Doctrines That Threaten Faith”.

will present a greater challenge to the continuation of faithfulness and faithful discipleship than any other period in human memory.

b. Etymology of Apostasy: The English word “apostasy” is a transliteration of the Greek word *apostasia* (ἀποστασία; cf. 2Thes.2:3), and means, etymologically, a “standing away” (*apo* = “away”; *stasia* = “standing”) or “separation” from something. The act of willfully turning away, forsaking, or “rebell[ing]” from someone or something is the most common application of this word throughout the ancient Greek language (cf. Acts 21:21, where it is translated “to forsake” by KJV and NASB, and “to turn away” by NIV). In terms of Old Testament parallels, *apostasia*, along with its cognate verb, *aphistemi* (cf. Acts 5:37), is represented by a rather large number of Hebrew words that express this same concept of turning away from God. For example, one of the more common such noun/verb pairs in Hebrew are the noun *meshubah* (hbwvm; lit., “turning back” or apostasy) and its cognate verb *shubh* (bvw; lit. “to turn back” or apostatize). And while we find a large number of terms for this concept in both languages, the main idea provided by the corresponding Greek and Hebrew vocabulary is unmistakable: “apostasy” is nothing less than a turning away from, a forsaking of, or a rebelling against God, that is to say, a complete rejection of His authority on the believer’s part, a “turning of one’s back” to God, while “turning back” to the world instead (cf. Jn.15:1-7; Rom.11:17-23).¹⁸

And he who was sown on the rocky places, this is the one who hears the Word and immediately receives it with joy. He has no roots [to his faith], however, but lasts only a short time. So when tribulation or persecution occurs on account of the Word, he is immediately tripped up (*skandalizetai*; i.e., he apostatizes). Matthew 13:20-21

And these [second types] who are sown on the rocky places are similar. Whenever they hear the Word they immediately receive it with joy, although they have no root [of faith] in themselves, but are only temporary [believers]. When tribulation or persecution because of the Word comes [their way], they are immediately tripped up (*skandalizontai*; i.e., they apostatize). Mark 4:16-17

And those [whose seed of faith fell] on the rock do receive the Word with joy when they hear it. However these [types] have no root [to their faith]. They believe for a while, but in time of testing **they apostatize** (*aphistantai*). Luke 8:13

Apostasy is thus, at its root, the death of faith, the rejection by a onetime believer of his Savior, our Lord Jesus Christ. As the gospel passages above from the parable of the sower make clear, it is most often “tribulation” and “persecution”, the costs of discipleship, which are the decisive

¹⁸ As may be expected, there are many other words in both the Hebrew Old Testament and the Greek New Testament used to represent the concept of apostasy, for example, *anakampto* (ἀνακαμπω, “to turn back”; cf. 2Pet.2:21), *skandalizo* (σκανδαλιζω, “to make stumble”; cf. Matt.24:10), *peshah* (iwp, “rebellion”; cf. Dan.9:24), *sur* (rvc, “apostasy”; cf. Is.1:5), *maradh* (drm, “to rebel”; cf. Num.14:9), and all of their cognates, to name but a few.

factors in causing a quondam believer to abandon his or her faith in preference for what seems at the time an easier road (cf. “tribulation” and “persecution” being characteristic of the first and second halves of the Tribulation in the Great Apostasy and Great Persecution respectively).

For if after having escaped the defilements of this world by recognizing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ they should be overcome [spiritually] by becoming involved again in these foul things, then they have become worse off than they were before. For it would have been better for them not to have accepted the Righteous Way in the first place, rather than – once having accepted this holy command [for *faith* in Christ] committed to them – to **turn their backs on it** now. And so in their case this proverb is true: “The dog has returned to his vomit, and the sow, though washed, to her muddy sty”.

2nd Peter 2:20-22

c. The Process of Apostasy: Although the essential mechanics of apostasy should be obvious enough from the above discussion, it is important for us to clarify here just how it is that a person may lose faith in Jesus Christ. Turning away from God and away from the Person of His Son is, in general, not always immediately obvious to others, and, rather than an event, is more often a process wherein the believer progressively violates his conscience, giving himself over to sin to such a degree that he is eventually forced to make a final choice between God and repentance on the one hand, or sin and reprobation on the other. For, at some point, continuing on the wrong road far enough and willfully enough will eventually and inevitably lead to the complete breakdown of the conscience and result in the “shipwreck” of faith:

I give you this command, Timothy my child, in accordance with the prophecies that were made long ago about you, that you conduct a good campaign, one that is in keeping with [those predictions], holding onto your faith and to a clean conscience (cf. 1Tim.1:5-6) – which [conscience] some have rejected (lit., “pushed away”) and [have thus] suffered ***the shipwreck of their faith***.

1st Timothy 1:18-19

As this passage tells us, it is impossible to continually ignore the Spirit’s conversation with the conscience without suffering damage to one’s faith (1Tim.4:1-2; Tit.1:15; cf. Eph.4:30; 1Thes.5:19; Heb.10:29). It is impossible to continually oppose God and His will without likewise doing harm to one’s faith (1Pet.2:11). And it is impossible to continually choose what is displeasing to God without becoming more and more reluctant to “look Him in the face” (Jn.3:20; Eph.5:11-14). Inevitably, the path of ignoring God and rejecting His will damages, diminishes, and desensitizes the conscience, and thus (in the absence of repentance) leads eventually to the obliteration of one’s faith. And when the believer stops believing altogether, then he/she is no longer a believer (Matt.24:10-13). The specific, biblical process involved here is the “hardening of the heart”, that is, in the case of believers, a gradual loss of response and

sensitivity to one's conscience, to the known will of God, and to one's commitment to following Jesus Christ as a true and faithful disciple (all of which are really one and the same thing).¹⁹

Make sure, brothers, that none of you develop an *evil heart of unbelief* (i.e., lack of faith) by *turning away* (lit. "apostatizing") from the living God. Rather keep encouraging each other every day as long as we still call it "today" (i.e. still remain in this world), lest any of you *be hardened [in heart] by the deception of sin*. For we all have a share in Christ, *as long as we hang on* to that original confidence [of our faith] firmly to the end, as it says:

Today if you hear His voice,

Don't harden your hearts as they did at the provocation [at Meribah].

For who provoked Him, though they had heard? Did not all of them who came out of Egypt under Moses' leadership do so? And with whom was He enraged for forty years? Wasn't it the very people who had sinned, then dropped dead in the desert? And to whom did He swear that they would never enter into the [place of] rest [He had promised], but to those who had been disobedient to Him? Now we see that they were unable to enter into this [place of rest] *because of their unbelief* (i.e., their loss of faith).

Hebrews 3:12-19

These verses are a veritable primer on the process of apostasy. Here we see that having an "evil (i.e., hardened) heart of unbelief" is essentially synonymous with entering into apostasy (etymologically "turning away" from God, as we have seen). These two phenomena go hand in hand and both proceed from an identical source, namely, the poor choices of the person in question. For, as in the case of the Exodus generation in the passage above, it is by our own will that we harden our hearts, and it is by our own will that we turn away from God. Turning toward Him, following Him, advancing on the right path – all these are good and proper decisions which bring us nearer to our Lord. Turning away from Him, following our own desires, leaving the right path – all these are poor and dangerous decisions which alienate us from our Lord. We have said in the past that our essential purpose here on this earth is to make our choice for or against God in the Person of His Son, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ – but this is not a once and for all decision.²⁰ Discipleship, being a believer in Jesus Christ and a faithful follower who lives to please Him, that is a day by day picking up of our cross (and every day presents its own challenges: Lk.9:23; cf. Matt.6:34; Eph.5:16; Col.4:5). Jesus told us to "count the cost" of discipleship before committing ourselves to following Him (Lk.14:26-34). For the life of a true disciple in Jesus Christ is definitely not without its costs, and it would be better never to embark on that road in the first place than to begin to follow Him only to turn away later (2Pet.2:20-22).

¹⁹ See Peter's Epistles, lessons #21, #26, and #27, and the series Exodus 14: Hardening Pharaoh's Heart.

²⁰ See The Satanic Rebellion: Part 3: "The Purpose, Creation, and Fall of Man", section I, "The Purpose of Man".

As the passage quoted above makes clear, it is “sin’s deception” which causes our hearts to lose sensitivity to what Jesus would have us do.

This does not mean that all apostates are engaged in a pattern of sinning which is obvious and overt (outrageous sexual or criminal behavior, for example). Sin comes in many forms, and, in the author’s observation, the types of sin which are more often associated with apostasy are largely sins of the heart like jealousy, envy, bitterness and anger, just the sort of attitudes that are wont to dominate the heart when a person blames God for personal tribulations and disasters (as Jesus tells us in the passages from the parable of the sower quoted in the previous section: Matt.13:20-21; Mk.4:16-17; Lk.8:13). But whatever the type of sin to which a believer gives his whole-hearted allegiance (as opposed to a temporary failure later repented of and confessed), it is just this sustained and determined pattern of choosing *against* God and *for* what displeases Him that hardens the heart, deadens the conscience, alienates us from God and God from us, and eventually puts faith to death, for we cannot simultaneously serve both Christ and sin (cf. Prov.28:13-14).

Don't you understand that if you give your allegiance to anyone to obey them as servants, then you truly are their servants when you obey them? [And that this is true] whether [you give yourselves] to sin, which results in death (i.e., of faith), or whether [you give yourselves] to obedience [to Christ], which results in righteousness?
Romans 6:16 (cf. Jn.8:31-38)

We all sin (1Kng.8:46; Ps.130:3-4; Prov.20:9; Eccl.7:20; Rom.3:23), but in our continuing relationship of faith with our Lord we are instructed to confess our sins, and are promised forgiveness when we do (1Jn.1:9; cf. Ps.32; 51). In addition to giving us comfort about the forgiveness of our sins, the apostle John, in his first epistle, tells us in no uncertain terms that we are indeed all sinners so that this need to confess our sins whenever we commit them is very real (1Jn.1:5-10). But John *also* says that his purpose in writing is “that you may not sin” (1Jn.2:1), and then, throughout the course of the letter, goes on to describe the believer as someone for whom sin does not even seem possible (cf. 1Jn.3:6; 3:9-10; 5:18). This is not a contradiction. Rather it is a confirmation that the Christian way of life is one of obediently following Jesus Christ (where sin is an anomaly), and not a life where one can choose one's own way in all things without serious and even eternal consequences. We have to own up to our mistakes, and we have to understand that sin, even when forgiven, has consequences both natural and divine, as in the case where our sinful actions may hurt someone and damage our relationship with them while at the same time occasioning discipline from the Lord (Heb.12:4-13). But for the true Christian, sin is a deviation from our journey of pilgrimage in the service of Jesus Christ. Through repentance and confession we get back on that straight and narrow road, and in doing so make it clear to ourselves and to all who observes us, angels and men alike, that we are truly committed to our faith in Jesus Christ, and that our lapse was but a momentary departure from our true

purpose rather than some new purpose we have now embraced.²¹ However, should that “temporary deviation” continue to develop into a new and firmly fixed orientation, we risk the defiling of our consciences and the hardening of our hearts against God – we risk our faith:

Every one is tempted by his own lust, being dragged away [by it] and enticed [by it]. Then, should lust conceive (i.e., should the person give in to it), it gives birth to sin. And sin, should it be fully carried out to the end (i.e., should the person give in to a life of sin), produces death (i.e., the death of faith). James 1:14-15

If anyone sees his brother engaged in a pattern of sinfulness which does not lead to death (i.e., is a deviation rather than a complete turning away), let him ask [forgiveness on his brother’s behalf], and life will be given to him (i.e., forgiveness and deliverance will result), that is, in those cases where those sinning are not [sinning] unto death. There is sin which leads to death – I am not telling you to pray in that case. All unrighteousness is sin, and there is sin which does not lead to death (i.e., temporary deviation, confessed and repented does not result in death). 1st John 5:16-17

Let us not put Christ to the test, as some of them (i.e., the Exodus generation) did and were killed by serpents. And let us not be complaining, as some of them complained, and were killed by the Destroyer. These things happened to them as an example to us and were written to warn us (i.e., to avoid similar apostasy) – we who live at the culmination of the ages (i.e., at the doorstep of the Tribulation). So let him who thinks he stands firm beware lest he fall (i.e., from faith; cf. Rom.11:22). 1st Corinthians 10:9-12

The best way to avoid apostasy, really the only sure way, is to commit and dedicate oneself to the task of marching forward on the road to Zion, faithfully following our Lord Jesus Christ who is the **only** Way to eternal life (Jn.14:6).

d. Prophecies of the Great Apostasy:

1) In 1st Timothy 4:1, the apostle Paul tells us that the Great Apostasy is an explicit teaching of the Holy Spirit. He also informs us of what this means in strategic terms, namely, that those who abandon the Christian faith during the Tribulation will not merely become largely neutral unbelievers (as is sometimes the case today), but instead will become willing and active participants in the new, syncretic satanic system (religious, political, social, etc.) which will be offered up by the devil and his antichrist as a hostile alternative to faith in Jesus Christ. Given that this system will have as one of its main objectives the eradication of true faith from the earth (through accelerating pressures that lead eventually to the violence of the Great Persecution in the Tribulation’s second half), we can see that in the case of such individuals the pattern of becoming active “enemies of the cross of Christ” will be completely fulfilled (Phil.3:18).

²¹ See The Coming Tribulation: Part 2A: “The Seven Churches” under the discussions of Ephesus and Pergamum.

The Spirit explicitly says that in the end times (i.e., during the Tribulation) *certain men will rebel (lit., “apostatize”) from the faith*, giving their allegiance [instead] to deceitful spirits and demonic doctrines. 1st Timothy 4:1

2) In 2nd Thessalonians 2:1-4, as mentioned at the outset of this section, Paul sees the Great Apostasy as an event proportional in its significance to the revelation of antichrist. In order to prove his point that the resurrection had not yet occurred, the apostle focuses the Thessalonian believers on two unmistakable events that must precede the resurrection whose occurrence or lack thereof could not be subject to misinterpretation. Along with the revelation of antichrist, such also will be the Great Apostasy. The Thessalonians could easily look within their own ranks and see that there had in fact been no massive defection into apostasy, and certainly not one in which a large number of their former fellow believers had now given their complete allegiance to the advancement of the cause of Satan and the elimination of the Church. As in the passage above, these verses show a clear connection between those who will turn away from Christ and the rise of antichrist and his system, making it likely that fallen former believers will play a decisive role in the advancement of the beast.

So we ask you, brothers, in regard to the coming our Lord Jesus Christ and our assembling together to Him [at His return], that you not be so easily moved from your correct understanding [of these matters], nor disturbed [by doubts about what you should know to be true] – not even if [this “new information” purports to come] through a spirit, or an [inspired] word or a letter supposedly from me, declaring that the Day of the Lord is already upon us. Do not let anyone deceive you in any way. For [the Second Advent cannot come] unless *the [Great] Apostasy* has first occurred and the man of lawlessness, [antichrist,] has [first] been revealed, that “son of destruction” (cf. Jn.17:12 of Judas), the one who will oppose and exalt himself against every so-called god and object of worship to such a degree that he will [even] take his seat in the temple of God and represent himself as being God. 2nd Thessalonians 2:1-4

3) In Matthew 24:3-13, Jesus is responding to a question from His disciples about the timing of these eschatological events. In this respect, our Lord’s response puts the Great Apostasy (as well as other events) to similar use as in the passage above. That is to say, the disciples had wanted to know when He would return, and Jesus tells them that before His return all the “birth pangs” of the Tribulation must precede (including the Great Apostasy). In verses four through six, Jesus tells His disciples of trends which will be in play throughout the time preceding His return. And, indeed, throughout the Church Age there have been and continue to be deceivers who represent themselves as Him (cf. 1Jn.2:18), and there have been and continue to be conflicts and threats of conflicts which seem (at the time) to be of such moment as to have apocalyptic significance. Our Lord’s message in the opening part of this passage is a threefold one, telling us first that we should not be deceived by any false Christ, nor thrown from our proper Christian walk by fearful anticipation of world events. Secondly, we are told that such deceivers and such potentially deceptive circumstances will be a characteristic of the days to come (i.e., of the entire Church Age). Thirdly, and most germane to our present study, is the message which these words imply,

that is, that the actual Tribulation will be so indisputably characterized by one particular false Christ, namely antichrist, and its events so obviously dominated by the series of world conflicts predicted to precede our Lord's return, that there will be no possibility of failing to recognize these things for what they are by those who have given proper attention to scripture. For both of these two Church-Age-long trends will find their exemplars and their ultimate fulfilment during the Tribulation in the person of the arch-antichrist, and in the playing out of his campaign of world domination respectively.

With verse seven, our Lord sums up the Tribulation's first half which He then explains in verse eight to be the beginning of the "birth pangs", namely, the first half of the seven year period which directly precedes His return. In His synopsis of these events, the division of the world into two power blocks and the "world war" which ensues (ultimately leaving antichrist in essential control of most of the earth) is the event sequence He offers us as an unmistakable, signature sign of the Tribulation's first half, noting as well that both conspicuous man-made disasters caused by intensified evil (detailed by the seven seals: Rev.6:1-17) and unprecedented divine judgments upon this intensified evil (detailed by the seven trumpets: Rev.8:6-11:19) will likewise characterize this period. We reach the Great Tribulation itself in verses nine through thirteen, where our Lord describes the Great Persecution and the culminating phase of the Great Apostasy as a single, composite phenomenon. Believers (who have turned apostate by the time of the Great Tribulation's commencement) betray other believers, resulting in tribulation, that is, in all manner of persecution including imprisonment, execution, and worldwide antipathy to all true followers of Jesus Christ (verse 9). This intense persecution causes many more to "fall away", a further round of betrayal, and increased hostility by these new apostates toward their former brethren (verse 10). In this environment of ever intensifying pressure and persecution, Satan will then launch a deceptive assault directed primarily at those who still remain faithful to Christ (verse 11: explained in verses 23-24 as a new round of false prophets who, with the help of satanically empowered "signs", will falsely proclaim that Christ has already returned). The combination of these horrific events will finally cause the love even of some of those who have endured to this point to be quenched (verse 12; see below under "Causes of the Great Apostasy"), and it is only those who hold out until the final trumpet when our Lord returns who will be saved (verse 13). Thus apostasy will reach its peak and its culmination under the pressures brought to bear by the Great Persecution in the Tribulation's second half. However, as is the case with the rise of antichrist, the Great Apostasy will begin and grow from the moment the Tribulation commences.

(3) And when He sat down on the Mount of Olives, His disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us when these things will be, and what the sign is of your return and of the end of the age?" (4) And Jesus answered and said, "See to it that no one deceives you. (5) For many will come in My Name, saying, 'I am the Christ', and they will deceive many people. (6) And you are going to hear about [actual] wars and impending wars. Make sure you do not become [overly] alarmed [by such things]. For [these things] must happen, but this is not yet the end [of the Tribulation]. (7) For [before that end] a nation will rise against a nation, even a kingdom against a kingdom (cf. Dan.11:25-30; 11:40),

and there will be famines (i.e., man-made disasters) and earthquakes (i.e., divine judgments) in various places. (8) But all these things are [merely] the beginning of the birth pangs (i.e., the first half of the Tribulation). (9) Then (i.e., the beginning of the second half or Great Tribulation) men will betray you [bringing you] into tribulation, and will put you to death, and you will be hated by all of the nations on account of My Name. (10) And at that time **many will fall away** (i.e., will apostatize) 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 24:3-13

4) There are also a series of passages in the book of Daniel which connect the Great Apostasy’s opening up into a full flood with the Tribulation’s mid-point.²² As one might expect, these passages all focus upon the land of Israel, but, in terms of apostasy, betrayal and persecution, the events described here have a worldwide applicability. Daniel 8:10-12 demonstrates the connection between apostate believers and the beast’s Great Persecution of those who remain faithful. Daniel 8:23 shows that the period of completion of the Great Apostasy is contemporaneous with the career of antichrist (i.e., the Great Tribulation; cf. Dan.8:24-25). Daniel 11:30-35 deals mostly with the Great Persecution and its specific course in Israel, but here as well we see the pattern of increased polarization with apostates and unbelievers actively in the devil’s camp on the one side, and those who remain fully committed to the Lord flatly opposed to them on the other.

And [the little horn] (i.e., antichrist as a type and representative of the devil) magnified himself against the host of heaven (i.e., the family of God, men and angels both), and he cast down to the earth some of the host (i.e., antichrist seducing believers into apostasy) and some of the stars (i.e., Satan having seduced angels into rebellion) and he trampled them underfoot (i.e., their rebellion or apostasy in association with evil leading to their subsequent destruction; cf. Dan.7:7; 7:19; Rev.11:2). He even magnified himself against the Prince of the host (i.e., Christ). The daily sacrifice was abolished by him, and the holy place (i.e., the inner court) was desecrated. And along with the daily sacrifice, the host (i.e., believers) fell into his power **on account of [the] rebellion** (i.e., the Great Apostasy, with persecution advanced through the help of apostates; cf. v.13). And he threw truth to the ground, and was successful in whatever he did. Daniel 8:10-12

And at the end of their kingdom (i.e., during the Tribulation), when **rebels are being confirmed** [in their apostasy], there will arise a stern-faced king (i.e., antichrist), well versed in deception. Daniel 8:23

²² That the information in Daniel chapter 8 applies to the end times is made clear in verse 19: “[The angel] said, ‘Behold, I am going to make known to you what will happen at the latter [time] of [God’s] wrath (i.e., the Tribulation), for [this will all happen] at the appointed time of the end (i.e., the end times)’”.

(25) Then he (i.e., the king of the north, antichrist) will rouse up his power and desire against the king of the south with a great force, but the king of the south will mobilize for war with an equally great force which will also be very powerful. Nevertheless, he (i.e., the king of the south) will not be able to stand [against the king of the north], for they shall devise plots against [the king of the south]. (26) For those who eat his choice food (i.e., his inner circle) will break him, and his force will flood away, and many will fall slain. (27) And though these two kings set their hearts on evil and speak lies at the same table (i.e., a peace conference), it will not prosper, for there will yet be an end to the period [of the Great Tribulation]. (28) Now as he (i.e., antichrist) returns to his own land with great booty, his heart will be set against the holy covenant, so that he will take action [against it] and [then] return to his own land. (29) During this period he will return and attack the south [again], but the circumstances of this campaign will not be like those of the first one. (30) For ships of Kittim (i.e., the western “Babylon”) will attack with him [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), and captivity (i.e., imprisonment), and plunder (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 11:25-35

2. The Situation of the Church and “church-visible” on the Eve of the Tribulation: To fully understand the phenomenon of the Great Apostasy, it is necessary to understand the difference between the church-visible and the true Church of Jesus Christ. Simply put, just as “not all Israel is Israel” (Rom.9:6), so not all who represent themselves as Christians really are believers in and followers of our Lord Jesus Christ. And we are not talking here about the fact that many Christians are not particularly interested in the Word of God or that many Christians are not carrying on their Christian lives in a particularly sanctified way (sadly, many are not). It is possible, though dangerous in the extreme, to be a marginal Christian, to be “lukewarm”, yet still be a member of Christ’s fold. Clearly, those who fall into this category (and in this most complacent of Church periods, that of Laodicea,²³ the percentage is appallingly high) will be in the gravest danger of losing faith and salvation under the spiritual pressures of the Tribulation.

²³ For the seven Church eras and their prophetic significance, see The Coming Tribulation: Part 2A: “The Seven Churches”.

But, marginal though they may be, they are still Christians as long as they maintain their faith in Jesus Christ (even if that faith is on “life support”). The distinction we are making here is between true Christians (of whatever stripe) and those who, while in reality not Christians at all, represent themselves as believers in Jesus Christ. Those who genuinely believe in and follow our Lord are Christians. Those who do not, are not, even though they may identify themselves as Christians and may belong to “Christian” organizations. In the author’s estimation, the size of this “church-visible” greatly exceeds the size of the true Church militant (i.e., true believers currently alive on earth), and this unfavorable proportion is likely to increase the nearer we draw to the Tribulation, trending even higher and picking up momentum once the Tribulation begins. The twin dangers of complacency and pseudo-Christianity will contribute in no small measure to making the true Church particularly vulnerable when the Tribulation does hit, especially inasmuch as prophecy suggests an exceptional period of calm and prosperity just prior to its inception:²⁴

But concerning the times and the seasons (i.e., the time-line of future prophecy and its specific events), brothers, you have no need for anyone to write you. For you yourselves know full well that the Day of the Lord (i.e., God’s eschatological time of judgment beginning with the Tribulation) is coming just like a thief in the night. When [people] are saying “Peace!” and “Safety!” (i.e., just before the Tribulation begins), at that precise time destruction will fall swiftly upon them, just like labor pains on a pregnant woman (i.e., the tribulational judgments culminating in Armageddon will begin).

1st Thessalonians 5:1-3

This dual phenomenon of complacency within the Church in our final era of Laodicea and an ever growing proportion of unbelievers within the church-visible is creating serious impediments to spiritual growth in our own time, and will be the cause of increasing spiritual danger for all Christians at that future time. Consider the negatives today of an environment where entertainment and socializing are given priority and where the search for truth and the teaching of truth is stifled. Within “Christian” churches where these circumstances obtain (at present more the rule than the exception), spiritual growth, drawing near to Christ and learning how to better serve Him, is a nigh on impossible task – when it happens, it happens in spite of rather than because of such groups. Now consider that during the Tribulation, when the proportion of unbelievers has increased and false teaching has spread, what dampening of enthusiasm for the truth must then occur in Christian groups that are marginal even now! Indeed, we may expect that during the Tribulation by far the majority of main-line Christian groups and organizations will be or will shortly become anything but truly Christian, and this shift of organized Christianity from mere ineffectiveness to outright hostility to truth and true spirituality will serve to have a very chilling effect on all those who are striving to serve their Lord in a good and proper way. For when nearly all of the identifiable “Christian” churches and organizations have

²⁴ Compare Joseph’s dream of the seven years of prosperity preceding the seven years of famine in Egypt (prophetic of the Tribulation: Gen.41:1-40), and see also The Coming Tribulation: Part 1: “Introduction”, section IV.1.b., “The “Day of the Lord” Paradigm”.

melted into one single matrix not merely of complacency about the inclusion of unbelievers and of tolerance of false doctrines (the case today), but actually of aggressive hostility towards any attitude of true dedication to Christ and of any correct understanding of the truth, then all true believers and genuine followers of Jesus will stand out as misfits as never before. This will be a test of faith unlike any in history, and, alarmingly, a test which many will fail, swelling the ranks of the Great Apostasy.

a. The Hardness of Unbelieving Pseudo-Christianity (The Seven Woes): Organized Judaism of our Lord's time presents a close parallel to the situation described above. Controlled largely by the scribes and Pharisees, the religious establishment of that time had become every bit as divorced from the true grace and power of God as will be the case for organized "Christianity" in the Tribulation (cf. Matt.23:5). Jesus' characterization of the spiritually dead "church-visible" of His own day gives us a very clear picture of what true believers will be up against once the church-visible of that future day makes a similarly clean break from the truth.

1) The Pseudo-Christian establishment hinders salvation for its members:

So woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you lock up the kingdom of heaven [right] in front of people. For you yourselves are not going in, nor do you allow those about to do so to [actually] go in. Matthew 23:13

It is understandable if regrettable that those who have rejected the one way of salvation, faith in Jesus Christ, should attempt to prevent the salvation of their fellow members and so "close up heaven" to them. For to allow true discipleship on the part of others in their midst would be, in a way, to repudiate everything they themselves stand for. That is why even today those who do not follow the true way of salvation do all in their power to deny it to others as well (as is evident in the case of all so-called "Christian" groups who teach salvation by works, thus denigrating faith in Christ alone). For such people, Jesus Christ and His gospel are embarrassments (cf. Lk.12:9). Any real truth, any genuine belief in Christ within their ranks is a source of trouble, of complications, and, to put it bluntly, just "uncomfortable". As children of him who is the father of the lie, they are naturally hostile to the truth (Jn.8:44).

2) The Pseudo-Christian establishment reaches out to hinder salvation for others seeking God:

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you scour land and sea to make a single convert, and when he becomes [one], you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves. Matthew 23:15

Propagating their false teachings is at once the best way to gain adherents and strength on the one hand, while reducing as far as possible the ranks of those who are truly seeking God. By coopting those who are searching for God and keeping them from true salvation, they avoid potential adversaries and suborn instead the zeal of these unfortunate converts for their own

purposes. Furthermore, such conversions give them confidence in the rightness of their twisted approach (a point evident in all cults today).

3) The Pseudo-Christian establishment adds forms and rituals which obscure truth:

Woe to you, you blind guides who say, “Whoever swears by the temple has no obligation, but whoever swears by the gold of the temple is obliged”. You fools and blind men! For what is greater, the gold or the temple which makes the gold holy? And you [also] say, “Whoever swears by the altar has no obligation, but whoever swears by the sacrifice which is on it is obliged”. You blind men! For what is greater, the sacrifice or the altar which makes the sacrifice holy? Therefore whoever swears by the altar swears both by it and by everything on it. And whoever swears by the temple swears by it and by the One who dwells in it. And whoever swears by heaven swears by the throne of God and by Him who sits upon it. Matthew 23:16-22

This is more than being more impressed with material things which appeal to earthly greed than with the underlying spiritual realities (i.e., the gold and the sacrifices instead of the temple and the altar which give them spiritual meaning). Beyond this failure to appreciate the spiritual truths which underlie the legitimate rituals described here, the pseudo-Christian establishment actually adds its own false strictures to the truth and thereby obscures that truth. This tendency to create and emphasize false precepts over the genuine Word of God is a trend which will dominate the whole warp and woof of the secularized pseudo-Christianity of the Tribulation (as it is indeed becoming more and more prominent in our own day, even in evangelical circles).

4) The Pseudo-Christian establishment uses minor, partial obedience to obscure major truths:

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you give a tenth of your mint and of your anise and of your cummin, but you have neglected the weightier parts of the Law, [namely], justice and mercy and faith. You ought to do the former – but not neglect the latter! You blind guides! You [are careful to] filter out the gnat, but [then] you swallow down the camel! Matthew 23:23-24

Equally incompatible with the truth of the Word of God is the tendency described above to over-emphasize minor *applications* of the truth out of context (even otherwise correct ones), while ignoring the actual *teachings* of the Bible which give them meaning. Like saying “grace” over a stolen meal, divorcing even legitimate Christian practices from their true spirituality not only results in a pointless exercise of pseudo-devotion to God, but, worse to tell, also has the effect of obscuring those important underlying truths upon which all such applications were originally based. In company with the third “woe”, this practice will help to rob organized pseudo-Christianity of any true relationship to Jesus Christ whatsoever (a trend on the rise in our own day as well, present wherever “the teachings of men” are put forth as if they were the words of God: Is.29:13; Matt.15:9; Mk.7:7; Col.2:22b).

5) The Pseudo-Christian establishment gives the appearance of holiness, but is not holy:

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they teem with robbery and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup so that its outside may also be [truly] clean.

Matthew 23:25-26

It is true that the tradition of “baptizing” eating utensils (among many other things) was a well-established extra-biblical tradition that attained a force beyond its true importance (an application divorced from its true spiritual significance as in the case of the fourth “woe” above), and one which had previously been criticized by our Lord (cf. Matt.15:1-11). However, as becomes apparent only after the comparison is completed (and so hits home with even more force), the “cup and dish” refer to *the scribes and Pharisees themselves* – they are the utensils which are clean only on the outside, but inside their true nature is seen to be greedy and licentious. It will thus be another characteristic of the organized pseudo-Christianity of the Tribulation to be “holy” in appearance, to present a sanctified exterior in terms of all behavior which may be readily observed, but to be devoted to sin and evil on the [secret] inside. Thus the “superficiality” which the leaders as well as the rank and file of the church-visible of that future day will exhibit will not only be a question of no depth of true spirituality, but actually of the reverse of what appears on the surface, with evil lurking below (cf. 2Tim.3:5).

6) The Pseudo-Christian establishment gives the appearance of spiritual life, but is dead:

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you resemble whitewashed tombs which, while they appear to be beautiful on the outside, on the inside are filled with dead men’s bones and all uncleanness. This is just how you are. On the outside you appear to men to be righteous, but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

Matthew 23:27-28

In addition to appearing to be holy while being profane in reality, pseudo-Christianity of the Tribulation will appear to be spiritually *alive* but will in reality be entirely *dead* to God. They may have impressive buildings, fascinating rituals, beautiful music, electrifying sermonizing, etc., but inside these attractive tombs only spiritual death will be found.

7) The Pseudo-Christian establishment appears to be for God, but is really hostile to Him and His:

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you restore the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous, and you say, “If we had been [alive] in the days of *our fathers*, we wouldn’t have participated *with them* in [their shedding of] the blood of the prophets”. So then you are your own witnesses against yourselves that you are [indeed the] sons of those who murdered the prophets. Matthew 23:29-31

Finally, and of extreme importance for us who stand on the threshold of these things, tribulational pseudo-Christianity will give the appearance of being on God's side while in reality being enemies of God and eager destroyers of all those who truly believe in and follow His Son. In this last case, our Lord's interlocutors are tripped up by their all too eager desire to associate themselves with the establishment of the past (i.e., they call the murderers "our fathers"), whereas if they had truly regretted what had been done, they would have been quick to disassociate themselves entirely from such evil deeds. But, as it is, they are more interested in laying claim to the power and prestige of the establishment of the past than to clear themselves of blame for the slaughter of God's people. It is exactly this willingness to choose privilege over true holiness that led the religious establishment of Jesus' day to kill their own Sovereign Lord, and will lead their spiritual successors into hearty complicity with the slaughter of the Great Persecution.

Behold, for this very reason (i.e., to prove your true nature) I am going to send to you prophets and wise men and teachers. Some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will flog in your synagogues and persecute from town to town, so that there will come upon you all the righteous blood [ever] spilled upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. Truly I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation (i.e., unbelievers of this type). Matthew 23:34-36

So while we may see in a large part of established "Christianity" at the Tribulation's inception a well-organized, well-financed system, with beautiful churches, beautiful music, and beautiful superficial sentiments, beneath the whitewashed surface there will be no truth, no faith, no love of Jesus Christ, only dead men's bones. And the hostility which will usher forth from our erstwhile brothers and sisters at that time, while it may begin with mere ostracism and calumny, will end with open persecution of the most severe sort in the cause and service of the beast.²⁵ The above example of the "seven woes" should give us pause, for if nothing else it illustrates that where there is smoke, there is fire. Dead pseudo-Christian organizations (of which there are plenty in our own day) may seem to pose no threat under present circumstances. However, just as soon as circumstances change (and change they will in the Tribulation, much for the worse), such organizations will be ready-made and willing co-conspirators both for the advancement of the process of the Great Apostasy and also for the implementation of the Great Persecution. The reason for the nature of such groups is not a matter of accident: these spiritually dead organizations reflect the hardened hearts of the individuals who make them up.

b. The Vulnerability of Lukewarm Believers (The Problem of Complacency): In addition to the problem of unbelievers and organizations which are Christian in name only, the second major factor which will contribute mightily to the Great Apostasy is the endemic problem of lukewarmness among the majority of genuine Christians as the Tribulation begins. We have

²⁵ On the melding of organized "Christianity" into worship of antichrist, see part 4 of this series, section VI.1, "The Anti-Christian Religion and its Worldwide Expansion".

already seen that this final era of the Church before the inception of the Tribulation, the era of Laodicea, is characterized by lukewarmness, that is, a lackadaisical attitude towards Jesus Christ, the Word of God, and the separate roles we have each been called to play in God's plan.²⁶ The overwhelming characteristic of believers in this period (and we can expect the trend to intensify as the Tribulation approaches) is one of apathy when it comes to building faith, growing through the Word of God, drawing closer to Jesus Christ, and preparing for and putting into practice the gifts, ministries and effects that God has ordained for us (cf. 1Cor.12:4-7; Eph.2:10).²⁷

One could go on at great length as to the causes of such indifference toward the Lord Jesus who bought us, but it is sufficient here to point out that in its essence this appalling attitude stems primarily from *loving the world more than Jesus*. Because of Jesus, our sins have been forgiven, and we have been delivered from the fiery death that awaits those who have rejected Him (Rom.5:9-10). Because of Jesus, we look forward to being resurrected in a body whose glory will render insignificant all of the suffering, pain, and trials we are enduring in this present flesh (Phil.3:20-21; cf. 2Cor.4:17-18). Because of Jesus, we are looking forward to a new earth and new heavens where righteousness dwells, where all the rot and evil of this present world will never again be called to mind (Is.65:17). Because of Jesus, we are not of this world – we may be in it for a time, but He is in us, and we live through Him and for Him (Jn.17:16-23). Through Jesus, we have been crucified to this world and it to us (Gal.6:4). Jesus is our life, and for us living is Jesus, pure and simple, so that death is all gain, because it will unite us face to face with the One we love so much forever more (2Cor.5:8; Phil.1:21).

These things are all true. We believe these things. So why do we not live them? In the era of Laodicea, in a time when materialism is king, when the world provides so many distractions, so many opportunities to partake of them, and so many fears lest all these “wonders” we depend upon both for survival and for entertainment be taken from us, turning our hearts away from the world is no simple task. Therefore the worldly attitude of Laodicea, trending farther and farther away from the Lord with every passing day, is, in some respects, understandable. But that does not make it any less regrettable. In an era when such pressures exist, and when the “normal” thing for Christians is to pay not much more than lip-service to their faith, true devotion to Jesus must be all the more jealously guarded. For complacency about God and His grace to us in the gift of His Son is not only a despicable thing for a Christian, it is also a highly dangerous thing, and at no time will that be more true than during the Tribulation's Great Apostasy. The Lord *is not pleased* with complacent disciples. The Lord *is pleased* with passionate disciples. Therefore when it comes to the choice between fervor for Jesus Christ or apathy concerning our relationship with Him, it is clear from scripture what a good Christian should be, one who loves our Master fervently from the heart, faithfully following Him and His example throughout this

²⁶ See The Coming Tribulation: Part 2A: “The Seven Churches”, section 7, “Laodicea: Apathy”.

²⁷ For an introduction to spiritual growth, see the Peter's Epistles series, especially lessons 10-14.

earthly life, prizing Jesus and our relationship with Him above all earthly treasures and considerations, making His good pleasure our first and foremost priority:

1) A good Christian should be zealous for Christ:

“As many as I love, I reprove and discipline. So become zealous and repent.”
Revelation 3:19

NOT lukewarm about our relationship with Him:

“I know your works, that they are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were cold or hot! As it is, because you are lukewarm and neither hot nor cold, I am about to vomit you out of My mouth.” Revelation 3:15-16

2) A good Christian should be a dedicated lover of God:

“Teacher, what is the greatest commandment in the Law”. And [Jesus] answered him, “You shall love the Lord your God with your whole heart and your whole soul (i.e., inner person) and your whole mind”. Matthew 22:36-37

And [Jesus] answered and said, “You shall love the Lord your God from your whole heart and your whole soul (i.e., inner person) and your whole mind and your whole might”.
Mark 12:30

NOT a lover of this world:

Don’t be a lover of this world, nor of what is in this world. If anyone is a lover of this world, a [genuine] love for the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. The world and its lust are passing away, but whoever does God’s will is [going] to stay [alive with God] forever. 1st John 2:15-17

3) A good Christian should be a friend of Jesus Christ:

You are My friends, if you do what I command you. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know what his master is doing. But I have called you [my] friends, because everything which I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. John 15:14-15

NOT a friend of this world:

You adulterously unfaithful people (i.e., unfaithful to God through dalliance with the world)! Don’t you know that friendship with the world means hostility toward God? Whoever wants to be a friend of the world establishes himself as an enemy of God.
James 4:4

4) A good Christian should be on fire with the Holy Spirit:

In regard to your enthusiasm, do not be hesitant, but be boiling with the Spirit.
Romans 12:11

NOT working against the Spirit's kindling of our zeal:

Do not put out the Spirit's fire. 1st Thessalonians 5:19

5) **A good Christian should be making the most of every opportunity for Christ:**

Walk wisely in regard to those outside [the Church], redeeming the time (i.e., making the most of every opportunity; cf. Eph.5:16). Colossians 4:5

NOT making full use of this world:

And those who use this world [should] not [be] as those who make full use of it. For the [present] form of this world is passing away. 1st Corinthians 7:31

6) **A good Christian should be single-minded toward God:**

And I will give them a single heart and a single way so that they may fear Me all their days for their good and that of their children after them (cf. Ezek.11:19; 1Cor.7:35).
Jeremiah 32:29

NOT double minded toward God (i.e., vacillating in heart between God and the world):

And if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask from God who gives freely and without reproach to all and it shall be granted to him. But let him ask in faith without doubting. For the one who doubts is like a wave on the sea, being blown and cast about. Let not that man think that he will receive anything from the Lord, [for he is a] double-minded man, unreliable in all his ways (cf. Ps.12:2; 119:113; Jas.4:8). James 1:5-8

7) **A good Christian should be passionate for Christ and His Church:**

If [you have] any comfort in Christ, if [you have] any encouragement from [God's] love, if [you have] any fellowship with the Spirit, if [you have] any sympathy and compassion [for fellow believers], then make my joy full by being of one mind, of one love, of one heart, thinking the same thing, doing nothing out of selfish competitiveness or self-importance, but in humility, considering each other as more important than yourselves, with each of you looking out not for himself but for each other. Have the [very same] attitude which also Christ Jesus did. Philippians 2:1-5

NOT complacent about God and His people:

Woe to you who are complacent in Zion, and to you who feel secure on Mount Samaria, you notable men of the foremost nation to whom the people of Israel come! Go to Calneh and look at it; go from there to great Hamath, and then down to Gath in Philistia. Are they better off than your two kingdoms? Is their land larger than yours? You put off the evil day and bring near a reign of terror. You lie on beds inlaid with ivory and lounge on your couches. You dine on choice lambs and fatted calves. You strum away on your harps like David and improvise on musical instruments. You drink wine by the bowlful and use the finest lotions, but you do not grieve over the ruin of Joseph. Therefore you

will be among the first to go into exile; your feasting and lounging will end (cf. Deut.31:20; 32:15; Is.32:9-14; Hos.13:6; Zeph.1:12-13). Amos 6:1-7 NIV

8) A good Christian should be following God with an “undivided heart”:

Teach me, O Lord, Your way [that] I may walk in Your truth. Make my heart one (i.e., undivided), that [I may] fear Your Name. Psalm 86:11

NOT wavering between following God and the world:

Then Elijah approached the assembled people and said, “How long will you continue limping (i.e., like you were “Baal dancing”; cf. v.26) on two divided [opinions]? If the Lord is the [true] God, then follow after Him. But if Baal is, then follow after him”.
1st Kings 18:21a

9) A good Christian should be one who remembers at all times what the Lord has done for us:

For [on this matter] I received [directly] from the Lord what I passed on to you, namely that on the night on which He was betrayed He took bread and having blessed it He broke it and said, “This is my body which is [offered up] on your behalf. Keep on doing this in order to remember Me”. And in the same way [after eating] He took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant [made] by my blood. Keep on doing this as often as you drink [it] in order to remember Me”.
1st Corinthians 11:23-25

NOT one who forgets the Lord in good times:

When you eat and are satisfied and bless the Lord your God on account of the good land which He has given you, take care for yourselves lest you forget the Lord your God so as not to keep His commandments, judgments, and statutes which I am commanding you [to keep] this day. Lest, when you eat and are satisfied and build fine homes and dwell [in them] and your cattle and sheep multiply and your gold and silver increase and everything you have increases, your heart become proud and you forget the Lord your God who brought you out from the land of Egypt, from the house of slavery, He who led you through the great and awesome wilderness with its deadly snakes and scorpions, a thirsty place without water, He who brought forth water for you from the flinty rock, He who in [this] desert gave you manna to eat (of which your fathers had no knowledge), in order to afflict you so as to test you that it might go well with you in the future. Lest you say in your heart, “My strength and my own hand has produced this wealth for me”. [Rather] that you may remember the Lord your God, that it is He who gives you the strength to produce wealth, [and] that He may establish His covenant which He swore to your fathers as it is this day.
Deuteronomy 8:10-18 (cf. Hos.13:6)

10) A good Christian should be one who delights in the Word of God:

Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the way of sinners, nor sit in the seat of mockers. But the teaching (*torah*) of the Lord is his delight, and in His teaching (*torah*) he meditates day and night. Psalm 1:1-2

NOT one who is complacent about learning the Word of God:

We have much to say about this [subject of Christ's priesthood], but it is difficult to communicate [such advanced things to you] because your ears have become lazy. And although by this time you ought to be [capable of] teaching [such things], you need someone to teach you what the basic principles of God's truth are again! You have turned [back] into [spiritual infants] who need milk and [can] not [yet tolerate] solid food! Hebrews 5:11-12

11) A good Christian should be one who truly worships God:

But the hour is coming, and in fact has already arrived, when the true worshipers [of God] will worship the Father in spirit (i.e., spiritually: our spirit responding to His Spirit) and in truth (i.e., truthfully: our heart responding to His truth). Indeed, it is just such worshipers that the Father is seeking. For God is spirit, and those who worship Him must do so spiritually (lit., in spirit) and truthfully (lit., in truth). John 4:23-24

NOT one who offers mere lip-service to Him:

And the Lord said, "Because this people approaches [Me only] with their mouths, and honors Me [only] with their lips, but their heart is far from Me, and because their fear of Me [consists only in] the commandment[s] of men taught [by tradition], therefore, behold, I am about to deal awesomely with this people in a most awesome way, so that the wisdom of the wise will perish, and the discernment of the discerning will be hidden [from them]". Isaiah 29:13-14

12) A good Christian should be one who sincerely loves Jesus Christ:

The grace [of God] be with all of you who love our Lord Jesus Christ with complete sincerity (lit., "with incorruptibility"). Ephesians 6:24

NOT a hypocrite (i.e., literally meaning "actor", one who only pretends to love God for show):

So when you give to charity, do not have a trumpet blown in front of you like the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets so that they may receive glory from men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full [by doing this]. Matthew 6:2

13) A good Christian should be exclusively devoted to the one true God:

You shall not bring (lit. have) other gods before My face. Exodus 20:3

NOT an idolater who vacillates between God and some other object or priority:

And I will stretch out My hand over Judah and over the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and I will cut off from this place the remnant of Baal along with the name of his ministers and along with his priests, [all] those who on their roofs worship the host of the heavens, all his worshipers who swear by the Lord, but also swear by Malcom (i.e., "Molech"). Zephaniah 1:4-5

14) A good Christian should be one who holds God in the highest esteem:

Therefore, says the Lord God of Israel, I had certainly said that your house and the house of your father would walk before Me forever, but now, says the Lord, far be [that] from Me! For those who honor Me I will honor, but those who despise Me will be held in low esteem. 1st Samuel 2:30

NOT one who shows little regard for God:

“A son honors his father, and a slave his master, but if I am their Lord, where is the reverence due Me?” The Lord of hosts is speaking to you priests who despise His Name. Malachi 1:6a

15) A good Christian’s heart should always look to where Christ is above:

Therefore since you have been resurrected [positionally] with Christ, be seeking after the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your hearts (lit., minds) on the things above, not the things on earth. Colossians 3:1-2

NOT be set on earthly things:

For many are walking (about whom I have been telling you and now tell you with tears) as enemies of the cross of Christ. The end [of this course of theirs] is destruction, their god is their appetite, and they glory in things of which they should be ashamed. They have their minds set on earthly things. But our citizenship is a heavenly one, and it is from there that we expectantly await our Savior, Lord Jesus Christ. Philippians 3:18-20

16) A good Christian should be one who strives always to please Jesus:

Our ambition [as Christians], therefore, whether in this body or out of it, is to be pleasing to our Lord. 2nd Corinthians 5:9

NOT someone who only seeks to please himself:

We who are mature (lit., able) should bear the weaknesses of those who are immature (lit., not able) – [and] not [only seek to] please ourselves. Let each one of us strive to please his neighbor for [what is truly] good in order to bring about [that person’s] edification (i.e., spiritual growth). For certainly Christ did not [seek to] please Himself, but [instead fulfilled the principle] just as it is written, “the reproaches of those who reproach You have fallen upon Me” (i.e., He accepted the world’s reproaches in witnessing to God rather than having concern for Himself). Romans 15:2-3

Throughout this sampling of passages (and, indeed, throughout the Bible), whether explicitly or implicitly passion for God is strongly commended while complacency toward our Lord (along with the inevitable and concomitant love of the world) is strongly condemned. Complacency is thus a serious problem for the Church at large and for individual Christians in particular **precisely because** of this “zero sum” opposition between the two alternatives. For either we truly love Jesus Christ more than anything else, or the truth is that we love the world more than Him. And if we do love the world more than the Lord, then at the very least we risk rendering our faith so

fragile and vulnerable that it may well not survive serious testing or tribulation, not to mention the Tribulation (Matt.13:20-21; Mk.4:16-17; Lk.8:13).

It is important to point out that the passion for God referred to here is *not* primarily an emotional issue. Emotion is present in true passion for God, to be sure, and for those who truly do love Jesus Christ with all their heart and soul and mind and might, there is indeed tremendous positive emotion to be experienced. But this genuine emotion *follows* commitment, dedication, faith and faithfulness. Such genuine emotion and passion are *the result* of the determined and consistent following of Jesus Christ in true discipleship, *not the means* to loving God more than the world. One cannot come to love Him more than the world by generating emotional displays. One cannot substitute an hour or two a week of weeping and wailing, enthusiastic singing, demonstrative praying (or whatever one's vehicle and preference of emotional expression may be) for reading, studying and being taught the Word of God, treasuring and contemplating it, and diligently putting it into practice in one's life in Christian walk and ministry. Real passion for our Lord is often expressed in a quiet and still manner, coming to know Him through the Bible, communing with Him in private, heart-felt prayer, following Him by leading the life He would have us live, and honoring Him by ministering to His Body, our fellow Christians, according to the gifts and ministries He has assigned (Jn.21:15-17). True zeal is not in the show of zeal (cf. Rom.10:2), but in the power of truth at work in the inner-man (Eph.3:16-19), expressing itself in deeds of faith, hope and love (1Thes.1:3). For us to work up a temporary "blush" of emotion without true substance behind it means nothing to God, for our God is a God who tests the validity of these emotions to show to the world, to the heavenly hosts, and to us as well whether they are indeed genuine and deeply rooted or merely a passing performance (Ps.7:9; Jer.11:20; 17:10; 20:12; Rom.8:27; 1Thes.2:4; Rev.2:23). It does no good to be like the younger brother in Jesus' parable who responded with a show of emotion and enthusiasm to His Father's call, but never got around to doing the hard work of His Father's will (Matt.21:28-31). For true disciples of Jesus Christ who are advancing resolutely on the pilgrimage to Zion which is this earthly life (Gen.47:9; Ps.23; 39:12; 84:5-7; Matt.7:14; Jn.14:6; Acts 19:9; 19:23; Heb.11:13-16; 1Pet.1:1), genuine emotion flows naturally from growing closer to God day by day.

A Psalm of David. When he was in the Desert of Judah. O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for You, my body longs for You, in a dry and weary land where there is no water. I have seen You in the sanctuary and beheld your power and your glory. Because your love (lit., mercy) is better than life, my lips will glorify You. I will praise You as long as I live, and in your Name I will lift up my hands. My soul will be satisfied as with the richest of foods; with singing lips my mouth will praise You. On my bed I remember You; I think of You through the watches of the night. Because You are my help, I sing in the shadow of your wings. My soul clings to You; Your right hand upholds me. Psalm 63:1-8 NIV

These words are from one who truly loved God with all his might in spite of the pressures of life, and are also for us who genuinely aspire to do the same. We who truly follow Jesus Christ with all our hearts and know this world for what it is, a dry and thirsty land, we who have set our

hopes on the life to come and not on this passing corruption our eyes behold, we are with David in the desert of Judah, with Moses, Joshua and Caleb in the wilderness of Sinai, with Abraham, Isaac and Joseph, only sojourning on this earth while we faithfully serve and patiently wait for our Lord (1Cor.1:7; Phil.3:20; 1Thes.1:10; 2Tim.4:8; Tit.2:13; Heb.9:28; Jas.5:7-11; cf. Rom.8:23-25; Gal.5:5; 1Tim.6:14), for His glorious return and His glorious victory, loving Him in the meantime more than our lives (2Cor.5:8; Phil.1:21; cf. Heb.11:24-27; 1Pet.1:8), and keeping ourselves from infatuation with the world (Jas.1:27; 2Tim.2:2-4). But for those who are overly preoccupied with the world, and whose emotions are stimulated only artificially and occasionally, compromise and complacency about commitment to Jesus inevitably make love and faith very fickle. Those who feel that they have somehow already attained the goal of the Christian life are merely deluding themselves (1Cor.4:8; cf. Phil.3:12-14), so that all their protestations of love and loyalty are usually little more than clouds and mist.

What can I do with you, Ephraim? What can I do with you, Judah? Your love is like the morning mist, like the early dew that disappears. Therefore I cut you in pieces with my prophets, I killed you with the words of my mouth; My judgments flashed like lightning upon you. For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings. Hosea 6:4-6 NIV

The choice is this: do we love, esteem and prize Jesus our Lord above everything in this world (cf. Ps.16:2), or do we put the world first, with all its cares, concerns and delights? The more we appreciate and know the truth, the less lovely the world becomes (Jas.4:4; 1Jn.2:15-17; cf. Matt.10:37-39; 16:24-26; Lk.14:25-33). But the more we neglect our spiritual growth and walk and ministry and the continually deepening relationship with our Lord that flows therefrom, the more complacent, the more lukewarm we become. In truth, it is folly to seek comfort, self-definition, or security in this ephemeral world rather than in the Lord who bought us, with whom we will be forever, and whom we claim to love beyond all else. Conversely and perversely, Christian complacency takes for granted the one thing we ought to be concerned about (i.e., our relationship with Jesus Christ), and instead worries about the things of the world which we ought to take for granted by faith:

And we know that, for those who love God, He works everything together for good – [that is to say,] for those who have been called according to His plan. Romans 8:28

For this reason I tell you [to] stop worrying about your life, that is, [worrying about] what you will [have to] eat. And stop [worrying] about your body, that is, [worrying about] what you will [have to] wear. Isn't your life more [meaningful] than food? And isn't your body more [meaningful] than clothing? Look at the birds of the sky – they neither sow, nor reap, nor gather into granaries. And [yet] your heavenly Father feeds them. You are more important than they are, aren't you? Now which of you can add a foot and a half to his height by worrying? Why then do you worry about clothing? Consider well the wild lilies – how [it is] that they grow, though neither toiling nor spinning. But I tell you that not even Solomon in all his glory used to clothe himself like one of these. And if

God dresses the wild plants in such a way – here today but thrown into the oven tomorrow – will He not all the more do so for you, O you of little faith? So don't worry, saying "What shall we [have to] eat?" or "What shall we [have to] drink?" or "What shall we [have to] wear?" After all, these are the things that the gentiles are frantically pursuing. Now your heavenly Father knows you need all these things. Therefore seek first the Kingdom and its righteousness, and then all these things will be given to you in addition. So don't worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself: there is [already] sufficient evil in any given day [without you adding to it ahead of time].
Matthew 6:25-34

The choice between passion and complacency comes down to a question of priorities, choices we make (or fail to make) every day in this short pilgrimage upon which we are embarked. For those who remain at ease instead of advancing in their Christian lives as our Lord has called us to do, there is spiritual danger now, but danger beyond our dreams (or nightmares) when once the Tribulation shall commence. We have seen that many Jews will return to God in the Tribulation's opening days. For us of the Laodicean era, it would be best to emulate their courage and zeal before those future pressures begin. For we are on the threshold, and our Lord is knocking. It is high time to arise and let Him in.

3. The Causes of the Great Apostasy: As bad as things may be from a spiritual point of view here in the latter days of the era of Laodicea, they will worsen by an order of magnitude as soon as the Tribulation begins. The falling away from Jesus Christ by an unprecedented number of our fellow brothers and sisters is something we may be capable of understanding before the fact, but not something we can emotionally prepare for in full should it be ours to experience. It will come as a tremendous shock when these prophecies are actually fulfilled, no matter how well versed we may be on the details ahead of time. But it is for that very reason absolutely crucial for those of us who have counted the cost of our discipleship and are determined to stay faithful to our Lord Jesus Christ, come what may, to gain every possible bit of scriptural insight and to make every possible bit of spiritual preparation before these events unfold. It therefore behooves us to spend a sufficient amount of time on the factors which will contribute to bringing this unparalleled mass apostasy about.

a. The unleashing of the "mystery of lawlessness": In pagan usage the Greek word *mysterion* (μυστήριον) generally refers to secret information known only to the initiates of a cult or secret society.²⁸ In the majority of cases where the word is used in the New Testament, the "mystery" in question is a revelation of divine truth (cf. Rom.11:25; 1Cor.15:51; Rev.1:20), that is, some portion of the Word of God which possesses a power and influence which is not to be underestimated (e.g., Matt.13:11; Mk.4:11; Lk.8:10; 1Cor.4:1; Eph.1:9; 6:19; Col.1:24-27; 1Tim.3:9). For example, in the case of the gospel, a "mystery" not fully "revealed" until the revelation of Jesus Christ in the flesh (Rom.16:25-26), we are told that it is the "power" of God

²⁸ See The Satanic Rebellion: Part 5: "Judgment, Restoration and Replacement", section II.8.b.ii and iii, "The Church" and "the Mystery of Christ".

to save all believing humanity (Rom.1:16). Ultimately, therefore, the mystery of God is Jesus Christ, His incarnation, His two advents, salvation through His death for all mankind including the gentiles, and our union with Him (Col.2:2). He is the focus of God's plan for history, and all things, all truth thus pivot around Him who is the truth, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The mystery of Him has now been revealed to the world through His life, His death, His resurrection, and through the completion of the scriptures, the final book of which is His "revelation" (the centerpiece of our present study; cf. Rev.1:1).

As it is employed in 2nd Thessalonians 2:7, however, the word "mystery" in the phrase "mystery of lawlessness", rather than being used to refer to the invisible power resident in the divine truth of Jesus Christ, refers instead to the corrupting influence of the devil's lies ("lawlessness" being the result of accepting these lies). Lies are, after all, Satan's stock and trade (Jn.8:44), but the essential untruthfulness of his doctrine is largely veiled from the unbelieving world (2Cor.4:4; cf. Is.6:10). Only in Jesus Christ is this veil removed so that the truth of God floods in and the devil's falsehoods are exposed for what they really are (2Cor.3:13-18).

The phrase "mystery of lawlessness" thus sums up the totality of the invisible efforts made by Satan to undermine God's truth with his own lies as he attempts to block God's plan while furthering his own "kingdom of this world" (Rev.11:15).²⁹ By substituting his lies for God's truth, Satan has, throughout human history, been making and continues to make substantial inroads into the visible forms of divine restraint which protect human society at all levels and in all places, invisibly attacking law and order, weakening nationalism, promoting false religion, and seeking by any and all means to desensitize the human conscience so as to embolden sinful and evil behavior worldwide. This explains how Paul can describe this powerful unseen influence as "already at work", for it is essentially another name for the implementation of the devil's counter-plan, now and in the future, which will culminate in the reign of antichrist, Satan's pseudo-Messiah.³⁰

Even now you know what it is that restrains [antichrist's arrival] so that he will be revealed [only] in his own time. For *the mystery of lawlessness* is already at work – [and] it is only the Restrainer [who keeps things in check, and will] until He moves out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed ...

2nd Thessalonians 2:6-8a (cf. Jn.8:36)

This same invisible force or power now kept in check by the Spirit's restraining ministry but destined to be unleashed in the last times is also described by the apostle John as the "spirit of antichrist".

²⁹ See The Coming Tribulation: Part 2B: "The Heavenly Prelude to the Tribulation", section III.2, "The Mystery of Lawlessness".

³⁰ See The Satanic Rebellion series, in particular part 4, "Satan's World System", and part 5, "Judgment, Restoration and Replacement".

And every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is *the spirit of the Antichrist*, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world.

1st John 4:3 NKJV

In this passage “spirit” refers to an unseen influence in exactly the same way as “mystery” does in the phrase “mystery of lawlessness”. “Lawlessness” and “antichrist” are also essentially identical as results of the satanic influence described in both passages because antichrist is the embodiment of the principle of lawlessness, being the “man of *lawlessness*” (2Thes.2:3; compare 2Jn.1:7 where anyone who rejects Christ is an “antichrist”; cf. 1Jn.2:18). Further, in both of these passages the satanic influence that leads to lawless behavior and to the rejection of God’s truth is seen to be already at work, and is in both passages the implication of increasing danger once the Tribulation begins is clear enough. When the restraining ministry of the Spirit is removed and the Tribulation does begin, lawlessness will be unleashed and antichrist will come onto the scene, two events which are really part and parcel of the same thing, namely, the release of satanic influence on the world to a degree never before seen. Thus both passages are able to make this close connection between antichrist and the satanic influence even now at work because the ultimate implementation of satanic influence on earth will come when the devil sets up antichrist to rule the world as his pseudo-Messiah during the Tribulation, a circumstance which will result in the now unseen satanic influence taking on a visible, direct, and personal form, and that without present restraints.

In the same context of 1st John chapter four, we are given a third synonym for this invisible diabolical pressure, namely, “the spirit of error”, with the word “error” referring to the wandering away of individuals, institutions and nations from God’s truth once they have become susceptible to this satanic “spirit”, “mystery”, or influence.

We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and *the spirit of error*.

1st John 4:6 NKJV

This is the same “error” soon to be empowered by God during the Tribulation in the case of all those who respond to the devil’s lies and follow antichrist, a prediction which occurs in the very same context and in direct connection with the “mystery of lawlessness” we are discussing here (2Thes.2:11, see immediately below).

Several important similarities occur in all three of these passages above (i.e., 2Thes.2:6-8; 1Jn.4:3; 4:6): 1) all three describe a satanic influence presently at work in the world; 2) all three imply by their contexts and phraseology that this influence directly opposes God’s truth; 3) all three describe the results of this influence in terms of alienation from God’s truth; 4) all three predict, implicitly or explicitly in their contexts, that this influence, presently restrained, will be released during the Tribulation in the form of Satan’s direct rule of the world through his antichrist.

Thus all three of these passages make it clear that the devil's successes in corrupting humanity are being accomplished primarily through his clever use of the lie to seduce mankind into error and away from the truth,³¹ not only the truth about God Himself (i.e., His true nature and the true way of salvation through Jesus Christ), but also the truth about God's law as expressed in the human conscience, natural and human law, and nationalism.³² The upward trend in the "mystery of lawlessness" can be seen in the increasing degeneration of individual morals and societal standards, economic globalism, political internationalism, and one-world religious ecumenicalism. Few Christians who have had occasion to observe the course of human civilization over the last half-century are likely to have many doubts about the existence of this trend or its acceleration as we draw ever nearer to the end times.

But while the "mystery of lawlessness" is already at work and experiencing ever greater success, it cannot be brought to the fever pitch necessary to introduce antichrist's world domination (the culmination of Satan's plan in the person of his pseudo-Messiah) until the Spirit's restraint is allowed to wane as the Tribulation begins.³³ For it is precisely that ministry which is currently preventing the devil from launching his tribulational offensive of world-conquest through antichrist along with all that it entails, and at the same time preventing the human race from lapsing into an even more lawless state than is presently the case. For the Spirit's restraining ministry not only prevents the devil from doing all that he would do now (and in the Tribulation will do), but also prevents the human race from responding to his lies and influence to the extent that they might do now (and in the Tribulation will do).

Even when the Spirit's ministry of restraint is temporarily removed, God, as we have seen, will not leave His people bereft of support. The 144,000 undergo a special sealing of the Spirit, and we are fully confident that God's provision and protection for all believers who are sealed with His Spirit will continue uninterrupted (2Cor.1:21-22; Eph.1:13-14; 4:30; cf. Ezek.9:1-11; Jn.6:27; 14:16-17; 1Pet. 1:1-2). However, that does not change the fact that life will become fundamentally more oppressive for all the inhabitants of the earth, believers included. For the intensified diabolical activity of the Tribulation (previously restrained to a very large degree) coupled with the unleashing of human sinfulness (now under Holy Spirit restraint) in a way unprecedented in our experience will combine to produce the full unveiling of the "mystery of lawlessness", a synergy of satanic efforts and human degeneracy destined to flourish in this benign environment of greatly reduced restraint. This "mystery of lawlessness" is, as scripture

³¹ See The Satanic Rebellion: Part 4: "Satan's World System", section IV, "Satan's World-System: Tactical Doctrine [the three strategic lies]", and V.2, "Demon Influence".

³² See The Satanic Rebellion: Part 4: "Satan's World System", section II.6, "The conscience as a restrainer of satanic influence", and section II.7, "Law and nationalism as a restrainers of satanic influence".

³³ See The Coming Tribulation: Part 2B: "The Heavenly Prelude to the Tribulation", section III, "The Restraining Ministry of the Holy Spirit".

says, already at work, and accounts in large part for the accelerating worldwide trend toward evil so apparent in our own day. But in the Tribulation, in the absence of the current restraint, it will be more intense in its effects by an order of magnitude and will help to produce greater pressures on believers than are currently even imaginable, thus contributing mightily to the Great Apostasy (the subject we are studying here).

As difficult as all this may be to contemplate (and it will be even much more difficult to endure), we must remember that a major part of the divine purpose for the Tribulation, the birth pangs that must precede our Lord's return (Matt.24:8; Mk.13:8), is to place the example of mankind's situation without restraint under Satan's rulership in direct contrast to the situation of mankind under the perfect millennial rule of Jesus Christ. Between the garden of Eden and the millennial Eden (where God reigns and mankind obeys),³⁴ we clearly see throughout the intervening history of the world the horrors of humanity's subjection to the devil's rule. And at no point will the evil of Satan's dominion be more obvious or more horrific than during the Tribulation, the time of Satan's greatest control and the time of the least divine restraint (making the contrast with the Millennium which follows all the more stark).³⁵

We have also been making the point from the inception of this series that one of the main reasons why the Tribulation will be so difficult to experience personally, so "bitter in the stomach", is that the extraordinary pressures exerted upon mankind therein will leave no middle ground, but will instead force everyone living upon the earth into uncompromising allegiance either to God or to the devil. Instrumental to this intensive and unparalleled polarization is an important corollary to the "mystery of lawlessness", namely, the "empowerment of error" which God will send upon the unbelieving world at that time. This future "empowerment of error" is a step beyond the presently operative "spirit of error" of 1st John 4:6 (a synonym for the "mystery of lawlessness" as we have just seen). In tandem with the removal of restraint upon lawlessness (via the cessation of the Holy Spirit's restraining ministry), this "empowerment of error", a unique facilitation of human self-deception, will drive unbelievers the world over into active allegiance to the devil as never before in the service of his earthly minion, antichrist, so that the true lawless nature of mankind apart from God (through faith in Christ), and apart from God's institutions (morality, law and nationalism) will be glaringly obvious.³⁶

³⁴ See The Satanic Rebellion: Part 1: "Satan's Rebellion and Fall", section II.6, "The Seven Edens".

³⁵ See The Coming Tribulation: Part 1: "Introduction", section I, "Definition and Overview of the Tribulation", and section II, "The Tribulation in Context: Satan's Rebellion and the Plan of God".

³⁶ See The Satanic Rebellion: Part 4: "Satan's World System", section II.7, "Law and nationalism as a restrainers of satanic influence".

And then the lawless one (i.e., antichrist) will be revealed, [that same one] whom the Lord Jesus will slay with the breath of His mouth and destroy when He appears at His [glorious] return – [that same lawless one] whose appearance [will come about] through Satan’s **empowerment** [and will be] accompanied by every [sort of] false miracle, both signs and portents, and by every [sort of] unrighteous deception [designed] for those who are perishing, [namely those who will believe these lies] because they did not open themselves up to the love for the truth so as to be saved. And for this [very] reason God is going to send upon them **an empowerment of error** (i.e., facilitating it; cf. Ex.14:4) so that they may believe the lie in order that they may be condemned, [even all those] who have not believed the truth but have [instead] approved of unrighteousness.

2nd Thessalonians 2:8-12

This passage shows us that just as antichrist’s appearance on the stage of history will come about through Satan’s “empowerment” and will be associated with all manner of deceptive activities, so the unbelieving world of that time will receive a special “empowerment” to hasten their belief in these deceptions and their infatuation with antichrist (cf. Deut.2:30). This empowering of antichrist by Satan and the false signs and miracles which lend power to his deceptions will be possible, as we have seen, only because of the removal of the Spirit’s restraining ministry. But in order to bring complete polarization to the world, in order to make unquestionably clear who is for God and who is for the devil, God Himself will also send a special “empowerment of error” upon unbelievers (all who have already rejected Him and His truth) with the result that they will embrace antichrist and all the satanic lies he represents (thus removing as neutral parties the present vast middle-ground of non-believing good citizens who, though they have no use for Jesus Christ, are at present moral and law-abiding in the main, and are for the most part not overly active in supporting the devil’s cause).

The Greek word *pláne* (πλανη) translated here as “error” (literally, a “wandering”; cf. the “planets” which “wander” through the sky) is the same one used in the phrase “spirit of error” in 1st John 4:6. In that context we saw that the “error” in question represented the satanic lie as a totality, and the same is true here as well. But in order to show the difference between this passage referring to future events and the other passages just studied which speak to the present operation of satanic influence, it will be helpful to place together here the operative phrases from all of them:

- “The mystery of lawlessness” (2Thes.2:7) = present satanic influence leading to lawlessness (active rejection of all forms of God’s truth).
- “The spirit of error” (1Jn.4:6) = present satanic influence leading to “wandering” from the truth of God in all its forms.
- “The spirit of antichrist” (1Jn.4:3) = present satanic influence leading to antichrist-like behavior which rejects the truth of God in every way.
- "Satan's **empowerment** [of antichrist]" (2Thes.2:9) = **future satanic empowerment** of the beast.

- “The *empowerment* of error” (2Thes.2:11) = *future divine facilitation* of unbeliever susceptibility to the satanic influence of the previous three passages during the Tribulation.

The critical fact that the “empowerment of error” is a divine facilitation of creature free will has been largely and widely misunderstood (as reflected by its mistranslation in most of the major versions: “strong delusion” [KJV], “powerful delusion” [NIV], “deluding influence” [NASB]). Traditional translations focusing on the idea of “delusion” miss the two key points here that 1) this is a *facilitation* of the free will of unbelievers (rather than an overriding of their right to choose), and 2) this is an empowerment to believe and serve the devil, one which *comes from God* rather than Satan. But these are precisely the two important aspects of the tribulational “empowerment of error” which distinguish it from the other three phrases dealing with present day satanic influence in the world.

First, the “error” or “wandering” here is an *active* behavior on the part of unbelievers who receive this empowerment, not a *passive* experience. That is to say, these unbelievers are not being violated against their will, rather, their will is being *empowered* to break through the divinely erected barriers that currently would prevent them from ever believing and serving Satan to the degree that the world of that day will do (cf. Jer.5:5 Hos.4:2). They will be given exceptional “latitude to wander” from God’s truth into the arms of the devil and his antichrist, but the *desire* to do so will come entirely from them, their choosing, their free will. Secondly, this empowerment comes from God, yet it is in no way contrary to His righteousness. As He did with the Pharaoh of the Exodus (Ex.14:4), God is simply giving the unbelieving world of the tribulational period a special ability to overcome the present psychological barriers that would cause even an unbeliever to tread lightly. This is merely a variation on a theme of what we presently see at work in the world. For if anyone were to suddenly behold Jesus in all His glory, or God Almighty on His holy throne, they would doubtless be unable to refrain from worship and “belief” of a sort – but not really out of what we would consider “a free choice” (cf. Jas.2:19). The glory of God, the overwhelming reality of the truth of Him, is necessarily veiled from the eyes of the world so that the choice for or against God, for or against His Christ, may come from the heart and be a genuine reflection of every person’s legitimate free will. In a similar way, the human conscience and normal human trepidation in regard to the power of law are powerful restraining forces that keep the majority of the unbelieving human race in check. Just as looting and lawlessness intensify whenever law and order break down, so during the Tribulation the psychological and physical leeway unbelievers will have to wander from God’s truth without being overcome by fear and foreboding or hindered by legal and social pressure will be dramatically increased, and the result will be a near unanimous allegiance to antichrist on the part of those who lack faith in Jesus Christ.

While it is only during the Tribulation that God will “empower error” to such an exceptional degree that it will encompass virtually all unbelievers, the principle of God allowing those who *willfully* reject Him and who *willfully* reject His truth to plunge ever deeper into error and delusion is operative even today. That principle is given its most detailed expression by the

apostle Paul in the first chapter of the book of Romans (compare Jeremiah chapter two). Here we see the consequences which befall those who willfully reject the truth of God and of His law (i.e., who reject both the truth He provides about His own existence leading to salvation, and also the truth He provides about basic law and morality necessary for even unbelievers to live in peace and decency):

[In contrast to the righteousness of God which is being revealed (i.e., dispensed) through faith (vv.16-17)], God's wrath is being revealed (i.e., dispensed) from heaven upon all ungodliness and unrighteousness – on men who suppress the truth in their unrighteousness. For that which can be known about God [from everyday experience] is obvious to them, because God has made it obvious. His nature, though invisible, is nevertheless plainly apparent, and has been since His foundation of the world, for it may be clearly inferred from this creation of His – [this is true of] both his eternal power and his divinity – so that they are without any excuse: they knew about God, but they neither honored Him as God nor thanked Him. Instead, they gave themselves over to [the] vanity [of this world] in their speculations, and their senseless hearts were filled with darkness. Claiming to be wise, they became foolish, for they exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for images and likenesses of corruptible men, of birds and beasts and reptiles. For this [very] reason, God abandoned them to corruption in the lusts of their own hearts, that they might mutually defile their bodies (i.e., the very thing they lusted to do). [And so] they exchanged the truth of God for the lie [of the devil], and worshiped and served the creature [Satan] in place of the Creator who is [worthy to be] blessed forever. Amen. [Yes,] for this [very] reason God abandoned them to defiling passions. For their females exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones, and likewise also the males abandoned natural relations with the female and burned with desire one for another, males for males, acting out their shamefulfulness in full, and in their own [flesh] fully receiving the reward due *for their error (pláne)*. And just as they did not see fit to keep God in their hearts, God abandoned them to their unfit minds, to do things which are not fitting, filled up with every [sort of] unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil, full of envy, murder, strife, guile, maliciousness, gossips, slanderers, God-forsaken-[and]-forsaking, insolent, arrogant, boasters, devisers of evils, not concerned for their parents, unthinking, unreconcilable, uncaring, unmerciful, men who though they had full knowledge of God's righteous decree, namely, that those who do such things are worthy of death, not only did [such] things themselves, but even commended those who made it their practice [to do them]. Romans 1:18-32 (cf. Mark 7:20-23)

As in the case of the 2nd Thessalonians chapter two passage, it is deliberate and willful error which begins this process and leads to God “abandoning” such individuals to their own lusts and devices, wherein they proceed from bad to worse. In our own experience and observation of the world we can clearly see this pattern in the case of most career criminals, terrorists, and morally degenerate types. However, these are still, blessedly, the exception among the unbelieving population of the world. For while the majority of the world's population has, tragically, rejected the knowledge of God which leads to salvation (i.e., the recognition and acceptance of the

existence and essential nature of God from observing the world He has made leading then to the gospel of Jesus Christ), by far most unbelievers are law-abiding citizens (i.e., they have *not* rejected the morality, law and nationalism set up by God that the world may continue to function in relative peace and normalcy at most times and in most places so that there may be continued freedom to choose for Him and His Son). But rather than merely “abandoning” only the willfully reprobate among the unbelieving population to the full fury of satanic influence, during the Tribulation God will actually enable and empower the entire unbelieving population to choose wholeheartedly for the devil’s deceptions embodied in the person of his antichrist.

The full unleashing of the “mystery of lawlessness” during the Tribulation coupled with its corollary principle, the “empowerment of error”, will combine to largely eliminate the middle-ground position for unbelievers who, though at the present moment they are sleep-walking through life apart from God, are, in the majority of cases, not actively giving themselves over to sin and evil to such a horrendous degree, and are for the most part not openly and actively enlisting themselves in the devil’s undertakings in any obvious fashion.

During the Tribulation, with law and nationalism practically eliminated as stays against Satan’s operations, and with the removal of the restraining ministry of the Holy Spirit, the middle ground position will be completely undercut, and God will hasten the process of demanding choice from the world by empowering those who choose against Him and Jesus Christ to throw aside all restraint and actively ally with Satan instead.

I came to cast a fire upon the earth, and how I wish that it were already kindled! But I have a baptism to undergo [first], and how I am pressed until it be completed! Do you think that I have come to bring about unity (lit., “peace”) on the earth? No! I tell you [I have come] rather [to bring about] division. For from now on there will be five in one house divided three against two and two against three. And they will [all] be divided “a father against his son and a son against his father and a mother against her daughter and a daughter against her mother and a mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law”. Luke 12:49-53

The fact that in the Tribulation there will for this reason be few neutral parties will greatly increase the strain upon believers, further contributing to the bitterness of life, and hastening the process of the Great Apostasy in the case of all those lukewarm believers whose faith is not up to withstanding such pressure.

So be aware of this, that in the last days there will be difficult times. For [in those times] there will be men (i.e., false teachers; cf. chap.2) concerned only for themselves, devoted to money, egotistic, arrogant, blasphemous, not concerned for their parents, ungrateful, irreverent, implacable, slanderers, uninhibited, savage, despising the good, betrayers, impetuous, megalomaniacal, devotees of pleasure rather than lovers of God, possessing an [outward] appearance of godliness, but [in reality] having rejected its [true] power. From such men turn away. Of this sort are those who [even in our own day] worm their

way into households and take captive the [spiritually] weak³⁷ who are loaded down with sins, leading them astray with various lusts, [victims who consequently,] though always learning, are never able to accept the truth. In the same way that [Pharaoh's court magicians] Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so these men also oppose the truth, for their minds have been corrupted and they have been found wanting concerning the faith. But they will not keep on striding forward forever. Their folly will become obvious to all, just as in the case of those two. 2nd Timothy 3:1-9

Here we have a chilling view of the behavior pattern we can expect during the Tribulation which will come about as a result of the “empowerment of error” principle as we saw it stated in 2nd Thessalonians 2:8-12. Comparing these verses to the previously quoted Romans 1:18-32 passage, we can easily see that the similarities, especially the lists of sinful trends and characteristics, are for all intents and purposes identical. The main *difference* between Romans 1:18-32 and what we have in the passage quoted immediately above is that in Romans chapter one these behavioral trends flow from God's permissive *allowing* of error, a principle presently operational in our own day primarily affecting that minority of unbelievers who willfully and deliberately reject all categories of truth (including basic morality, law, and good citizenship). However, in the 2nd Timothy chapter three passage above we see the results of God's active *empowering* of error which will affect nearly *all* unbelievers and to a degree not yet experienced, as the previous majority middle-ground of nominally moral, law-abiding, patriotic unbelievers melts away. Even today, all unbelievers are in the devil's grasp (cf. Eph.2:1-5; 2Tim.2:25-26; Heb.2:14-15), but, prior to the "empowerment of error", most are not willfully and actively carrying out Satan's agenda (being restrained from doing so by conscience, morality, and law). As a result of this shift from God's “allowing and abandoning” to “facilitating and empowering” of the self-delusion that comes from rejecting truth, the Tribulation will be a time of little or no gray-area between the active and committed adherents of the devil on the one hand (constituting the vast majority of the world's population at that time) and the dedicated followers of Jesus Christ on the other (constituting an embattled and, especially during the Tribulation's second half, persecuted minority).

By actually facilitating error during the Tribulation rather than merely allowing it as is presently the case, God will graphically demonstrate beyond all doubt the real thoughts and intents of unbelievers' hearts by *empowering* them to do what they really want to do but had previously been restrained from doing on account of God's mercy directed toward the world at large (cf. Rev.16:8-11):

And *[all] the rest of mankind* who were not killed by these plagues directed at them (i.e., the warning judgments of the Tribulation's first half) *did not repent* of the works of their

³⁷ Literally “women” who are singled out here because they were the traditional administrative heads of households in the ancient world (cf. Prov.31:10-31), and households tended to act corporately (Tit.1:11; cf. Acts 16:31) – but the characterization in the quote here is certainly meant to be understood as applicable to men as well.

hands so as not to worship demons and idols made of gold, silver, bronze, stone and wood, which are not able to see or hear or walk about, nor did they repent of their murders nor their potions nor their sexually immoral acts nor their thefts.

Revelation 9:20-21

Of particular note in this passage is the role played by witchcraft and sorcery through the use of various philters indicated by the word “potion”. Along with other words of this same root (from which we derive pharmacy and pharmaceutical), the Greek word *pharmakon* (φάρμακον) is never used in the New Testament apart from witchcraft and sorcery (cf. Gal.5:20; Rev.18:23; 21:8; 22:15), since, from the biblical point of view, mind-altering drug use is always demon-related. Compare, for example, the use of hallucinogenic agents in the Eleusinian mysteries, a crucial element in the production of “ecstasy” (or “error” as we should say) in such cults which is often overlooked. In this clear collaboration between drug use and devil-worship, we see how in the Tribulation the true satanic nature of all anti-God practices will be made crystal clear, and those who partake of them left with no excuse.

Negotiating this world is difficult enough for believers under present circumstance, and the difficulty of how to relate to unbelievers is no small part of the problem. Inasmuch as the difficulty of this problem will increase astronomically during the Tribulation when virtually the entire unbelieving population turns actively hostile under the leadership of antichrist, we need briefly here to compare the mechanics and effects of unbeliever degeneracy at the present time with the acceleration predicted to take place once the Tribulation begins. While the scope, magnitude and circumstances of the “empowerment of error” will be quite different from the “abandoning to error” operational today, its mechanics and effects are identical. In both cases the initiation of the process is found in the unbeliever’s rejection of God’s truth. In neither case is God causing the unbeliever’s descent into self-inflicted spiritual blindness, hardening of his own heart, searing of his own conscience, and engaging in ever accelerating sinful and evil behavior. In both cases rejection of God’s truth and God’s will inevitably leads the person involved into believing the devil’s lies and carrying out the devil’s will instead of his own will (for no one is really their own free agent except when it comes to making the choice of whether to serve God or Satan: cf. 1Cor.12:1-3).

So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you no longer walk as the unbelievers (lit., “gentiles”) walk in futility of mind, darkened in thought, and separated from the life of God because of the [deliberate] ignorance (i.e., arising from rejection of truth) that is in them because of the hardening of their hearts. Having lost all sensitivity [to God’s truth], they have given themselves over to sensuality to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more. Ephesians 4:17-19

But while both at present and in the future this process of unbeliever descent into error has at its core the rejection of truth (i.e., a failure to believe God), and proceeds, if unchecked by law and morality, to desensitize the conscience and harden the heart, there are presently limits imposed by the Spirit’s ministry of restraint which, working together with the conscience and with the visible divine institutions, restrict both the degree of degeneracy to be allowed in most individuals, and

the extent to which lawlessness may advance worldwide. These restraints and barriers arrest the process in most cases, at least to some degree. During the Tribulation, however, in the absence of the Spirit's ministry and with the diminution of all other restrictions, the barriers of conscience and morality will provide little resistance to the divine empowering of the unbelieving will to devote itself to sin and evil. The most pertinent biblical parallel we have for this stepped up "empowerment of error" is the case of Pharaoh and his army who were allowed to oppose God beyond what, under normal circumstances, a human being would be capable of doing in the face of the manifest and undeniable power of God (Ex.14:4; 14:17).³⁸ These dual pressures (of removed divine restraint and empowered hardening of the conscience) will barbarize the world's unbelieving population as never before, and will consequently subject believers to enormous stress, breaking the fragile faith of many, and thus contributing significantly to the Great Apostasy.

As Christians, believers now made one with Jesus Christ, we are no longer of this world (Jn.17:14-16). We remain here, not as a part of the world, but as His witnesses of light in a world of darkness (1Pet.2:9). Through our continuing loyalty to Him, we demonstrate to all who observe us (men and angels alike: 1Cor.4:9; 11:10; Heb.13:2; 1Pet.1:12; cf. 1Tim.3:16) the genuineness of our faith and of His faithfulness in preserving us in this hostile environment.³⁹ We are not of this darkness (Acts 26:18), but, just as Jesus was sent into this world to serve for our eternal benefit, so we remain in this world in order to serve our Lord Jesus Christ (Jn.17:18; 20:21; 1Cor.5:8; Gal.6:9-10; Phil.1:21; Jas.2:14-26; cf. Matt.28:18-20). It is therefore not at all surprising that the world hates us just as it hated Him (Jn.15:18-19; 17:14; 1Jn.3:13), or that we are commanded to hate our lives in this world (Jn.12:25; cf. Lk.14:25-34) and to have no love for it (Jas.4:4; 1Jn.2:15-17). Furthermore, and particularly pertinent to our present discussion, we are told to be circumspect about the relationships we have in this world which are not Christian-based (cf. 1Cor.7:39; Eph.5:5-7).

Don't let yourselves be mismatched together in the yoke with unbelievers (i.e., in any close, intimate association). For what partnership does righteousness have with immorality, or what fellowship does light have with darkness? What agreement is there between Christ and Belial (i.e., the devil)? What agreement is there between God's temple and idols? For we are the temple of the Living God, just as God has said: "I will dwell among them and walk among [them], and I will be their God, and they will be My people. Therefore come out from the midst of them (i.e., the ungodly) and separate yourselves" says the Lord, "and do not touch anything unclean. Then I will receive you

³⁸ See the series Exodus 14: Hardening Pharaoh's Heart, and Peter's Epistles, lessons #21, #26, and #27.

³⁹ See The Satanic Rebellion: Part 1: "Satan's Rebellion and Fall", section I.3.d, "Angels are similar to mankind in several important ways", and Peter's Epistles, lesson #22, under "Angels are Watching Us".

and will be to you as a Father, and you will be to Me as sons and daughters” says the Lord Almighty. 2nd Corinthians 6:14-18

And yet it is also patently clear that, as witnesses of light to the world, we are not to completely isolate ourselves from it (cf. 1Pet.2:12), we are not to put our light under a bushel (cf. Lk.11:33).

You are the light of the world. A city built on a mountain cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and [so] it illuminates everything in the house. Let the light within you shine in this way before men, so that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven. Matthew 5:14-16

Disassociation from other Christians who are behaving shamefully is indeed mandated (1Cor.5:11-13). However, we cannot and should not try to remove ourselves physically from the world so as to prevent any contact whatsoever with unbelievers.

I wrote you in my [previous] letter not to consort with immoral persons – not [that you should] altogether [refrain from having any contact whatsoever] with greedy, crooked, and idolatrous people, for in that case you would have to depart from this world [entirely]!
1st Corinthians 5:9-10

Maintaining the proper relationship with the unbelieving and secular world thus offers Christians who are truly committed to following Jesus Christ a unique challenge. How do we keep ourselves pure from the world (Jas.1:27; cf. Jn.17:17; 17:19; Rom.12:2; 2Pet.1:4; 2:20), while at the same time continuing to live in it and conduct our essential activities, some of which are not only necessary but are a witness to unbelievers when performed honorably as unto the Lord (Acts 20:34-35; Eph.4:28; Col.3:23; 2Thes.3:6-12; cf. 1Pet.3:1-2)?

And [we encourage you] to make it your ambition to live quiet lives and to attend to your own business and work with your own hands as we commanded you, so that you may maintain a seemly walk towards those outside [the Church] and have need of nothing.
1st Thessalonians 4:11-12

This has always been a narrow path to traverse, even at times and in places of little or no outright persecution from the state or society in general. In the Tribulation, however, because of the removal of restraint upon and empowerment of human sinfulness and evil, the level of difficulty Christians will encounter while interacting with the secular world will increase by an order of magnitude. In the past, except in times of exceptional persecution, a Christian could expect at least some degree of civility in relations with the unbelieving world at large, and, because of the hedge of nationalism, at least some safe haven in the world where sufficient law and order existed for the practice of true Christianity (cf. 1Tim.2:1-2; and see Rom.13:1-7; 1Pet.2:13-17). Antichrist’s world-wide government will change all that, and in the vacuum of restraint left by the cessation of the Spirit’s ministry, with no one to convict the world of its evil (cf. Jn.8:36), and with the same spirit of facilitating self-deception poured out upon all unbelieving humanity

that allowed the Pharaoh of the Exodus to reach new heights of lawlessness, the process of searing consciences and hardening hearts will accelerate. The point where most of humanity is reduced to a unprecedentedly lawless and sinful state will be reached with shocking rapidity, leaving believers to lament the times and increasing exponentially the challenge of living in the world without compromise while at the same time maintaining Christian love. Even for Christians of strong faith who refuse to wither in this intense heat, the increasingly barbaric and hostile pagan world will be by far an even more difficult place to live for Jesus Christ than is the case at present.

How long, O Lord, must I call for help, but You do not listen? Or cry out to You, “Violence!” but You do not save? Why do You make me look at injustice? Why do You tolerate wrong? Destruction and violence are before me; there is strife, and conflict abounds. Therefore the law is paralyzed and justice never prevails. The wicked hem in the righteous so that justice is perverted. Habakkuk 1:2-4⁴⁰ NIV

Keep this foremost in your mind: in the end times mockers will come [on the scene], ridiculing [the truth] and acting out of their own selfish lusts, saying, “Where is that ‘return’ He promised? Everything is the same now as it was since the beginning of the world, since the time our forefathers passed on.” 2nd Peter 3:3-4

But you, beloved, remember the words of the apostles of our Lord, spoken to you before, that at the end of the age there will be mockers who will behave after the manner of their own unholy lusts. Jude 1:17-18

Do not believe a friend. Do not put your confidence in a companion. Guard the entrances of your mouth from her who lies in your bosom. For a son will treat his father disgracefully, and a daughter will rise up against her mother, and a mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law. A man’s enemies will be those of his own household. Micah 7:5-6 (cf. Jer.9:4-6; Matt.10:34-36; Lk.12:51-53)

And at that time **many will fall away** (i.e., will apostatize) and will betray each other and will hate each other. Matthew 24:10

Thus the release of so much vile activity in both the seen and unseen realms will make life in the Tribulation very difficult to endure for believers in particular, especially since this base of degenerating behavior will be layered upon the diabolical world-system under antichrist, a system which in turn will bring about an unprecedented deluge of divine judgment upon the earth (on behalf of believers). The principle that removing restraint upon evil (be it through law, or conscience, or divine agency) results in exacerbating wicked conduct is both intuitive and evident

⁴⁰ Chapters one and two of Habakkuk are a clear case of “the Day of the Lord paradigm”, with Babylon and its king doubling for the tribulational Babylon and antichrist. See The Coming Tribulation: Part 1: “Introduction”, section IV.1.a, “The ‘Day of the Lord’” Paradigm”.

enough from numerous historical and contemporary examples. More importantly, it is also well documented in scripture (cf. Jer.5:1-5):

1) Removing the restraint of swift execution of the law accelerates criminal behavior:

When the penalty for evil deeds is not quickly enforced, men's hearts are filled with thoughts of doing evil. Ecclesiastes 8:11

2) Decline in cultural and moral standards encourages wicked behavior:

The wicked strut confidently about, when what is despicable is exalted in the eyes of men. Psalm 12:8

3) Empowerment of the wicked accelerates their evil and discourages righteous behavior:

When the righteous exult [in victory], it is most beautiful [to behold], but when the wicked rise [to power], men hide themselves. Proverbs 28:12 (cf. 28:28)

4) Rejection of God's standards accelerates lawlessness:

When there is no [respect for] divine communication (lit., "vision" [from God]), the people are unrestrained, but he who obeys the Law will be blessed. Proverbs 29:18

5) Rejection of God's Word and increasing criminality accelerate the breakdown of restraint:

Hear the Word of the Lord, O sons of Israel, for the Lord has a quarrel with the people of [this] land. For there is no truth, no mercy, no knowledge of God in the land. [Only] cursing, and deception, and murder, and adultery. They have broken through [all restraints], and bloodshed responds to bloodshed. Hosea 4:1-2

6) Increasing lawlessness reduces restraint to the point of stifling righteous expression:

For I know that your transgressions are many and your sins are numerous. You oppress the righteous man, you take bribes, and you turn the innocent away [from justice] at the gate. So the prudent man keeps quiet at [such a] time [as] this, for it is an evil time. Amos 5:12-13

7) Rejection of truth reduces restraint to the point of making righteous behavior dangerous:

Since truth is lacking, he who turns aside from evil makes himself a prey. Isaiah 59:15

All of these results and more of the principle that removed restraint produces a corresponding increase in wickedness and lawlessness will obtain from the time of the cessation of the Holy

Spirit's restraining ministry and the corresponding "empowerment of error" until our Lord returns. What is to be noted here in particular is that the reduction thereby during the Tribulation of the vast mass of humanity to a heightened state of sinful and lawless behavior will tend to demoralize the righteous and will thus be a major contributor to the acceleration of the Great Apostasy as we have it from our Lord Himself:

(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 24:12-13

Our Lord's words about the exceptional endurance required for deliverance at the end of this quotation in *verse thirteen* must be digested in order to properly appreciate what is meant in the preceding *verse twelve*. That is to say, exceptional endurance will be necessary to survive with faith intact this environment of legal and ethical anarchy. For the trend will be for this increase of lawlessness and the corresponding degradation in quality of life which will accompany it to occasion a worldwide hardening and souring of attitudes on the part of almost everyone, unbelievers and believers alike (i.e., "the many" in this verse, or *hoi polloi*; Greek: οἱ πολλοί). To use an analogy, it is much easier to reflect Christian love and cheerfulness when you are well and feeling well than when you are sick, and likewise much easier to do so when things are rolling along nicely for you than when you are under some sort of difficult pressure or testing. The unequalled lawlessness of the Tribulation, played out against the backdrop of antichrist's government and God's judgments upon the world as a result, will make life so bitter that it will be as if a large burden of chronic sickness and pressure were piled upon the backs of the entire population of the world ("the many") – in addition to whatever troubles each individual already possesses (though we believers should be praising God for his punishment of those who oppose us). Given these conditions, it should come as no surprise whatsoever that human kindness, civility, and tolerance (the meaning here in Matt.24:12 of *agape*; Greek: ἀγάπη) often present to at least some degree under favorable circumstances, should virtually disappear from the world, as the charitable inclinations of nearly everyone on planet earth experience a "cooling" under the pressure of tribulational events, the increase of lawlessness in particular.

Jesus' warning to us His followers in verse thirteen to be on guard against this danger tells us in no uncertain terms that this pressure will figure large in the apostatizing of many lukewarm believers (the normal status quo, unfortunately, for the majority of Christians in this final Church era of Laodicea: see part 2A of this series). For if one's love is already lukewarm, what can it become if it cools further than outright cold? As the essential Christian virtue, love cannot be disassociated from faith (Gal.5:6; cf. 1Cor.13:13; Eph.1:15; Col.1:4-5; 1Thes.1:3; 2Thes.1:3). And we know that when faith is truly cold it is truly dead (the analogy being to the life leaving the body: 2Kng.4:34 and Jas.2:17-26; cf. Rom.12:11). Cold love is therefore essentially equivalent to no faith (cf. 1Cor.13:2b). The lack of warmth in the "body" of Christian virtue is a

sign that one has allowed one's faith, love and hope to die under the pressures of persecution (i.e., apostasy has set in):⁴¹

And he who was sown on the rocky places, this is the one who hears the Word and immediately receives it with joy. He has no roots [to his faith], however, but lasts only a short time. So when **tribulation or persecution** occurs on account of the Word, he is immediately tripped up (i.e., he apostatizes). Matthew 13:20-21

And these [second types] who are sown on the rocky places are similar. Whenever they hear the Word they immediately receive it with joy, although they have no root [of faith] in themselves, but are only temporary [believers]. When **tribulation or persecution** because of the Word comes [their way], they are immediately tripped up (i.e., they apostatize). Mark 4:16-17

And those [whose seed of faith fell] on the rock do receive the Word with joy when they hear it. However these [types] have no root [to their faith]. They believe for a while, but **in time of testing** they apostatize. Luke 8:13

In addition to the lawlessness-induced trend of unbelievers becoming cold and sullen and of lukewarm believers becoming apostate, we must also take our Lord's words at Matthew 24:12-13 to mean the cooling of love even among believers who were previously zealous for Him. This is a sobering thought for committed disciples of Jesus Christ, and a warning to make the most of the time at hand to prepare spiritually for the troubles ahead. For, as always, the only way to be sure of salvation and spirituality is to keep marching ahead in spiritual growth. Finally, one very positive point we need to be careful not to miss in this passage is Jesus' qualification of His statement: "the love **of the many** will cool". This means that, on the one hand, not every believer who is a zealous disciple of Jesus Christ will allow tribulational pressures, horrendous as they will be, to adversely affect their Christian walk (indeed, given the multitude of martyrs the Tribulation will produce, the number in this category will be large in gross terms if not in percentage of world or Christian population: cf. Rev.7:9-14). Therefore we have every reason to hope that at least *some* portion of the lukewarm population of Laodicea will, under these pressures, be prodded in the opposite, positive direction, responding to our Lord's injunction to "become zealous and repent" (Rev.3:19). This is indeed encouraging news for warm and lukewarm alike, but it goes without saying that those of us who have already committed ourselves to be zealous for Jesus Christ here and now rather than awaiting the "shock treatment" of the Tribulation to provide motivation will have much cause to be grateful for any and all spiritual growth and preparation we are able to make ahead of that trying time. For while this present world is already a very dark place in spiritual terms (Jn.1:5 cf. 2Pet.1:19), a kingdom of

⁴¹ For more on these basic Christian virtues, see Peter's Epistles, lessons #16 and #17 on "virtue thinking"; #21: "Perseverance of Faith"; #24: "Faith Dynamics", and see also The Satanic Rebellion: Part 4: "Satan's World System", section IV, "Satan's World-System: Tactical Doctrine", for the three virtues of faith, hope and love as they counter Satan's lies.

darkness (Col.1:13) dominated by the forces of darkness (Eph.6:12) from which darkness we have been called forth into God's light (1Pet.2:9; cf. Eph.5:8; 1Jn.2:8-9), nevertheless, the spiritual darkness of the Tribulation will be so intense as to make this present time seem daylight by comparison (cf. Is.21:11-12; 59:9-21; 60:1-2; Joel 2:1-2; Amos 5:18-20; Zeph.1:14-15; Jn.9:4; 1Thes.5:1-8). Let us therefore resolve, if that dark time should come upon us, to stay faithful to the light of truth until our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the glorious Day Star, rises at last and puts an end to that terrible night:

Yet I consider the prophetically inspired Word (i.e. the Bible) even more reliable (i.e., than the transfiguration of vv.16-18). You too would do well to pay the closest attention to it (i.e., scripture), just as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the Morning Star rises (i.e., the Second Advent). 2nd Peter 1:19

b. The dearth of Bible teaching: This second major cause of the Great Apostasy is an exclusive concern of believers. While the unleashing of lawlessness and consequent degeneration of the behavior of unbelievers will only affect believers indirectly (by increasing the external pressures on faith), the coming dearth of genuine Bible teaching anticipated during the Tribulation will have a direct negative impact contributing to apostasy. As in the case of the former cause above, so in this case it will be almost exclusively the lukewarm members of the Body of Christ adversely affected by this coming famine of spiritual food. For having been complacent about solid spiritual nutrition in good times, they will find turning to substantive Bible teaching in hard times a difficult transition, especially considering that it will be very hard to find (cf. 1Sam.3:1; 28:6; Prov.29:18; Mic.3:4-7).

“Behold, days are coming”, says the Lord, “when I shall send a famine upon the earth. Not a famine of bread nor a drought of water but [a dearth] of hearing the words of the Lord. [Men] will stagger from sea to sea, and will wander from the north to the east to seek the Word of the Lord, but they will not find [it]”. Amos 8:11

Therefore you will stumble in the daytime, for even the prophet[s] have [already] stumbled with you by night. My people are destroyed for lack of [the] knowledge [of God]. Because you have rejected [this] knowledge, I will reject you from being a priest to Me. Because you have forgotten the teaching (*torah*) of your God, I also will forget your sons. Hosea 4:5-6

In the passages quoted and listed above, the common element in the dearth of the Word of God is a prior rejection of that Word by those who are supposedly God's people (clear from the contexts of Amos eight and Hosea four). What we have here in principle, in the historical examples given, and in the Tribulation to come, therefore, is not our God holding back truth from those who love Him, but an unwillingness on His part to continue supplying good teaching to those who have chronically and willfully rejected it in favor of false teaching or even no teaching at all (Is.28:9-13; Ezek.20:3-4; 20:30-31; Matt.13:11-17; Mk.4:12; Lk.8:10).

The Lord will be with you if you will be with Him. And if you seek Him, He will be found of you, but if you forsake Him, He will forsake you. For many days, Israel was without the God of truth, and without a priest to teach, and without teaching (lit., *torah*). But in her distress she returned to the Lord God of Israel and sought Him and He was found of her. 2nd Chronicles 15:2b-4

And He said to me, “Go and say to this people, ‘Hear well, but do not comprehend. See well, but do not understand’. Harden the heart of this people, make their ears heavy, and blind their eyes, so that they may not see with their eyes, nor hear with their ears, nor understand with their hearts, nor repent and be healed”. Isaiah 6:9-10

This lack of demand for the Word of God is certainly in keeping with the trends of our own day, the final Church era of lukewarm Laodicea (see part 2A of this series). For we can already see at work in our time a demand-driven consumer Christianity which seeks out entertainment rather than substantive teaching of the Word of God.

For the time will come when they will not put up with sound teaching, but will [instead], desiring to have their ears scratched, heap up by their own [devices] teachers to match their specific lusts. And they will turn their ears from the truth and resort instead to fictions. 2nd Timothy 4:3-4

Finally, there is another cause of the dearth of spiritual food during the Tribulation which has nothing to do with present apathy. We know from Revelation chapter thirteen alone that antichrist’s worldwide religion will make it very difficult for those Christians who truly follow and worship God to survive physically. Therefore it is not amiss to assume that the beast and his false prophet will add to this physical persecution a spiritual one as well, making it illegal and next to impossible for believers to assemble or share with each other the fruits of their spiritual gifts. Nothing, of course, is impossible for God, and so we can be confident that we will never lack the essential spiritual food we need for our spiritual well-being. That does not mean that we will have it as good as we have it now, however, and this is certainly something to keep in mind when we forgo opportunities to take in the Word of God, opportunities which are going to be much rarer in that future day. So while the dearth of Bible teaching during the Tribulation will not come as a consequence of the overall present day apathy in the Church, in the case of individual believers who are apathetic to the Word now, that future shortage of teaching will be all the more difficult to bear (in the same way that those who are malnourished suffer more in times of famine than those who are hale and hearty when it begins).

God provides for all our needs. But it is well to consider while there is still time and opportunity to address the issue that *part* of His provision is advanced warning which allows his children to prepare ahead of time. Just as God sent word through Joseph’s interpretation of Pharaoh’s dreams that seven years of famine were ahead (and it is no accident that this is the exact length of time of the Tribulation), so we ought, as Joseph advised Pharaoh to do, take every possible advantage of the years of prosperity that precede the famine that we may have abundant spiritual

resources – spiritual preparation and spiritual maturity based upon hearing, learning, believing and applying the teachings of the Word of God – to weather that dark time ahead (Gen.41:1-57). After the famine has started is far from the best time to begin.

So Jesus said to them, “For a little while yet, the Light is among you. Walk while you have the light, so the darkness doesn’t overtake you. Indeed, the person who walks in darkness doesn’t know where he is going. While you have the Light, believe in the Light, that you may become sons of light.” John 12:35-36

c. The rise of false teaching: In addition to the pressure exerted by increased lawlessness and the difficulties created by the dearth of spiritual food, a third major cause for the massive apostasy among believers during the Tribulation will be the prevalence of persuasive false teaching. Our Lord’s teachings in particular are replete with warnings about the danger of deception and the need for alertness during this troubling period ahead (Matt.24:5-6; 24:11; 24:24-27; 24:42; 25:13; Mk.13:5-6; 13:9; 13:23; 13:33; 13:35; 13:37; Lk.12:40; 17:23; 21:8; 21:36; cf. 2Thes.2:3-12; 1Tim.4:1-5; 2Tim.3:1-13), so that we would do well to spend some time here studying this threat.

1) The persuasiveness of tribulational false teaching: While the pressure of rampant lawless behavior will push believers toward apostasy and the famine of spiritual sustenance will reduce their resistance to apostasy, the false teaching of the Tribulation will exert a tremendous ***pull*** on believers who are not solidly grounded in the truth. The devil has always gone to great lengths to make his false doctrines attractive, and all who buy into them are said to be caught in his snare (2Tim.2:25-26). However, the conditions we have been studying which will exist during the Tribulation (lawlessness, empowerment of error, shortage of Bible teaching, general hardships of an unprecedented nature, etc.) will definitely contribute to the receptiveness of the world to Satan’s grand offensive against the truth of God, and will help to create the complete spiritual polarization we have been studying which is destined to strip away the present atheistic and agnostic skepticism so that the “sword” may clearly divide the world into the two camps (Lk.12:49-53), believers and those committed to the devil’s pseudo-Messiah.

To begin with general principles, perhaps the most important thing to understand about false teachers and the false teaching they purvey is that they are skilled at giving the ***appearance*** of being true and of teaching the truth even while they are false and teach only lies:

- They turn truth upside down, “putting bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter” (Is.5:20).
- They teach man-made precepts as if they were from God (Matt.15:9).
- They deceive through flattery to serve their own appetites (Rom.16:17-18).
- They preach a different gospel and a different Jesus to seduce believers (2Cor.11:3-4).
- As servants of Satan, they are only masquerading as servants of Christ (2Cor.11:13-15).
- They show a zeal for their converts, but for evil purposes (Gal.4:17).
- They have no scruples in the use of trickery to deceive their listeners (Eph.4:14).
- They spread false teaching like gangrene and oppose the truth (2Tim.2:14-3:9).

- They claim to know God but deny Him with their every action (Tit.1:16).
- In their greed, they make up stories in order to better exploit their listeners (2Pet.2:1-3).
- They entice people to follow them by appealing to their lusts and desires (2Pet.2:17-22).
- After infiltrating Christian fellowship, they teach that grace is a license to sin (Jude 1:3-4).
- They gain a following by advancing themselves and flattering others (Jude 1:16).
- They claim to be important persons in Christ's Church, but in reality are wicked (Rev.2:2).

In addition to effectively (and wrongly) portraying themselves as true and as teachers of truth, other common factors which link the false teachers described in these passages include their methodology of flattering, seducing and lying to their victims, promoting their own glory and prosperity at the expense of their victims, and having concern only for themselves even as they exploit those who believe their lies. Since Satan's deception of Eve in the garden, the devil has always been adept at using attractive lies and half-truths to deceive and mislead (Jn.8:44; Eph.6:11), and at no time will this method be more evident than during the Tribulation (Matt.24:5; 24:24; Mk.13:5-6; 13:22-23; Lk.21:8; 2Thes.2:3-12; 1Tim.4:1; 2Tim.3:1-9; 2Pet.3:1-17; 1Jn.4:1-6). Lying, deception, and leading into error through persuasive appeals to men's hidden desires are all part of the essential methodology of false teaching, a methodology which is in sharp contrast to that of genuine teachers of the Word of God who eschew all such deceit (Jn.7:18; 2Cor.4:2; cf. 2Cor.1:12; 1:18-24; 12:16-17).⁴²

In conceptual terms, satanic false teaching is a progression. First, the devil undermines God's authority, convincing his victims that God is untruthful, unable or unwilling to help, and, in general unnecessary and irrelevant in the face of "more important" issues (cf. the assurances given to Eve, "You will not die"; Gen.3:4). Next, Satan advances the idea that we are, can be, or will be like God if only we follow his program instead of God's (cf. the tempting of Eve, "You will be like God"; Gen.3:5). Finally, in the case of those who buy into the devil's first two lies, Satan attempts to convince them that by carrying out their desires (and the devil's will) they are actually helping God out of a "knowledge of good and evil" (cf. Eve's willing participation in the temptation of Adam with self-righteous satisfaction; Gen.3:6). The first lie, motivated by greed and fear, focuses our attention upon attaining temporal security here and now (instead of on the issue of eternal life), thus ignoring the key fact of our mortality and the need to find a solution from God alone. The second lie, motivated by subjective pride, focuses our attention upon ourselves, seeking to establish and affirm our own glory (instead of on our need for forgiveness), thus ignoring the issue of our essential sinfulness and the need for a Savior. The third lie,

⁴² This is an extensive topic which can only be covered in part here. The reader is strongly urged to consult the other detailed treatments of this critical subject contained in 1) Peter's Epistles #27 "Three False Doctrines That Threaten Faith", 2) Read your Bible: Protection against Cults, 3) The Satanic Rebellion: Part 4: "Satan's World System", section IV, "Satan's Tactical Doctrine", and 4) The Coming Tribulation: Part 2A: "The Seven Churches" "False Teachers, False Doctrines, and False Christians" (under the discussion of Ephesus).

motivated by objective arrogance, focuses our attention upon our own deeds and accomplishments, seeking to demonstrate our ability to “do good” apart from God (instead of realizing that there is nothing we can do to help God), thus ignoring the issue of our own flawed character and our need for rebirth through Jesus Christ. The devil tells us that it is this short life and this world which are important, not the triumph over death in eternal life in the world to come through Jesus Christ. The devil tells us to esteem ourselves, instead of realizing that we are sinful and in need of someone to wash away our sins. The devil tells us that what we do is good, while in truth our efforts to “better the world” apart from God are serving Satan’s cause. This three-fold system of deception has many aspects which we do not have time to discuss here in full (see the preceding footnote), but it should be noted that Satan’s ministers inevitably come back to these same three themes in all of their craftily concocted false teachings, preaching the material instead of the spiritual, self-worth instead of total depravity, and doing good as they define it instead of truly serving God by (1) foreswearing any love for the world; (2) embracing salvation through the cross of Christ; and (3) following after Jesus Christ in spiritual growth, progress and production.

(24) Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone wants to follow Me, let him [first] abandon his own aspirations, [then] pick up his cross and follow Me."
Matthew 16:24 (cf. Mk.8:34; Lk.9:23)

We can expect Satan’s false religion of the Tribulation to make full use of this progression as never before. The activities of antichrist, his success and pseudo-miracles, will persuade many that he and his worldly system are the hope for the troubled world of that time and that God’s promises are untrue and His prohibitions of no account (“You will not die”; cf. 2Pet.3:1-18). The promises made by this false religion will be as enormous as they are egregious – offering life from the dead and semi-divine status in the same way that the beast will appear to have been “resurrected” (“You will be like God”; cf. 2Thes.2:9-12). Finally, in turning the fury, frustration and blood-lust of the world against the family of God, Satan will have fully convinced his followers that they are “doing good” (willing participation in the destruction of others with self-righteous satisfaction; cf. Jn.16:2).

A further common element in all three phases of the progression of the satanic system of lies, both conceptually and specifically in its tribulational manifestations, is the fact that the devil is always careful to proffer things that people actually *want* (whether their desire is an open one or well-hidden from the world’s eyes):

1) A tangible and visible solution to the political and economic problems of the day, especially if such a solution promises benefits for each individual in a personal way, is a common aspect of all strongman totalitarian movements, and we can expect this to be even more so the case during the Tribulation to the extent that the problems and discomfort of that time will be more acute than ever before: God promises to take care of His people forever as well as providing for their essential needs day by day; Satan promises abundance in this world for those who forsake God and follow Him (of course the devil is lying and will never keep his promises of provision whereas God is ever faithful and ever true, but following God takes faith).

2) A promise of immortality and/or promotion to demigod status has long been a feature in many religions which operate on a salvation by works basis, and we can expect that during the Tribulation when the incidence of death and terror will be higher than ever before this appeal will be all the more persuasive, especially since on the one hand failure to join the beast's religion will lead to persecution, and, on the other hand, antichrist's apparent resuscitation from the dead and performance of miraculous signs will seem to give credence to this message: God promises an eternal life with Him and His Son for His people who wait patiently for that day; Satan promises power in this world for those who forsake God and follow him (of course the devil is lying and can never keep his promises of promotion whereas God is ever faithful and ever true, but following God takes hope).

3) A scapegoat whose destruction is to be considered an act of good is a very appealing prospect for the unbelieving world and a common element in political and religious movements that have sought world-domination, and we can expect it to be all the more so during the Tribulation when there will be both a more integrated and universal world-order than ever before and when the horrific nature of the events of that time will seem to cry out for an appropriate victim to blame: God commands us to love even our enemies; the devil claims that we are doing good when we destroy those who oppose him (of course the devil is lying and has no true concern for those who forsake God and destroy themselves by helping him, whereas God has shown us the true way to live, but following God in this way takes love).

When we put all these things together, the difficulties of the Tribulation, the unprecedented level of satanic activity and false teaching directed towards the deception of mankind, and the removal of restraint upon the darkness that is within the unbelieving heart, the unprecedented progress that the devil will make in enlisting mankind to his standard during that future time of trouble should not come as a complete surprise. It will not be the methodology of Satan per se which will be different during the Tribulation (for he has been employing the same methodology of deception since his seduction of a third of angelic kind).⁴³ Rather it will be the degree to which he will be successful in the implementation of his deceptions under antichrist, a quantum leap beyond the considerable successes visible in our own day.

And when He sat down on the Mount of Olives, His disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us when these things will be, and what the sign is of your return and of the end of the age?" And Jesus answered and said, "See to it that no one deceives you. For many will come in my Name, saying, 'I am the Christ', and they will deceive many people." Matthew 24:3-5

I fear [for you] lest in some way, just as the serpent deceived Eve with his craftiness, [so too] your thoughts may be [in the process of being] corrupted [and led astray] from the sincerity and holiness [you had] towards Christ. For if someone comes and proclaims a

⁴³ See The Satanic Rebellion: Part 1: "Satan's Rebellion and Fall", section IV.3.b, "Satan's Revolutionary Platform".

different Jesus whom we have not proclaimed, or if you get a different spirit [from him] which you did not get [from us], or a different gospel which you did not receive [from us], you tolerate [these lies] well enough. 2nd Corinthians 11:3-4

[Let us grow spiritually] ... that we may no longer be immature, swept off-course and carried headlong by every breeze of so-called teaching that emanates from the trickery of men in their readiness to do anything to cunningly work their deceit. Ephesians 4:14

Put on the full armor of God, so that you may be able to stand firm against the tricks of the devil. Ephesians 6:11

See to it that no one be taking [control of] you as [though you were] plunder through the [so-called] study of wisdom (lit., “philosophy”) and deception [which is] devoid [of truth], [which] agrees with human tradition, [which] agrees with [speculation about] the material principles of the world, but [which does] not agree with Christ. Colossians 2:8

The Spirit explicitly says that in the end times (i.e., during the Tribulation) certain men will rebel (lit., “apostatize”) from the faith, giving their allegiance [instead] to deceitful spirits and demonic doctrines. 1st Timothy 4:1 (cf. Jer.8:5)

Wicked men and tricksters (i.e., false teachers) will continue to “make progress” for the worse, [both] deceiving [others] and deceiving themselves [as well]. 2nd Timothy 3:13

All things are pure for those who are pure [themselves], but for those who have defiled themselves and do not believe, nothing is pure. Indeed, both their mind and their conscience has been befouled. They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny [Him], being detestable, disobedient [to the truth], and unfit for any [truly] good work. Titus 1:15-16

Who is the liar if not the one who claims that Jesus is not the Christ? This is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son. 1st John 2:22

And 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. Revelation 12:9

And [the beast’s false prophet] will deceive (lit., present tense) those who dwell upon the earth through the signs which will be given to him to perform before the beast. Revelation 13:14a

And the beast was seized and the false prophet with him (the one who had performed the signs before him with which he had deceived those who took the sign of the beast and worshiped his image). The two were thrown alive into the lake of fire which burns with sulphur. Revelation 19:20

[The angel with the key to the Abyss] threw [Satan] into the Abyss and closed it, putting his seal upon it, so that [the devil] might not deceive the nations any longer until the thousand years had elapsed. After this, he must be released for a short while.

Revelation 20:3

And when the thousand years were completed, Satan was released from his prison, and he came forth to deceive the nations which [reside] in the four regions (lit., “corners”) of the earth, Gog and Magog (whose number is as the sand of the sea) in order to marshal them together for war. Revelation 20:7-8

2) The persuasiveness of the tribulational false religion: The beast’s tribulational religion is properly a subject for part 4 of this series (and will be taken up during our study of Revelation chapter thirteen). However, it is necessary at this point to discuss in brief some of its main aspects in order to demonstrate that its attractiveness will be a second feature which will lend momentum to the persuasiveness of the false teaching destined to be endemic during the Tribulation. As a focus for and a mainstay of that false teaching, the one-world religion of antichrist will make a major contribution to the causation of the Great Apostasy.

We should mention first of all that there are any number of close analogies to the phenomenon of this future religious movement prophesied to mimic true, biblical Christianity in many persuasive ways. Nearly all non-Christian religions share common characteristics which present parallels carefully designed by Satan to lure human beings away from the true God. Almost all call upon “God” or gods; almost all have a “sanctified place of worship”, a collection of holy writings, a cadre of trained priests (or teachers, or administrators, etc.), and a colorful collection of religious rituals and paraphernalia; almost all claim to be a way to God, and almost all promise some sort of solution or answer to the ultimate concern of human mortality. Such spin-offs from the true, biblical worship of God, both cults and spiritually dead denominations alike, are particularly dangerous for new or as yet immature believers who are in the process of seeking God. For in many cases it takes wisdom, discernment, diligent reading of the scriptures, and often much digging into the real beliefs of such groups to be able to see clearly that what they are worshipping is in fact *not* really God (for the true worship of God requires a genuine and unpolluted faith in His Son, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ: Jn.14:6).

What is true today we can expect to be even more so the case with the beast’s religion during the Tribulation. This new religion will not spring forth out of nowhere, but will be preceded instead by a worldwide ecumenical movement in which most “Christian” denominations will doubtless participate. We can expect both the precursor religious movement and the beast’s religion proper (which will take over this movement in the middle of the Tribulation) to be highly syncretic. That is to say, they will in all probability include, tolerate, and encourage virtually all religious practices and beliefs as being a part of “the holy”, with exclusivity and dogmatism (e.g., claiming that faith in Jesus is the only way of salvation and that the Bible is the only inspired Word of God) being just about the only views not tolerated. In this way, those who are determined to follow the truth wherever it leads will be relegated to the fringes of society, while, on the other hand, the magnetic draw of being part of this all-inclusive and exciting new development will be

tremendously powerful. We can, of course, see the same trend already at work in our own day in a very similar way. But during the Tribulation this trend will accelerate, and the ecumenical movement will gel to a degree and with a speed difficult for us to envision or anticipate at present (especially in the absence of Holy Spirit restraint). During the second phase of the tribulational false religion's development, that is, the establishment of antichrist (and Satan) as the object of worship, intense persecution of those who resist will produce the final installment of apostasy, driving into the arms of the beast those whose faith is not strong enough to endure the challenge of potential martyrdom. A brief perusal of some of the salient characteristics of this future religion should suffice to demonstrate its potential for persuasiveness and its corresponding effectiveness in contributing to the process of apostasy:

1) It will mimic Christianity: A very large part of the deceptive element of the tribulational false religion will be the deliberate lengths to which it will go to give the appearance of being "true Christianity". This is nothing new, of course. One can easily point today to half a dozen major denominations and many cults which claim to be the only true Church of Christ (even though Christ's true Church is composed of all who have faith in and are faithful to Him, quite apart from any organizational affiliation at all). However, two major points will mark out the beast's tribulational religion as significantly different. First, during its ecumenical first phase this false religion will coopt and incorporate many groups and denominations that do include Christians (at least at that point). Only after the Tribulation's mid-point, when antichrist takes his seat in the rebuilt temple in Jerusalem and unveils his new religion in all its sordid particulars will the practice of true Christianity within this polyglot accretion of ecumenicalism become completely impossible. Secondly, during that second phase, with the help of his false prophet (and of Satan's power) antichrist will portray himself as the fulfillment of all world religion, *and of Christianity and Judaism in particular*. For he will be the devil's "Messiah" (hence the name "*anti-Christ*", the prefix conveying the meaning of a substitute as well as of an opponent: cf. 1Jn.2:18-23; 4:3; 2Jn.1:7), taking his seat in God's own temple in his new world-capital of Jerusalem (2Thes.2:4), and proclaiming himself as "the Christ" (Matt.24:5; 24:23-24; Lk.21:8). The parallelisms do not end here, but suffice it to say that the "con job" which the false trinity of Satan, antichrist, and the false prophet will perform upon the inhabitants of the earth will be so effective that it will even put pressure upon the faith of "the elect" (cf. Matt.24:24; Mk.13:22). How much more then should we not expect such measures to draw into apostasy those who are not solid in their faith (the rule rather than the exception in our current Laodicean era), and all those who have previously allowed themselves to be coopted along with their organizations, especially in the midst of the manifold pressures and horrors of the Great Tribulation?

Although the false religion of the Tribulation will superficially mimic Christianity in both its ecumenical phase and in the full-blown beast-worship which follows, one will not have to do much more than scratch its whitewashed surface to see that its teachings will be far removed from God's truth, consisting of concocted rites and regulations (Matt.15:9). The substance of those teachings will point somewhat subtly toward idolatry during its first phase, but will develop into an unapologetic and idolatrous worship of the beast and his image in the second (2Thes.2:4; Rev.13:11-15). There are no true gods besides the One true God, so that behind every pagan,

non-Christian “deity” lurks not a god but a demon (1Cor.8:4-6; 10:20-21). For this reason, all idolatry is at its root the worship of demons and fallen angels, and, since these are in no way operating independently, all idolatry is thus the worshiping of Satan, making idolatry, angel-worship, and devil-worship all one and the same thing, a blasphemous rejection of the Creator in favor of His rebellious creature (cf. Col.2:16-23; Heb.1-2; 2Pet.2:10-12; Jude 8-10). At no time will this be at once more clear and more obscure than during the unveiling of the beast’s religion during the Tribulation’s second half. Pseudo- and marginal “Christian” denominations of our own day are already deeply conflicted on the issue of idolatry, with the practice of worshiping images, dead human beings, and angels at an all-time high of acceptability. The miracles and wonders that will be wrought by antichrist and by his false prophet on his behalf will be more than enough to convince the unbelieving world as well as, sad to say, many who are weak in faith, that this new religion with its new “Messiah” are the genuine article. But behind the beast we find Satan rather than God (2Thes.2:9; Rev.16:13), and in this false religion with its false trinity a culmination of all that has been behind pagan religious activity from the beginning: the outright worship of Satan, an objective that has always been first and foremost in the devil’s priorities (Matt.4:9; Lk.4:7; cf. Is.14:13-14; Ezek.28:17). Only those of pure heart and sound doctrine, committed to following the Lord whatever the cost, will be able to discern between the true light and this highly deceptive darkness, and we should not be fooled as to the intensity of the persuasiveness which the tribulational false religion will effuse. Antichrist will be a half-angel, Satan’s seed, and empowered by the evil one to perform miracles that amaze the world. His rise will be meteoric, and we can expect him to exert a personal magnetism that will put all previous human exemplars of charisma in the shade. With antichrist as its false Messiah, this false religion will arguably be, in fleshly terms, the most “exciting” thing the world has yet seen. To some he will seem a god. For those who are of the profession of materialism he will be more than happy to be esteemed an extra-terrestrial. And for those who have been or are in the process of being coopted from Christian and pseudo-Christian groups alike, his angelic roots will be promoted in an unashamed and unabashed display of idolatry in its truest sense, the worship of angels, demons, and the devil.⁴⁴ Faith, the unbending belief in what one knows to be true from the Word of God (no matter what the eyes may see), will be necessary to resist the unprecedented persuasiveness of the temptations which the tribulational false religion will deploy.

2) It will go to great lengths to be attractive and appealing: This point is often misunderstood. Conventional wisdom about the tribulational false religion has it as forbidding in

⁴⁴ This last “face” put forward by antichrist may seem somewhat bizarre to many contemporary believers, but it is well to remember that during the early history of the Church the worship of angels constituted one of its most deadly threats. The book of Hebrews is directed in no small part against this heresy as contemporary Judaism saw the Messiah as an angel (this explains why the book focuses so heavily upon proving Jesus’ superiority to angels and at the same time demonstrating His true humanity). Later Jewish lore explained “let us make man” in Gen.1:26, for example, as God in consultation with the angels. Ephesians and Colossians likewise are aimed in no small part at combating the incipient heresy of Gnosticism which is also a form of angel-worship (see part 2A of this series).

aspect and terrifying in operation. Nothing could be further from the truth, especially during its first phase. For, on the contrary, the ecumenical world-religion which will morph into outright worship of the beast will go to great lengths to welcome, engage, and assure anyone and everyone with whom it has contact. It will put on a friendly face and stop at nothing to appear attractive, entertaining and wholesome. Just as Satan made use of a friendly agent to deceive Eve (i.e., her pet serpent),⁴⁵ so he always has endeavored to enclose his lies and deceit in packages which look as attractive as possible. As in all the other aspects of the false religion of the Tribulation, so also in its projection of apparent benevolence, sincerity, and affability, it will represent the pinnacle of Satan's efforts in this regard. Those of us who experience these pressures first hand may also expect to have our friends and relatives "evangelizing" aggressively for it. They will certainly have plenty of incentive to do so, and not only in respect to promises made for such activities. There will unquestionably be penalties to pay for having close associations with true Christians who refuse to "convert" (even if these lie in the past alone), and this is a trend which will intensify in bloody earnest when the Great Persecution of the Tribulation's second half begins.

It is not only the religion itself in all its teachings, trappings and regalia that will defeat current expectations by being much more attractive and less threatening in appearance than is now supposed. The clergy for this coming religion will be equally charismatic and equally innocuous (at least to the eye). Judas furnishes a helpful parallel for this new order of minister. To all human appearances, Judas was the best of the lot. He was no doubt the best dressed, the best groomed and the most responsible of the twelve (entrusted with the common purse as he was, and well-provided for by his thefts from it: Jn.12:6; 13:29). So much was this the case that when Judas left the last supper in order to betray our Lord, his fellow disciples apparently never even suspected that it was he (compare Lk.22:24 with Jn.13:21-30). So it will be with the false religion's clergy. We can expect them to be fine speakers (Rom.16:17-18; Col.2:4), adept at the use of persuasive words (1Cor.2:1-5), masquerading most effectively as ministers of light (2Cor.11:13-15). But in reality they will be in the employ of Satan, cashing in on the false use of the Word of God (1Tim.6:5; Tit.1:11; 2Pet.2:1-3), selling out like Balaam (2Pet.2:14-15), betraying the Lord like Judas, and, like Cain (Jude 1:11), willing to use whatever means necessary to gain their ends (Eph.4:14; 1Tim.4:1-3). They will look to all the (unbelieving) world as if they are true servants of God, and many will undoubtedly call themselves "Christians" (cf. Zeph.1:4-5; Rev.3:1), but the people who truly know their God will not be deceived by such wolves in sheep's clothing (Dan.11:32; cf. Lev.10:1-3; Num.16:1-50; Jer.23:9-40; Ezek.13:10-23; Zeph.3:4).

Beware of the false prophets who are going to come in among you in sheep's clothing, but underneath they are ravenous wolves. Matthew 7:15 (cf. John 10:12)

⁴⁵ See The Satanic Rebellion: Part 3: "The Purpose, Creation, and Fall of Man", section IV, "The Fall of Man", and Peter's Epistles lesson #27 "Three False Doctrines That Threaten Faith".

For I know that after my departure fierce wolves will enter in among you who will not spare the flock. And even from among your own number [of elders] men will rise up and speak twisted things in order to entice the disciples (i.e., believers) to follow them. So be alert, remembering that for three years I did not stop warning each of you [about these dangers] day and night with my tears. Acts 20:29-31

I am amazed that you have had such a rapid change of mind away from the One who called you by the grace of Christ – to a different gospel (which is [really] not another [gospel at all]). Rather [the case really is that] there are certain men [there] who are throwing you into disorder, men who desire to pervert the gospel of Christ. But [even] if I myself – or even *an angel* out of heaven – should preach to you something out of keeping with what I have preached to you, let him be cursed! Galatians 1:6-9

3) It will utilize classic satanic methodology: In order to optimize its persuasiveness, the tribulational false religion will employ all the techniques of propaganda the devil has utilized since the beginning. These classic tactics of persuasion will be (as they have always been) focused upon gaining a hearing, then acceptance in principle, then an embracing of the lie. The evangelistic “pitch” of the tribulational religion’s false gospel will rely upon all the familiar methods which have always been used by Satan and his subordinates to win human beings over to falsehood:

- Its “gospel” appeal will include an element of truth: Half-truths are a notoriously effective way of undermining the *real* truth, and we know for a fact that this common deception will figure large in the beast’s religion. To take the two most salient examples, there *will* be a world kingdom established by God, but that will be Christ’s kingdom, not antichrist’s regime (though the false religion will claim divine favor for the kingdom of the beast), and there *will* be a world ruler anointed and appointed by God, but that will be Jesus Christ our Lord at His return, not antichrist (though the false religion will proclaim him as the true Messiah). In both examples there will be superficial similarities which support these lies (a united world rule and a world ruler with seemingly miraculous powers respectively), and we should be prepared to see this pattern of half-truths repeated in the superficial mimicking of virtually every aspect of true Christianity by the tribulational religion of antichrist.
- Its “gospel” appeal will be highly syncretic: This point is the converse or “flip-side” of the above. In addition to containing some elements of truth to cloak the larger lie, the institutions, practices, and doctrines of the false religion of the tribulation will also embrace widely disparate approaches and beliefs, including, so far as is possible, almost every organization’s pet ideas and customs. “Swearing by God ... yet also by Malcom” will be a hallmark of this syncretic faith (Zeph. 1:5). But compromise of the truth in principle is just as deadly for believers as accepting a lie covered in a veneer of truth.

- Its “gospel” appeal will be delivered by a friendly agent: The ministers, evangelists, and spokesmen for this new religion will be among the world’s most powerful, influential, and popular people (cf. Is.23:8; Rev.18:3). The power celebrities wield in influencing the weak-willed and weak-minded into various bizarre, cult-like, and anti-Christian activities should be clear to anyone who reads the newspaper. The difference between contemporary practice and what will occur during the Tribulation will be both qualitative and quantitative. For it will not only be fringe celebrities involved in evangelizing for the beast’s religion, but very nearly the entire complement of “Who’s Who”, including those with good and solid reputations.
- Its “gospel” appeal will exude a familiarity with God: The words “God” and even “Jesus” will be salted liberally into the conversations of everyone involved in both phases of the tribulational religion. From those who are its formal representatives in particular we can expect a very polished evangelical appeal that suggests a deep intimacy and familiarity with God and all things divine. Though the truth will be exactly the opposite, giving the appearance of being “close to God” is a classic way for agents of the devil to allay the fears of their intended victims, portraying themselves as "ministers of righteousness" (2Cor.11:14-15).
- Its “gospel” appeal will contain a legitimizing of secret desires: Just as the saying “you can’t cheat an honest man” has much merit, so in the case of satanic deception it is the lack of love for the truth that makes human beings vulnerable to the devil’s lies in the first place. And, inevitably, when one is lackadaisical about the truth and lazy about following God diligently (or entirely disinterested in either), one fleshly desire or another will generally rise to fill the void. Whether subtly or obviously, the devil never fishes without bait. Behind every cult, every satanic lie, and, without question, behind the coming false religion, one finds an offer from the devil to fulfill and to justify some sinful desire hidden in the heart. Whether it is to offer through service and participation something one does not yet have but lusts for, or to justify some current behavior or past deed about which one feels guilty, all organizations of which the devil approves, and certainly this future one which will be most directly under his control, offer something of value to potential participants. This is not, of course, to suggest that the devil actually “delivers” on these promises, for he and his have no true interest in justice for or in the welfare of their victims.
- Its “gospel” appeal will be extra-biblical: The quickest and best way to “smoke out” any cult or demon-influenced group is to examine their attitude toward the scriptures. Any group that claims to be “of God” which downplays the importance of reading the Bible for oneself is inevitably and invariably headed in the wrong direction, at the very least. And when mere discouraging of independent consultation advances to prohibition or denigration of the Bible, one can rest assured that God is not present in that group. The tribulational false religion, syncretic as it will be, will in all likelihood hold the Bible in

low esteem, granting equal or greater weight to other “great books”, and placing its own doctrines and new “sacred writings” in the place of honor.

4) It will be inclusive and exclusive at the same time: This dual character of the false religion will also contribute to its persuasiveness. The fact that it will be a “big tent” organization will encourage individuals from all walks of life to join, and we should also not underestimate the persuasive appeal of the band-wagon effect that will occur once its ecumenical phase has begun. With seemingly everyone everywhere being pulled into its orbit, the power of the group and the desire to belong to something that virtually everyone else is joining will prove too much for most people to resist. But even as the majority of the world’s population is being sucked in, the fact that those who choose to take their stand with the Word of God are not included will also make this new organization exclusive, containing only those who have embraced this “one true church”, and this “one true religion” (creating a sort of “crusade” effect which will later be directed against genuine believers during the Great Persecution). Remaining aloof from such pressures will not be an easy matter, and for those who do the situation will not be a simple one with which to cope. For before the first half of the Tribulation has come to an end, the situation will doubtless be much like that faced by Noah and his family, who, being the last remaining remnant of true humanity, were doubtlessly ostracized and ridiculed by the hybrid population of the antediluvian world of that time.⁴⁶ And just as it was a very difficult matter to resist the nearly unanimous peer pressure to join in Nimrod’s movement to build the tower of Babel, so at this future time dissent will pay a heavy price.⁴⁷ Going in the opposite direction from everyone else is never easy. How much more will this not be true during the Tribulation when former Christians, friends and relatives are eagerly beckoning the few hold-outs to turn around? For those who do join, the promise of being “safe” within this near universal organization will seem genuine. For those few who refuse, choosing instead to remain loyal and faithful to Jesus Christ, ostracism and ridicule will soon turn to threats, coercion, and persecution, culminating in the Great Persecution which characterizes the Tribulation’s second half, the Great Tribulation.

5) It will be tolerant and intolerant at the same time: Vis-à-vis the behavior and ancillary beliefs of its own members, the tribulational false religion will be extremely tolerant. There will be “many gates” of entry, and “many ways” to pursue its false spirituality. This will be true even in the case of practices which are exact opposites, for example:

- It will embrace both hedonism and asceticism: On the one hand, the false religion of the tribulation will profess pleasure and the “godliness” of indulging in it, proclaiming universal forgiveness (apart from faith in Christ or repentance) and denying any divine

⁴⁶ See The Satanic Rebellion: Part 5: “Judgment, Restoration and Replacement”, section III.1, “Satan’s antediluvian attack on the purity of the human line (the Nephilim)”.

⁴⁷ See The Satanic Rebellion: Part 5: “Judgment, Restoration and Replacement”, section III.2, “Satan’s postdiluvian attack on human freedom (the Tower of Babel: Genesis 11:1-9)”.

judgment for any sort of excess (cf. Col.2:16; 2:20-23; 1Tim.4:3; Heb.13:9). On the other hand, it will also preach an austere self-denial and strict dietary regulations, threatening judgment for violations without any valid reference to Christ or true biblical usage (cf. 2Tim.3:1-5; 2Pet.2:1-2; 2:13-14; Jude 1:18-19). Both of these “ways”, though contradictory, will be embraced as acceptable for converts, and it must be noted that about the only common features they do share are that both are, in their very essence, hostile to a grace-based life of faith and obedience to Jesus Christ, and that neither has scriptural legitimacy (cf. Rom.14:17; 1Cor.8:8; 10:30; 1Tim.4:4-5).

- It will permit both licentiousness and abstinence: What is true in material matters generally (eating habits being the most common application in the first antithesis immediately above), will also be true in regard to sexual behavior and the use of alcohol and other behavior-altering substances. Idolatry has always been known for its licentiousness in these regards from ancient times. It is also quite common to find a brand of celibacy and self-denial in all such matters in many false religions. The false religion of the Tribulation will allow either “way” as a valid method of serving the beast. Antichrist himself will be non-conventional in his approach to these things, exhibiting behavior that is amoral and “above” normal human conventions (Dan.11:37 in the context of verses 36-39). Neither approach, however, will have any validity in God’s eyes.
- It will express itself in both emotionalism and rationalism: Both wild ecstasies and dispassionate cerebral “worship” will characterize the followers of this coming false religion. Neither those who prefer a cold, analytical approach, nor those who crave emotional release will be excluded. But in either case, the true worship of God the Father and Jesus Christ in Spirit and in truth will be rejected.

Thus this new religion will have something for everyone, and will legitimize, justify and “bless” excesses of behavior on both extremes of the spectrum. Little wonder then that all those who are not committed to following Jesus wherever He leads will be easily intrigued and seduced by such an all-inclusive, all-forgiving, all-tolerating system that at the same time seems entirely authoritative, embracing all (non-biblical) traditions, and yet manages to be novel in and of itself.

As touching the beliefs and behavior of true Christians, however, the coming false religion will be extremely intolerant. For we know the truth: Jesus is the only gate of entry to the Father (Jn.10:7), and He is the only truth, the only way, and the only life (Jn.14:6). The absolute nature of our faith (and the fact that its elimination is a prime objective of the devil and a major purpose behind this coming false religion) guarantees that this most “tolerant” of all religions will be unwilling to abide true Christianity or accept the survival of true Christians. This combination of extreme tolerance and extreme intolerance will also be very persuasive, for it is our nature as human beings to crave complete carte blanche for any behavior when the object is ourselves, and to admire unyielding intolerance of “aberrant” behavior when the object is someone else.

3) The persuasiveness of tribulational false signs: One particular aspect of tribulational false teaching that deserves special mention in regard to its contribution to promoting apostasy is the effective use to which false signs will be put by antichrist and his false prophet. For scripture is very clear that the signs performed by these two in the power of the devil will be unprecedented in human history, and will play no small part in winning over the majority of the world's population (Mk.13:22; Rev.13:3-4; 16:13-14; 17:8; 19:20).⁴⁸

For [during the Tribulation] 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.

Matthew 24:24

[Antichrist's] appearance [will come about] through Satan's empowerment [and will be] accompanied by every [sort of] false miracle, both signs and portents, and by every [sort of] unrighteous deception [designed] for those who are perishing, [namely those who will believe these lies] because they did not open themselves up to the love of the truth so as to be saved.

2nd Thessalonians 2:9-10

And [the beast's false prophet] [will] perform great miracles (lit., "signs"), even making fire come down from heaven to the earth in front of everyone. And he [will] deceive those who dwell upon the earth on account of the miracles (lit., "signs") which have been given to him to perform in the presence of the beast, even commanding the inhabitants of the earth to make an image of the beast, [that is] of him who received the [deadly] stroke of the sword and [yet] came [back] to life. And it was given to him to provide a spirit for the image of the beast so that the image might speak, and [it was also given to him] to bring it about that as many as refused to worship the image of the beast might be put to death.

Revelation 13:13-15

But no matter how miraculous such signs may appear to unbelievers, we Christians walk by faith, not by sight (2Cor.5:7; cf. Prov.3:5). Therefore as faithful followers of the Living Word, our Lord Jesus Christ (Jn.1:1-14), we must be careful always to put our total faith in the Word of God above anything and everything our eyes may see, and trust in what our Lord has told us through His Bible even in the face of such overwhelmingly persuasive "miracles" which may seem to contradict what we know from scripture to be true:

⁴⁸ The "miracles" performed by Pharaoh's court magicians, Jannes and Jambres, provide a parallel (Ex.7:11; 7:22; 2Tim.3:8-9). In both the past and future cases, however, the power of God will prove superior and more impressive to an incalculable degree.

I will bow myself in worship toward your holy temple, and I will give thanks to your holy Name on account of your mercy, and on account of your truth, for You have *magnified Your Word above Your entire Name*.

Psalm 138:2

For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there without watering the earth, so is the Word which goes forth from my mouth. It will not return to Me in vain without accomplishing what I please, and it will be successful in whatever [purpose] I have sent it forth.

Isaiah 55:10-11

“Is my Word not like fire?”, says the Lord, “And [is it not] like a hammer which can smash to bits a rocky mountainside?”

Jeremiah 23:29

Why do you call [to Me, saying] “Lord, Lord”, but you do not do *what I say*?

Luke 6:46

The Word [Jesus Christ] existed at the very beginning, and there was reciprocity (i.e., co-divinity) between the Word and God [the Father]. And the Word was God. This One both existed and enjoyed reciprocity with God from the very beginning. Everything came into being through Him, [Jesus Christ], and without Him, nothing has come into being which has in fact come into being.

John 1:1-3

Search the scriptures (since you assume by how you read them that you have eternal life)! These are the very scriptures that bear testimony about Me.

John 5:39

Jesus said to [His disciple, Thomas], “Because you have seen Me you have believed? Blessed are those who have not seen and have [yet] believed!”

John 20:29

For who has known the mind of the Lord, that he might instruct Him? But we possess the very mind of Christ (i.e. the Holy Spirit illuminating the scriptures which are Christ’s very thinking).

1st Corinthians 2:16 (cf. v.12-13)

[Let us] not [be] having [any] regard for what can be seen, but [instead] for what cannot be seen. For the things which can be seen are ephemeral. But the things which cannot be seen are eternal.

2nd Corinthians 4:18

For we are walking [our Christian walk] through faith [in the Living and written Word], not through appearance.

2nd Corinthians 5:7

All scripture is inspired by God and useful for teaching, for admonishing, for correcting, and for training in righteousness.

2nd Timothy 3:16

[Jesus] is the shining forth of [the Father's] glory, the precise image of His essence, the One who sustains the universe by His mighty Word . . .

Hebrews 1:3a

For the Word of God is living and powerful; it is sharper than any two-edged sword, penetrating even to the point of being able to divide the spirit from its earthly life and the marrow from its bones; it acts as a judge of our heart's intentions and emotions.

Hebrews 4:12

It is faith [in the Living and written Word], moreover, that substantiates what we hope for. [Faith] provides proof of things unseen.

Hebrews 11:1

For I did not follow concocted tales in making known to you the power and the coming return of our Lord, Jesus Christ, but was an eyewitness to His majesty. For when He had received honor and glory from God the Father, these words sounded forth to Him from God's majestic glory: "This is my beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased." And these words I myself heard as they were delivered from heaven, for I was with Him on the holy mountain (cf. Matt.17:1-8). Yet I consider the prophetically inspired Word (i.e. the Bible) even more reliable (i.e. than what I saw with my own eyes). You too would do well to pay the closest attention to this [prophetically inspired Word], just as to a lamp shining in a dark place (cf. Ps.119:105), until the day dawns, and the Morning Star rises (i.e. the Living Word, Jesus Christ, returns), pondering in your hearts this principle of prime importance: no single verse of prophetically inspired scripture has ever come into being as a result of personal reflection. For true prophecy has never occurred by human will, but only when holy men of God have spoken under the direction and agency of the Holy Spirit.

2nd Peter 1:16-21

What we have seen from the beginning, what we have heard and seen with our eyes, what we have observed and touched with our hands – this is about the Word of life, [Jesus Christ].

1st John 1:1

Such powerful encouragement for us to put our faith in the Word even in the face of overwhelming visual evidence to the contrary is buttressed even further by the clear directions given by Paul to Timothy and applicable to all pastors to put a like and equal main emphasis

upon teaching the truth of the Word (rather than performing miracles, even if legitimate and possible):

Until I (i.e., Paul) come, devote yourself to [public] reading [of the scriptures], to encouragement [through preaching], to teaching [the Word].

1st Timothy 4:13

Let those elders who lead well be held worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the Word and in teaching.

1st Timothy 5:17

Be zealous to present yourself to God [as one] approved [in what you do], a workman who does not need to be ashamed, [like a skillful carpenter] “cutting straight” the Word of truth.

2nd Timothy 2:15

Proclaim the Word! Keep at it, whether circumstances are favorable or not! Reprove, rebuke, [and] encourage with all patience [in your] teaching!

2nd Timothy 4:2

Yes, scripture is clear. It is the Word of God, the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, to which we are to give our attention, not the things which our eyes may see or our ears may hear. No matter how amazing, how unprecedented, how thoroughly persuasive the “miracles” or “signs” we may behold, we are to count them as nothing if they are contradicted by the Word of God (compare Jer.10:2 with Lk.21:25-26). This principle which has such critical implications for our conduct in the Tribulation also has an important application for us today on the threshold of that terrible time here in the Church era of Laodicea. For we live in a time when the Church, rather than giving precedence and pride of place to the teaching of scripture, is increasingly fascinated with the material world, with human works over the words of God, with experiences and emotional highs, with erstwhile miracles, healing and tongues, with hoopla, fanfare and carnival rather than the serious study of the Bible. The building up of a good conscience, of a good value system, and of proper, biblical priorities now will not only be helpful but may also be crucial in our successful navigation of the trials to come. On the other hand, undue attention now to the very sort of spectacles which will be used to such good effect by the beast and his false prophet during the Tribulation, not only places the believer in a very weak spiritual position now, but may well contribute to his or her apostatizing from Jesus Christ under the pressures of that terrible time ahead.

4) The persuasiveness of coopted organizations: This point also deserves separate coverage under the rubric of the contribution to the process of apostasy made by the false teaching of the Tribulation. We have already seen in regard to the persuasiveness of the satanically inspired “miracles” which will characterize the Tribulation that they will be amazingly powerful to the point of putting serious pressure even on the faith of the elect (Matt.24:24; Mk.13:22). In spite of these pressures, dedicated believers in Jesus Christ will continue to follow what the Bible says

rather than what their eyes see, no matter how miraculous these things may seem. They will apply all the appropriate scriptures instead of leaning on experience:

If a prophet arises in your midst, or a dreamer of dreams, and prophesies for you a sign or a wonder, and [even] if the sign or wonder comes to pass which he predicted for you, [and if he then] says “Let us follow after other gods” ([gods] whom you have not known or served [before]), **do not listen** to that prophet or to that dreamer of dreams, for the Lord your God is testing you to find out whether [or not] you [truly] love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your being (lit., “life”). Deuteronomy 13:1-3

Dedicated believers in Jesus Christ will continue to give heed to the scriptures in preference to any sign or wonder or miracle which contradicts them. They will apply the “Christ test” in the case of all spiritual leaders and pastors, just as they do today:⁴⁹

Beloved, don’t believe every spirit [of every so-called prophet], but test the spirits [of these “prophets” to see] whether [or not] they are from God. For many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this [test] you [will] know [whether or not a person has] the Spirit of God. Any spirit (i.e., a person or organization) which professes that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but any spirit which does not profess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not from God. And this [latter] is the [spirit] of the antichrist, which you have heard about, that he is coming, and [even] now [his spirit] is already in the world. 1st John 4:1-3

Sadly, however, many who are weak in faith will cave in to these pressures, and in very many instances they will be led into doing so from the top down. For in all too many individual cases of apostasy, it really will be a matter of lambs being led to the slaughter by the very leaders and organizations whose job it is to shepherd them. Indeed, all those who currently find themselves in denominations which are only marginally Christian or whose leaders and “teachers” are doing a poor job as representatives of Jesus Christ have already been compromised to an extraordinary degree. Based upon the predictions and analogous scriptures covered in the sections above, we should have every expectation that these weak and/or venial leaders will be quick to succumb to antichrist’s exploding world-ecumenical movement, and only too willing to drag most of their membership along behind them (even as they have continued to be dragged along into spiritual apathy in our own day). This will be all the more true during the Tribulation’s second half when antichrist’s “wonders” will be added to this witches’ brew of false motivations. For the performance of such unbelievable signs and miracles will endow this coming false religion with a tremendous amount of emotional authority (with only the firm determination to put scripture ahead of what is visible being capable of resistance). It should be noted by way of an aside here that our current world is more vulnerable to such deceptions than was ever the case in the past. To a world that sees itself as sophisticated and knowledgeable to a degree not seen before in history, this statement no doubt will seem ludicrous. But it is true nonetheless. For it is

⁴⁹ See “The Christ Test” in, Read Your Bible: A Basic Christian Right and Responsibility.

precisely our present preoccupation with materialistic explanations for everything that happens in the world that will make us all the more vulnerable in the face of the beast's miracles, signs so profound that they cannot easily be denied or explained away. For those who know their God, the occurrence of such phenomena will not overly impress – completely convinced of the power of the immaterial over the material, we Christians use the Bible as our guide to distinguish between signs and miracles that are of God and those that are not. But to the vast majority of humanity, the experience of undeniable extra-material events will prove too powerful to resist. And for those leaders and members of putative Christian groups which are spiritually weak or even dead, these wonders will be all that is necessary to “prove” that the beast is “the one”, and that his new religion is the only “true way”.

What this means in practical terms is that once such organizations and denominations sell out completely to the ecumenical movement and thereafter allow themselves to be incorporated into the beast's religion in toto (during the final three and a half years), those believers who have kept fellowship with them up to and into the Tribulation will find it increasingly difficult to escape their grasp. The problem of freeing oneself from an organization which has come to be synonymous in one's mind with faith is somewhat akin to sinking into quicksand while unconscious: even if one “comes to” and recognizes the dire nature of the situation, escaping the terrible pull is still no easy matter. We can see this same phenomena playing out in many denominations even today, as unbelieving elites continue to move their charges further and further away from God and the Bible, while many of the rank and file, though far from happy with these developments, allow themselves to be dragged along (out of misplaced loyalty, tradition and inertia). But regardless of the reason for apostasy, every individual believer is responsible to the Lord for remaining faithful to Him. The fact that he or she may have been influenced by his or her leaders into apostasy is no excuse:

And there arose among the people false prophets, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will introduce destructive false doctrines – even denying the Master who bought them – and will bring swift destruction on themselves. ***And many will follow their lascivious ways so that the way of truth will be subject to blasphemy on their account.*** 2nd Peter 2:1-2

For by pouring forth [statements] of outrageous folly, [by appealing to] fleshly lusts, and by making use of every [sort of] sensuality, [these false teachers] entice ***those who [previously] had truly escaped*** from those who live [such] lives of deception (i.e., the false teachers). [These false teachers] promise [weak believers] freedom [from a disciplined life], though they themselves are truly slaves of corruption. For by what[ever] one is mastered, to this is he enslaved. For if after having escaped the defilements of this world by recognizing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ [these weak believers] should be overcome [spiritually] by becoming involved again in these foul things, then they have become worse off than they were before. For it would have been better for them not to have accepted the Righteous Way in the first place, rather than – once having accepted this holy command [for faith in Christ which was] committed to them – to turn their

backs on it now. And so in their case this proverb is true: “The dog has returned to his vomit, and the sow, though washed, to her muddy sty”.
2nd Peter 2:18-22

Therefore while it is one thing for pagan religions and dead denominations containing few Christians in their ranks to be pulled into the orbit of the beast’s religion, the coopting of groups which are comprised of at least some genuine believers will be yet another powerful factor in aiding and abetting the practice of apostasy. In the end, it will make little difference whether it was the band-wagon principle, the continuing authority of the denomination in question, the fear of being shunned, discriminated against, or persecuted, or the outright deceptions discussed above which play the dominant role in pulling believers into apostasy along with the organizations to which they belong. Continuation in a relationship which is spiritually harmful cannot help but compromise and threaten faith:

Do not be deceived: bad associations corrupt good morals. 1st Corinthians 15:33

The current trend in our Laodicean age toward apathy to the truth and a desire for entertaining substitutes which “scratch the ear” will, during the Tribulation, greatly assist the process of assimilation and cooption of Christian groups by Satan and his antichrist into their worldwide religion.

For the time will come when they will not put up with sound teaching, but will [instead], desiring to have their ears scratched, heap up by their own [devices] teachers to match their specific lusts. And they will turn their ears from the truth and resort instead to fictions. 2nd Timothy 4:3-4

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.
1st Timothy 4:1

This process, moreover, will not only proceed from top to bottom, but also from bottom to top. For not only will it be a case of leadership subverting membership, but also the other way around. As false teaching and false teachers begin to aggressively infiltrate Christian and erstwhile Christian groups, many of the rank and file in these groups (whether apostate Christians or unbelievers all along) will put pressure on the leadership from the “grass roots” to join in. Under such pressure (and faced with rebellion or expulsion), only the staunchest leaders will be able or willing to offer any resistance, daring to lose their jobs, reputations, and worse. Given that the groups we are talking about here are already deeply mired in spiritual apathy, we can expect such resistance to be inconsequential, and can further expect most of the leadership of such groups to accommodate to the wishes of the majority of their constituency. We may call this phenomenon “the golden calf compromise”. For just as Aaron was quick to heed the demands of the rebellious mob that confronted him in Moses’ absence (even though he was certainly aware of the wrongness of his actions: cf. Ex.32:1-4), so the vast majority of spiritual leaders in all but the most dedicated Christian groups will likewise buckle under the internal pressure to compromise with the ecumenical developments of the Tribulation’s first half. And

just as Aaron may have foolishly thought he could still steer this horrible idolatry in God's direction by calling the golden calf's feast a "feast to the Lord" (compare Ex.32:5 with 32:6), so it may well be that some of the leaders constrained by these pressures may convince themselves that they are sticking with their groups for the sake of good. In reality, however, when the final opportunity for separation comes, failing to avail oneself of it will only mean spiritual disaster. Moreover, in the case of the leadership, by remaining and accommodating they will only be giving false comfort to their truly Christian charges, and be helping to blind them to the fact that staying with these organizations once they have been fatally compromised can only lead to apostasy. It is well to note that the Israelites became restless and vulnerable to such outrageous apostasy only when Moses, a well-known type of Christ (cf. Ex.32:1; Acts 7:40: a return as if from the dead), had been away a long time – and just before he returned at that. So also in this case it will be just before Christ's return, and at the lengthiest point of His absence, that the Great Apostasy will claim so many of our fellow believers, with the most prominent leadership of the Church (analogous to Aaron) being swept up in their rebellion out of fear. And just as the rebellious Israelites of that time sought another leader other than Moses to "take them back to Egypt" (Neh.9:16-17; cf. Num.14:1-4), so in their apostasy these former Christians will join with unbelievers the world round in embracing a new savior, one who will promise them a worldly heaven on earth, namely, the antichrist.

In this capacity it is at least worth asking whether so-called "Christian" groups may not constitute antichrist's original base for his ecumenical movement (as opposed to being a later target). Since the beast will begin with politics, we may posit that the ecumenical movement (which will only later develop into a universal, idolatrous religion) will be an essentially political formation at its inception. As we shall soon see (and have already discussed by way of preview in our coverage of the four horsemen), the Tribulation's first half will be a time of exceptional upheaval. Antichrist will doubtless gain much political support by promising political solutions to the horrendous world conditions of that time. Given the propensity of many religious and even Christian groups to become involved in political causes "for good", it is not far from the realm of the possible to suppose that antichrist will make full use of this tendency. Since the initial development of ecumenical cooperation will be political in nature rather than doctrinal (with "cooperation" and coercion in the realm of belief coming only later), it is easy to see how many Christians of poor discernment might be able to embrace this movement and still allow themselves to think they were doing something "Christian" (even as they were actually falling away from the truth and from Christ). Using Christian and semi-Christian groups as a base would have very clear advantages for antichrist, whose entire false religion will later come to be based upon claiming that he is the Messiah.

4. The Refining of the Remnant: One of the reasons for the astonishing abandonment of the Lord during the Great Apostasy will be the unprecedented degree of deception unleashed by the devil and his two earthly minions, the antichrist and his false prophet (Dan.11:32-35; Matt.24:11; 24:24; Mk.13:22; 2Thes.2:9-12; 1Tim.4:1-5; 2Tim.3:8-9 with Ex.7:11 & 7:22; Rev.13:13-14; 19:20). This assault will pour forth a veritable ocean of falsehood which will overwhelm all but the truly elect (Matt.24:24; Mk.13:22). If there is a silver lining in this terrible cloud of apostasy,

it is to be found in the refining of the faith produced by the pressures of the Tribulation of all those who are truly God's people. It is true that the refining of the hearts of His people, the strengthening of faith and the testing of our commitment to Jesus Christ are givens in every era:

Rejoice in this [salvation to come], even though at present it may for a time be your lot to suffer through various trials so that this validation (lit., "assaying") of your faith [which results from your successful passing of these tests] may result in praise, glory and honor for you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. For this [validation process] has a greater benefit [for you] than [is true in the case of] gold, which, while it is also proved by fire, ultimately perishes (e.g., in contrast to the eternal rewards of faith proved genuine through testing). 1st Peter 1:6-7

For He knows my path. He has tested me (i.e., "has assayed the value of [my faith like one does gold bullion]"). I will come forth like gold [from the crucible]. Job 23:10

The smelter for silver and the crucible for gold, but the Lord is the One who tests hearts. Proverbs 17:3

Behold, I have refined you, but not like silver – it is a furnace of affliction in which I have tested you. Isaiah 48:10

However, as we have said from the beginning of this series, one of God's purposes for the Tribulation is to draw a very vivid distinction between those who have chosen for Him and those who are not willing to do so.

Seventy sevens have been decreed for your people and your holy city, ***to complete the rebellion and consummate sins*** (i.e., bring apostasy to the full), to atone for iniquity and bring in everlasting righteousness (i.e., the saving work of Christ), and to seal up vision and prophecy and anoint the holy of holies (i.e., the coming of the Kingdom). Daniel 9:24

In the Tribulation there will be no middle-ground. Only those who are sure and solid in their faith in Jesus Christ will be able to avoid being drawn into apostasy and the false religion, and at the same time endure the emotional pounding of the Tribulation and all that it will encompass.

Because you have kept My command to persevere in Me, I will also keep you from the hour of testing which is about to come upon the entire inhabited world ***to put the inhabitants of the world to the test.*** Revelation 3:10

For in addition to all the unprecedented difficulties of that time, our faith will also be pressured from all quarters, from false prophets and false Christs (Deut.13:1-4; Matt.24:5; Matt.24:10-13; Mk.13:6; Lk.21:8; 1Jn.2:18; 4:1-5; 2Jn.1:7), from false Christians infiltrating our fellowship (Dan.11:34; Gal.2:4; Jude 4), from the departure from our fellowship of those we love (1Jn.2:19), from dissension in our ranks (1Cor.11:19), and from the increasing alienation and

persecution we will feel and experience from “Christian” groups who will actively ridicule us for our perverse persistence in our faith. This last point is very important to understand. For the refining of the remnant of true believers during the Tribulation will be much more a matter of believers separating themselves rather than being separated out. Everyone likes a growing church, and during the ecumenical movement of the Tribulation’s first half the “churches” who compromise with it will grow as never before. Within there will be excitement, hoopla, entertainment – everything but Christ. Without there will be isolation, revulsion, contempt – but for the sake of Christ (Heb.10:33-34; 13:11-13; cf. 2Cor.1:3-11). Those who are not pure will fall away into apostasy during this terrible time, but those who are pure will be purified even further, so that when our Lord does come (Rev.22:11), He will come to a people ready and prepared (cf. Lk.1:17), and He will come to rescue and avenge them:

And it will be said on that day, “Behold, this is our God! We put our hope in Him that He would deliver us [and He did]! This is our Lord. We put our hope in Him. Let us rejoice and be glad in His deliverance!”
Isaiah 25:9

Strengthen the feeble hands, steady the knees that give way; say to those with fearful hearts, “Be strong, do not fear; your God will come, He will come with vengeance; with divine retribution He will come to save you.”
Isaiah 35:3-4 NIV

The persecution of the true Church and the Lord’s retribution at the Second Advent are the twin foci of the Great Tribulation from the divine point of view. Small wonder then that the Tribulation will be a winnowing process designed to separate the wheat from the chaff so that the Bride to whom our Lord returns will be holy and pure in every way (Ps.45; Eph.5:25-27; Rev.19:7-8).

John answered them all and said, “I am [symbolically] baptizing you with water. But One who is more powerful than I am is coming, [One] whose sandal thong I am not sufficient to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit *and with fire!* His winnowing fork is in His hand, [ready] to cleanse His threshing floor and gather the grain into His barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.
Luke 3:16-17

For believers, therefore, the Tribulation will not be a time of pointless suffering, but rather a time of purposeful purging, refining, and purifying of all those who have genuinely committed themselves to following Jesus Christ faithfully to the end (cf. Jer.9:7; Jn.15:2).

And even from among [the ranks of] those who have insight, some will be persecuted, in order to refine, purify, and cleanse them until the final end. For [it is] yet to come at its appointed time.
Daniel 11:35

And [during that time of the end] many will purify and cleanse themselves, and will be *refined* (lit., “smelted in a crucible”). But the wicked will act wickedly, nor will any of

the wicked understand. But those who give [these matters] careful attention will understand. Daniel 12:10

If past biblical parallels of such periods of refinement can provide any guide whatsoever, we may expect the remnant refined in this way to be small indeed (at least relative to the billions worldwide who currently identify themselves as Christians). Only three escaped from Sodom (Gen.18:16 - 19:29), only eight escaped the great flood (Gen.7:7; 1Pet.3:20), only 600 dared to throw in their lot with David during his trials in the Judean desert (1Sam.22:1-2; 23:13; 27:2; 30:9; 1Chron.12:1-22), only 7,000 refused to “bow the knee to Baal” during Jezebel’s apostasy (1Kng.19:18; Rom.11:1-6). Throughout human history, the number of the elect has always been but a tiny fraction of the total human population, and even within the apparent community of believers there have inevitably been many who were lukewarm and many who were not believers at all. Just as “not all Israel is Israel” (Rom.9:6-33; cf. Ezek.5:2-4; 5:12; 20:35-38; Zech.13:8-9), so it should not be surprising that not all who claim to be part of Christ’s Church truly are. However, the significant difference between the present time and the Tribulation is that, in the midst of that crucible to come, all those who are not dedicated to Jesus above everything else in their lives will be winnowed out, and poured out like dross into apostasy.

Although your people may be like the sand of the sea, O Israel, [only] a remnant of them will return. [For] a final reckoning has been decreed, overflowing with righteousness. For the Lord is about to accomplish a reckoning [which is both] final and [firmly] decreed in the midst of the entire earth. Isaiah 10:22-23

When the rush to join the new ecumenical movement and the false religion it spawns does come, we who have trusted in Christ for our salvation must remember that the presence of a crowd does not guarantee the presence of God. Even though we may be pariahs and outcasts in the eyes of the world (Ps.84:5-7; Heb.11:13-16; cf. 1Chron.29:15; Ps.39:12; 63:1; 119:19; 1Cor.7:29-31; Heb.11:37-38; 13:13-14; 1Pet.1:1; 2:11; 1Jn.5:19), God is no “respector of persons”, nor is He influenced by appearances as the world is (Rom.2:11; Eph.6:9), nor is He impressed by mere numbers. What impresses God is the attitude of our hearts (1Sam.16:7; Ps.51:17; 147:10-11; Is.29:13; Jer.12:2; Matt.10:26; Lk.8:17). He sees us for what we really are, His own children – if we but stay true to this faith, faithful to the end:

See how great a love the Father has bestowed upon us to [actually] be called children of God! And [that is just what] we are! For this reason the world does not understand us because it has not understood Him. Beloved, we are already the children of God, but what we will be has not yet been revealed. We know that when He, [our Lord Jesus Christ,] is revealed [to us at the resurrection], we will be [exactly] like Him, and so will see Him exactly like He is (i.e., at the resurrection, we will have new bodies exactly like our Lord’s and know Him as we are known by Him: cf. 1Cor.13:12).

1st John 3:1-2

So strive all that much more then, brothers, to make your calling and election secure through these good works. By devoting yourselves to these things (i.e., virtue, growth

and the Christian production which springs from faith) you shall never be tripped up along your way. For it is by such means that your path into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be smoothly and generously paved.

2nd Peter 1:10-11

So then, my brothers, just as you have always been obedient [to the truth], not just when I was present [with you] but even more so now in my absence, go to work on your salvation with fear and trembling.

Philippians 2:12

In terms of historical analogies, the situation and experience of the Thessalonian believers presents a very close parallel to what genuine Christians will have to face during the Tribulation. They too were attacked by false teachers (cf. 1Thes.4:13-18 with 2Thes.2:1-3), and found themselves under the most severe testing (1Thes.1:6; 2:14; 3:3-4; 2Thes.1:4-7), a combination of circumstances which led the apostle Paul to be greatly concerned about their spiritual welfare (1Thes.3:1-5). But, in spite of everything, they triumphed over all threats to their faith through their joyous reliance on the Word of God (1Thes.1:6; 2:13; 3:6; 2Thes.2:13; cf. 1Thes.1:3), becoming a model to their contemporaries and to us of how believers should behave in tribulations great and small (1Thes.1:7; 2Thes.1:4). Like the wise virgins in our Lord's parable (Matt.25:1-13), we too must commit ourselves to stocking up on the oil of truth while it is yet day, that our lamp of faith may not be extinguished during that dark night to come. Instead of allowing ourselves to become over-focused upon this present world in the relative calm of the moment, we should do all that we can to prepare for the struggle ahead, remembering that we are but pilgrims on this earth, walking but a Sabbath day's journey every day, one day at a time, on our way to Zion, following the example of those who have gone before:

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

Hebrews 11:13-16

As those upon whom the end of the ages is about to come (1Cor.10:11), we who have determined to remain faithful to our Lord Jesus Christ, come what may, must have no illusions about either

the difficulty of the task that lies ahead, or the subtlety of the testing through which we must pass on our way to safe deliverance.⁵⁰

Bless our God, O peoples, and make the sound of His praises heard. He has preserved our lives, and has not let our feet stumble. Yes, O God, You tested us, and You refined us as [one] refines silver. You brought us into the [prison] fortress. You set tribulation upon us (lit., “on our loins”). You made men ride over our heads. We went through fire and water. But in spite [of all this] You have brought us forth into [a place of] refreshment (i.e., deliverance). Psalm 66:8-12⁵¹

When the whirlwind passes by, the wicked are no more, but the righteous will stand firm forever. Proverbs 10:25

When calamity comes, the wicked are brought down, but even in death the righteous have a refuge. Proverbs 14:32 NIV

Let us not put Christ to the test, as some of them (i.e., the Exodus generation) did and were killed by serpents. And let us not complain, as some of them complained, and were killed by the Destroyer. These things happened to them as an example to us and were written to warn us (i.e., to avoid similar apostasy) – we who live at the culmination of the ages (i.e., at the doorstep of the Tribulation). So let him who thinks he stands firm beware lest he fall. 1st Corinthians 10:9-12

Finally, although the parable of the wheat and the tares has its true fulfilment at the end of our Lord’s millennial reign (Matt.13:24-30; 13:36-43), the principle of leaving the tares to grow in company with the wheat certainly has a direct application here. The tares or weeds among the good grain represent unbelievers mixed into the Church-visible by Satan in such a cunning way that only God is capable of discerning the good from the bad. This is certainly reflective of the situation we see today in our own Church era of Laodicea. To this moment, God has, for the most part, left the tares to grow beside the wheat so as not to judge the whole Church in a general “uprooting”. Under the pressures of the Tribulation, however, it will rapidly become apparent who are of “the wheat” and who are of “the tares” as our Lord begins to make the distinction between the wicked and the righteous progressively clear (one of the Tribulation’s salient characteristics as we have repeatedly seen). Viewed from this broader perspective (which takes in both believers and unbelievers in the Church-visible in one panoramic view), the process of refining, winnowing, separation, and selective harvesting of the elect initiated by the Great

⁵⁰ For an overview of these difficulties, see The Coming Tribulation: Part 1: “Introduction”, section III, “General Character of the Tribulation”.

⁵¹ Psalm 66 as a whole has prophetic application as a victory Psalm for the Messiah’s return (with the verses quoted here focusing on the tribulation from which the congregation of the faithful have been delivered).

Apostasy will also reveal by this very separation the identity of the reprobate tares now largely hidden from our earthly eyes (Lk.3:16-17; compare also the parable of the net which gathers good and bad: Matt.13:47-50; and the parable of the wedding banquet where some who show up are not worthy: Matt.22:1-14; Lk.14:16-24).

Now the field is the world. And the good seed, these are the sons of the Kingdom. But the tares are the sons of the evil one. Matthew 13:38

III. The Trumpet Judgments: Revelation 8:6 - 9:21

1. The Purpose of the Seven Trumpet Judgments: The seven trumpet judgments are literal “plagues” in the biblical sense (cf. Rev.9:20, and compare 8:12 *eplege* and 9:18 “these three plagues”). That is, they are calamities visited by God upon the earth which are not confined to physical diseases (cf. the plagues of frogs, gnats, and flies in Exodus chapter 8, all of which are also called “judgments” in Ex.6:6: Hebrew *shphatiym*, שִׁפְטִיִּם). As in the case of the ten plagues the Lord inflicted upon Egypt some three and a half millennia ago (Ex.7:14 - 12:30), and also in the case of the seven bowl judgments, still looming as we study them here (Rev.16:1-21), the seven trumpet judgments are clearly just that, instances of divine punishment leveled upon exceptional evil (Is.26:20-21; cf. Lev.26:14-39; Deut.28:15-68; 1Kng.16:29 - 17:1). These judgments will occur after the Tribulation is already well underway (see below for chronology) in response to unprecedented spiritual degeneration on the one hand (i.e., the Great Apostasy), and unprecedented lawlessness and growing satanic control in the secular arena on the other (the policies of antichrist’s kingdom being the preeminent manifestation as outlined in the first four seals of Rev.6:1-8). But while a large part of the purpose of these judgments is indeed to express God’s wrath upon the exceptional apostasy, degeneration, lawlessness and evil which will flourish during this time, we would be remiss not to point out that the fundamental purpose of these judgments is one of warning. Numerous scriptural parallels make it clear that, in the Bible, the primary significance of blowing the trumpet is the sounding of an alarm at moments of crisis (e.g., Num.10:1-9; Josh.6:1-5; 6:20; Jer.4:19-21; 6:1; Hos.5:8-9; Amos 3:6; Zeph.1:15-17; 1Cor.14:8), occasionally giving warning of impending divine judgment in particular (see esp. Ezek.33:1-20 and Joel 2:1). And as we have previously seen, the seven trumpet judgments of Revelation fulfill the symbolism of the feast of Trumpets, a festival which also bespeaks warning and the need for preparation, and which occurs at a place in the Jewish ceremonial calendar where it represents the beginning of the Tribulation’s first half (just as the Day of Atonement symbolically marks the inception of the Great Tribulation proper).⁵² The Great Tribulation will be, as we have seen, the period of the most intense horror, suffering and trial that mankind has ever experienced. For unbelievers (and for believers vulnerable to apostasy), the stakes are even higher than the torments ahead. In the Tribulation’s second half, antichrist will force mankind to

⁵² See The Satanic Rebellion: Part 5: “Judgment, Restoration and Replacement”, section II.8.c.3.5, “Trumpets (Rosh Hashanah)”.

swear allegiance to his master Satan or suffer the consequences (i.e., taking the “mark of the beast”: Rev.13:16-17). Scripture is clear that the voluntary receipt of this mark removes all possibility of future repentance and is thus equivalent to a self-imposed sentence of condemnation (cf. Rev.14:9-11; 16:2; 19:20; 20:4). With the eternal futures of every inhabitant of the earth about to hang in the balance in this dramatic way, intense and unmistakable warnings are not only appropriate, they are in fact a gracious act of a loving God, giving even the hardest of hearts a last chance to see and accept the truth before it is too late.

2. The Chronology of the Seven Trumpets: In our treatment of the seven seals of Revelation chapters six through eight, we saw that the seal-trends, while commencing in the sequence in which they are listed, were not episodic. That is to say, once a seal is opened and the trend it represents begins, there will be no respite until Christ’s return (e.g., the consequences of antichrist’s rule represented by the first four seals will not be eradicated until the Second Advent). The seven trumpet judgments, by way of contrast, while they too occur in sequence, like the seals *are* episodic. Like the plagues upon Egypt prior to the Exodus, each trumpet judgment lasts for a specific length of time and comes to an end before the next one in the sequence commences. Since these plagues are indeed judgments from God, and since they are clearly parallel and analogous to the judgments upon Pharaoh and Egypt (clear types of antichrist and his kingdom respectively), it is certainly appropriate that each blow should be felt by the unbelieving world individually and discretely, so that the fact of their divine origin may not be easily explained away (as was also the case prior to the Exodus).

As to the specific chronology of these seven trumpet judgments, it is important to note that they have been very precisely calibrated by God. For in regard to the sixth trumpet judgment Revelation 9:15 states that the four angels who administer it had been made ready for its precise “hour and day and month and year”, and in the case of the fifth trumpet judgment we are also told at Revelation 9:10 that the plague of scorpion-like pain will last for five months (the temporal reference being to the length of the plague itself, not to the duration of the suffering as is commonly supposed). This last point combined with the principle of the accelerating duration and the accelerating intensity of each of the seven trumpet judgments (the final trumpet, after all, is the Great Tribulation, the most intense period of judgment in history, lasting for the full 42 months of the seven year period’s second half), means that we can project their relative lengths: the fact that judgment #5 lasts five months invites us likewise to assign a corresponding number of months to each of the first six trumpets (excluding the seventh trumpet which, as we have said and will see in detail in part 4 of this series, represents the Tribulation’s entire second half, that is, the Great Tribulation). The net result of adding this ascending number of months (i.e., 1 month for trumpet #1, plus 2 months for trumpet #2, plus 3 months for trumpet #3, plus 4 months for trumpet #4, plus 5 months for trumpet #5, plus 6 months for trumpet #6) is a total of 21 months, exactly one half of the 42 month total of the Tribulation’s first half:

See Figure #1 at rear: “The Seven Trumpet Judgments” [trumpets.bmp]

It will be seen from the diagram above that these six judgments have been placed in immediate sequence directly prior to the commencement of the Great Tribulation (instead of at the very beginning of the Tribulation or, alternatively, spaced out in one fashion or another throughout the first 42 months). There are nearly irrefutable reasons why these judgments should precede and then run directly into the Great Tribulation as indicated in the figure above:

1) The principle of acceleration argues for understanding things in this way. Just as the ten plagues of the Exodus were increasingly severe (see below), so we ought to expect things to get progressively worse as these judgments proceed. The extension of the duration of these plagues as indicated in the figure above will certainly contribute to the growing weight of judgment and add force to the warnings they provide (following the principle of increasingly severe punishment for recurrent misbehavior that applies not only in secular legal systems around the world but also in the expressed divine approach to reprobate conduct: cf. Lev.26:14-39; Deut.28:15-68).

2) As even casual readers of Revelation are aware, there are clear parallels between the seven trumpet judgments and the seven “bowl” judgments of Revelation chapter 16. Pertinent to our discussion here is the fact that the seven bowl judgments immediately precede and lead directly into Armageddon and the Second Advent, and are likewise clustered sequentially in the second half of the Great Tribulation’s 42 months (see part 5 of this series). Therefore it would be highly unusual if the deliberately parallel trumpet judgments were arranged in a markedly different manner.

3) The function of the trumpets is to provide warning through judgment (i.e., a merciful last attempt on God’s behalf to shake the inhabitants of the world out of their spiritual hardness before the horrors of the Great Tribulation begin, and before the acceptance of the mark of the beast destroys all possibility of repentance). It therefore certainly stands to reason that these seven trumpet judgments would be grouped immediately before the event they are designed to warn against (i.e., the Great Tribulation). It would make little sense for the seven trumpet judgments to be concentrated at the outset of the Tribulation, a situation which would grant an inexplicable 21 month period of respite before the Great Tribulation begins. The same may be said about distributing the first six trumpet judgments over the entire 42 months of the Tribulation’s first half. One can imagine that the respite provided by either of these alternative arrangements would tend to be counterproductive to the purpose of warning given mankind’s notorious ability to forget and ignore with the passage of time even the most horrendous events. There is, in fact, no discernible gap between these judgments and the seventh trumpet as described in Revelation, leading us to deduce a seamless continuum between warning and punishment – just as was the case in the Exodus.

4) The narrative of the seven trumpet judgments does in fact lead directly into the Great Tribulation with no discernible gap or interval (e.g., Rev.10:6-7; 11:1-14; and compare Rev.11:15-19 with chapters 12-13 wherein are contained events that relate exclusively to the Great Tribulation). Scripture gives us little choice but to “anchor” the end of the trumpet judgments directly to the Great Tribulation (especially since the seventh trumpet *is* the Great Tribulation).

3. The Ascending Intensity of the Seven Trumpet Judgments: Not only do the trumpet judgments expand sequentially in terms of their duration (being 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 42 months long respectively), but they also exhibit a progressive intensification in terms of the painful effects they produce:

- Trumpet #1: Vegetation Stricken: A third of the earth is scorched, and a third of its grass and trees are burned up, but *no* human fatalities are mentioned.
- Trumpet #2: The Sea Stricken: A third of the creatures in the sea are killed, and a third of all ships destroyed, unquestionably resulting in *some* human fatalities.
- Trumpet #3: Fresh Water Stricken: A third of the world's fresh water is poisoned with the result that there are *many* human fatalities.
- Trumpet #4: The Heavenly Lights Stricken: While no fatalities are mentioned in conjunction with this one third reduction in the delivery of heavenly light, this is the first judgment wherein *all* human beings and *all* portions of the world are adversely affected. The suffering caused by this diminution of light should not be underestimated (cf. Rev.16:10-11).

The administrators of these first four trumpet judgments are the four angels of Revelation 7:1-3, “to whom it had been given to harm *the earth* and *the sea*”.⁵³ For all four of the above judgments are targeted directly at either “the earth” (i.e., land), or at “the sea” (i.e., the waters of the earth), or, in the case of the fourth judgment, both (i.e., deprivation of light affects all living things). In this they are different from the last three trumpet judgments where, rather than the earth and the sea, *human beings* are directly targeted as the objects of the judgments, and human suffering and death the main rather than merely the ancillary result. Of further significance is the fact that the last three trumpet judgments, while decreed by God, are carried out by demonic forces.⁵⁴ This is a further, clear indication of the progressive intensification of these judgments. Indeed, these final trumpet judgments are so much more severe in nature than the preceding four that they are given the name “the three woes” (compare Rev.8:13 with 9:12; 11:14; 12:12).

- Trumpet #5: The First Woe: Demon Harassment: The entire unbelieving population of the earth is affected.
- Trumpet #6: The Second Woe: Demon Destruction: An entire third of the world's population is killed.
- Trumpet #7: The Third Woe: The Great Tribulation: The “third woe” is, as discussed above, synonymous with the Great Tribulation (cf. Rev.12:12). While exact numbers are

⁵³ In terms of their rank, these four angels are most likely “authorities” (Greek: *exousiai*, εξουσιαί), the next highest ranking of the elect angels after the archangels (who sound the trumpet blasts which set these subordinate angels to work). See The Satanic Rebellion: Part 4: “Satan’s World System”, section III.3.b.4, “Authorities”.

⁵⁴ See The Satanic Rebellion: Part 4: “Satan’s World System”, section III.5, “God’s employment of evil spirits”.

not provided, this three and one half year period will produce the most staggering loss of life in raw terms that has ever taken place (cf. Is.13:12). The slaughter that will take place at Armageddon alone boggles the mind (Rev.14:17-20; cf. Ezek.39:4-6; 39:11-20), and the bowl judgments of Revelation chapter 16 which precede it are clearly more dire in their effects than the trumpet judgments (which collectively claim the lives of over a third of the world's population). Finally, the fact that the Great Tribulation lasts for 42 months, exactly *seven times* as long as the sixth trumpet judgment which precedes, also does much to signal the incomparably more horrendous nature of this last judgment (cf. Matt.18:22). For as terrible as the first half of the Tribulation will be, in comparison to the Great Tribulation unleashed by the seventh trumpet it is only the "beginning of woes" (Matt.24:3-13).

4. The Effects of the Seven Trumpet Judgments on Believers: As believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, we rightly and prudently view the coming events of the Tribulation with sanctified concern. Though we are not fearful and are firm in our faith regarding our Lord's ability to deliver us from all threats, we are nonetheless perfectly justified in taking the warnings concerning the coming Tribulation to heart – indeed, we would be spiritually negligent if we did not. Scripture provides us with a very detailed version of these future events not for their entertainment value, but precisely so that we may take measures now to become spiritually prepared for the Tribulation when it comes – a salutary course of action even if it be God's will for us to be spared enduring the Tribulation proper (for as those who are "sharing in the sufferings of Christ", we shall certainly see our share of personal tribulations). One point in which we may have great confidence concerns these very judgments, the seven trumpet judgments (and the bowl judgments of Revelation 16 as well). For these judgments are just that, divine punishment upon the world of *unbelievers*, and especially upon those who are actively supportive of antichrist and his regime. These seven plagues are not, therefore, meant or intended to harm God's people. The Tribulation will be the most difficult time in history for believers to endure, but not because of either of the two sets of punitive judgments being considered here. Just as the 144,000 were sealed by God so as to be spared the plagues soon to be delivered by the four angels of Revelation 7:1-3, so we may have every confidence that not only are these judgments not meant for the people of God, but that we also shall be spared the worst of their effects.

In Revelation 9:4, only those who do not have the seal of God on their forehead are harmed by the scorpion-like sting of the demon army of Abaddon-Apollyon. By this we may understand that believers will not be subject to this plague. As we saw in our previous treatment of the 144,000 (in part 2B of this series), the seal of God "on the forehead" technically refers to special mark of authority given to that elite group. However, as we have also pointed out in that connection, all believers are sealed with the Holy Spirit of God (2Cor.1:21-22; Eph.1:13-14; 4:30), and scripture provides several close parallels of divine protection in similar circumstances, where God's people are protected even as God's enemies are judged. The most poignant and applicable of these are 1) the mark placed on the foreheads of the righteous in Jerusalem to protect them from the coming slaughter (Ezek.9:1-6); and 2) the Passover mark placed on the

doors of believers to protect them from the Destroyer who was to kill all the first-born of the Egyptians (Ex.12:7-13).

In regard to the first parallel in Ezekiel, all who do not have the mark are to be destroyed, but all who have the mark are to be spared. In this way, God makes a sharp distinction between those who “mourn” over the apostasy of the day and those who are complacent and participating in it. This sharp distinction between God’s friends and God’s foes is clearly the point in Revelation 9:4, and it is equally clear, given only two categories, that all believers fall into the category of being associated with the righteous 144,000 rather than with those who reject God.

As to the second parallel in Exodus, it is most instructive that the purpose of the mark on the door is “that *no* destructive plague may touch you when I strike Egypt” (Ex.12:13). And even in the absence of some similar mark, the Israelites were spared the negative effects of the nine plagues which preceded (cf. Ex.8:22; 9:4-6; 9:26; 10:23). In all His judging of Pharaoh and the resistant Egyptians, God is deliberately and purposefully “making a distinction” between them and His people (cf. Ex.8:23; 9:11; 10:6; 11:7), splitting the entire population of Egypt into two categories: those who are God’s people and those who are not (exactly as in Rev.9:4). Especially given the fact that the Exodus is a prophetic “type” of the Tribulation (consider the parallel between Pharaoh and his kingdom on the one hand and antichrist and his kingdom on the other), we should therefore see the reference in Revelation 9:4 to the “those with the mark of God on their forehead” as applicable to all believers generally and not restricted to the 144,000 exclusively (even though this special sealing applies only to them), for believers approve and support the ministry of the 144,000, whereas unbelievers reject and oppose them.

Similarly, in Revelation 9:20-21, those not killed by the six plagues still fail to repent of their godless deeds. Here, not even the 144,000 are mentioned, but we are clearly not meant to understand that for this reason they now fall into the category of “the rest of mankind” who continue in their blasphemous ways. Thus in Revelation 9:20-21 we see the same sharp distinction of the world into two discrete camps with no middle ground (a main theme and a main purpose of the Tribulation, as we have repeatedly pointed out). Without question, therefore, Revelation 9:4 is meant to reassure us that, as in the Exodus plagues, and as in the fall of Jerusalem, those who truly belong to God will be spared the judgment of God, even though the times may otherwise be exceptionally difficult to endure. We may have to pass through fire and water (Ps.66:12), but by God’s grace and through God’s mercy we shall do so, confident of being spared the righteous judgments which consume His enemies:

When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. Isaiah 43:2 NIV

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 (i.e., until the Tribulation is over). For behold, the Lord is about to come forth from His place in order

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.

Isaiah 26:20-21

What is true for all believers who are carefully following the Lord, however, may not be so easily vouchsafed for those who are falling into apostasy. As a time of sharp division and distinction between the people of God and the followers of the devil the Tribulation will be a period of little or no middle ground, and we must expect for all who do not fall into the protected category of faithful believers being considered here to fall instead into the unprotected category of those who suffer the effects of the judgments. The background for the quotes from Isaiah above, it should be recalled, is military defeat on a massive scale as a result of widespread apostasy (cf. 2Chron.28). The seven trumpet judgments likewise fall upon an evil, recalcitrant, and apostate world, with only the true and faithful followers of our Lord protected from their effects. We who have determined in our hearts to belong to the latter category and not to fall into the former need to be prepared for the world's reaction to these events as well. Just as with recent events in this country when all suggestions that attacks and disasters might have something to do with divine judgment have been met with blind (and godless) outrage, so we may expect the world to be completely unresponsive to these seven trumpet judgments, unrepentantly finding no fault with its evil and apostasy. Indeed, Revelation 9:20-21 tells us exactly that. But we faithful followers of Jesus Christ will be protected from these things, and, just as importantly, we may have complete confidence that the difficult times which are about to befall this world are definitely not of our making. Quite the contrary. These judgments and all the divine judgments of the Tribulation are actually *for the benefit* of believers (as will be even more obvious in our treatment of the bowl judgments, specific divine punishment upon the unbelieving world for their persecution of the true Church; cf. Rev.16), and so we should be joyful in the face of them (Ps.97:8; Rev.16:5-6; cf. Ps.48:11; Rev.8:3-5; 18:6-7). When presented with these events, therefore, we believers need to remember that they are signs that the return of the Lord and our ultimate deliverance is drawing nearer, encouraging one another to hold onto our faith solid and strong until that glorious day.

And there will be signs in the sun and the moon and the stars, and on the earth there will be [great] distress among the nations [who will be greatly] bewildered by the roaring of the sea and [its massive] waves, [and] men will lose heart out of fear and expectation of what is about to come upon the inhabited world. For the luminaries of the heavens will be [powerfully] shaken. And then you will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and much glory. When these things begin to happen, stand up and raise up your heads, because your redemption is near. Look at the fig tree and all its leaves. When they have already come out [like this], you can see for yourselves by examining it that summer is near. So also when you see that all things have come to pass, know that the Kingdom of God is near. Luke 21:25-31

Strengthen the feeble hands, steady the knees that give way; say to those with fearful hearts, "Be strong, do not fear; your God will come, He will come with vengeance; with divine retribution He will come to save you." Isaiah 35:3-4 NIV

1. Vegetation Stricken (8:6-7)

Revelation 8:6-7:

(6) And the seven angels with the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound [their trumpets]. (7) And the first [angel] sounded [his trumpet]. And fiery hail [of meteorites] mixed with blood appeared and was cast to the earth. And the third part of the earth was scorched, and a third part of the trees were burned up, and all green grass was burned up.

As explained in figure #1, the first trumpet judgment will commence exactly half way through the first half of the Tribulation, and will last for one month. It will be remembered that at the very outset of the Tribulation, following the opening of the seventh seal, the world had received an unmistakable divine warning of its commencement in the form of unexplainable thunderous voices, an unprecedented display of lightning, and a worldwide earthquake (Rev.8:1-5). But far from taking warning, by the time of this first judgment nearly two years later, the world will have witnessed a series of developments which should have removed all doubt about the lateness of the hour. For at the mid-point of the Tribulation's first half . . .

- Antichrist will not only have gained power in his own country, "Babylon", but will be well on his way to establishing his kingdom, "revived Rome".
- The Great Apostasy will be well underway.
- Antichrist's false religion will be gaining ground worldwide in tandem with his world political movement.
- The ministry of 144,000 will be in full swing.
- The ministry of the two witnesses, Moses and Elijah, will be in full swing.
- The temple will have been rebuilt (in some form or other).
- The trend of unprecedented worldwide lawlessness will be painfully apparent.
- The trends of the four seals will be commencing within the beast's kingdom (with effects and ramifications far beyond).

All these events will be treated in their proper places, but for our purposes here it is sufficient to note that none of these developments will have done much to awaken the unbelieving world. All of our indications from the Bible are that by this time most hard hearts have grown harder and far too many soft hearts have grown hard, so that it is now high time for the warning judgments to begin.

The overall plan for human history, of which this first trumpet judgment is a part, is God's, and the delegated authority by which it is released is the Lamb's (as seen in His opening of the seals; cf. Jn.5:22-30). The agent of its administration, however, is one of the four angels of chapter seven whom we have identified above as an "authority", the rank directly below the archangels who sound these seven trumpets. As we have seen in the past, these high ranking angels undoubtedly have numerous subordinates (compare the existence of legions of elect angels in

Matt.26:53; cf. 2Kng.6:17), and, as their ability to restrain the world's winds implies (Rev.7:1), are endowed by God with exceptional powers to manipulate celestial phenomena (the province of these first four trumpet judgments).⁵⁵ In addition to this direct, unseen angelic agency working from the ultimate and delegated authority of God the Father and the Lamb, we must also mention here that there will be intermediate human agency involved in these judgments as well, for they will be proclaimed and visibly “unleashed” on the world at the word of the two witnesses, Moses and Elijah. This will be analogous to the way in which the plagues of the Exodus were mediated by Moses (Ex.7-11), and the judgments of his day were mediated by Elijah (the three and a half year drought in particular: 1Kng.17:1; Jas.5:17). In this connection, it is significant that drought and the turning of water into blood are given specific mention at Revelation 11:6 in company with “every kind of plague”, since these two plagues best characterize the historical ministries of these two men in their mediation of divine judgment (Rev.11:6): turning water into blood is the crucial third “sign” given to Moses by the Lord to validate his authority (Ex.4:9 with Rev.11:5-6), and Elijah is most famous in the respect for the three and half year drought that plagued the Northern Kingdom (cf. Jas.5:17 with Rev.11:5-6).⁵⁶

The Greek word for hail (*chalaza*, χαλαζα) is used for anything which falls from the sky (meteor showers included).⁵⁷ Given the close and deliberate analogy here between the “fiery sulphur [rocks]” which fell on Sodom and Gomorrah (where vegetation was also stricken: Gen.19:23-25), and the “hail-*stones* of fire” which will fall on the armies of the beast at Armageddon (where blood is also involved: Ezek.38:22), we must understand this hail in the same way, namely, as a shower of “meteorites” which descend to the earth in a dramatic and spectacular way (cf. Ps.11:6).⁵⁸

This judgment, however, will be unique, first of all because of the tremendously dire effects it will produce on a scale completely unprecedented in the memory of human experience. A full one third of the earth will be devastated by the fires these incendiary bodies produce, destroying

⁵⁵ See Bible Basics: Part 2A: Angelology, section II.9.3.4, “Authorities”.

⁵⁶ See section V. below.

⁵⁷ In contrast to this rocky hail, both the hail accompanying the earthquake following the seventh trumpet at the commencement of the Great Tribulation (Rev.11:19), and the hail accompanying the great earthquake as part of the seventh bowl judgment (Rev.16:21) will apparently be composed of ice.

⁵⁸ The Greek “*chalaza kai pyr*”, “hail and fire”, is what is known as a “hendiadys”, that is, a figure of speech whereby a single element (in this case, the flaming meteorites) is described in terms of its two prime characteristics individually in order to give each characteristic the maximum emphasis – just as in the case of the “fire and brimstone” rained on Sodom and Gomorrah, where we are to understand that the sulfur was aflame, not that the fire and the sulfur fragments were somehow separate.

thereby a third of the world's trees, and setting all of its verdant grasslands ablaze. Implied in the phrase "a third of the earth" is the massive accompanying damage that these worldwide fires must inevitably entail for man-made structures of every sort, and we are to understand that a considerable loss of human life will ensue from the extensive series of conflagrations that will be caused everywhere on earth to such a degree that an entire third of the planet's land masses will be so affected (distributed around the world and not localized in one particular area). Nevertheless, just as the Exodus generation and the faithful of Elijah's day were spared the direct effects of the divine judgments themselves (though they were not immune to all of the concomitant hardships these judgments occasioned), so we may assume on the basis of the example of God's protection of His people Israel during the Exodus judgments mediated by Moses (Ex.8:22; 9:4-6; 9:26; 10:23), and His preservation of the lives of those who did not bow the knee to Baal during the judgment upon Israel mediated by Elijah (1Kng.19:18; cf. 1Kng.18:1-4; Rom.11:2-4), that those who are truly His will likewise enjoy a measure of protection from this and the other trumpet judgments, despite the difficulties and widespread destruction they will produce (e.g., Moses and Aaron are not afflicted with boils in Ex.9:11).

The second aspect of this judgment which marks it out as unique and no mere freak of nature will be the intentional inclusion of blood within the meteorites responsible for these fires. It is important to note that, just as in the case of other "blood judgments" in Revelation (Rev.8:8; 11:6; 14:20; 16:3-6) and those of the Exodus (Ex.7:17-21; cf. Ps.105:29), the blood here described as being mixed with the "fiery hail" is literal blood (cf. Ezek.38:22). The inclusion of blood (no doubt contained within the fiery, hollow spheres, and visibly splattering upon impact) will constitute a clear message to the inhabitants of the earth that this is not merely an accidental though horrific meteorological phenomena, but rather is an unmistakable act of divine warning and judgment. For supernaturally occurring blood of this sort is a deliberate and well-known symbol of divine displeasure and impending wrath (Joel 2:31; Rev.6:10; 6:12; cf. Gen.9:4-6; Lev.17:1-16; Is.26:21; 2Pet.3:10). It is a warning against the shedding of innocent blood (which antichrist and his followers will ignore), and a threat of the judgment of blood from God Himself upon all who scorn the warning (which judgment will be carried out in full at Armageddon).

While believers will receive a large measure of divine protection during this plague, that does not mean that we will be spared of all its consequences (cf. Jer.45:1-5). The massive worldwide fires produced by this first trumpet judgment will cause many individual dwellings to be destroyed, and we cannot say for certain that our homes will be unaffected. What we can say for certain is that God will provide for our every need in spite of the horrendous nature of this judgment (Ps.37:25; Phil.4:19; Heb.13:5-6), and that through it He will surely work everything out for us for our good (Gen.50:20; Rom.8:28).

2. The Sea Stricken (8:8-9)

Revelation 8:8-9:

(8) And the second angel sounded [his trumpet]. And [something] like a huge mountain burning with fire was cast into the sea, and a third part of the sea became blood, (9) and a third part of the creatures in the sea died, [even of all] those possessing breath (i.e., fish and mammals). And a third part of the ships were destroyed.

The same agencies obtain in this second trumpet judgment as we saw operating in the first. The judgment is decreed by God, is part of the Revelation of Jesus Christ, is heralded by an archangel, administered by one of the four “powers” (i.e., the angels of the winds of Rev.7:1-3), and mediated by the two witnesses. While the first trumpet judgment was dramatic, the appearance in the heavens of such a monstrous portent and its subsequent descent to earth with such horrific results clearly marks this second judgment out as of greater import than the first. This fiery meteorite, mountainous in its size, will strike the earth’s seas and cause unheard of devastation in this second realm of operation (just as the first did on the land). While the many meteorites of the first trumpet judgment fell everywhere on earth, destroying a third of its vegetation in the process, this large, fiery meteorite’s impact will be centralized, striking in one particular area with its devastating effects then radiating outward. The first such effect will be the turning of an entire third of the world-sea into blood (also radiating out from the point of impact). As was the case when the Nile was turned to blood (Ex.7:14-24), natural processes will eventually dilute and dissipate this mass of concentrated contamination, but not until an entire third of the animate creatures in the sea are killed because of its noxious effects (as happened to the fish in the Nile as well: Ex.7:18; 7:21; Ps.105:29). The second devastating effect of this colossal meteorite strike will be the destruction of a third of the world’s ships, undoubtedly stemming from the tsunamis that travel outward from the point of impact and the severe vortex it will create which will swallow up everything in the vicinity. In addition to the significant loss of life which will occur aboard this large number of ships lost at sea, there will unquestionably be heavy casualties on many islands and coastlines from the astounding waves such an event must produce (cf. Lk.21:25-31), making this judgment almost certainly more fatal than the first. We also note that, as detailed in the time line given above, the effects of this judgment will be twice as long as those of the first (for this judgment’s effects will endure for two months). Finally, the blood accompanying it, in addition to being a warning sign as we saw above, now actually becomes a means to administering part of this second judgment.

While believers will also receive a large measure of divine protection during this plague, that does not mean that we will be spared of all its consequences either (cf. Jer.45:1-5). The devastation caused by this second trumpet judgment will have a massive negative economic impact (occasioned by the loss of a third of the world’s shipping, the dislocation to the food supply stemming from the loss of a third of the world’s fisheries, and the devastation of many of the world’s coastal areas). We cannot say for certain that our livelihoods and economic situations will be unaffected. What we can say for certain is that God will provide for our every need in spite of the grievous nature of this judgment (cf. Ps.37:25; Phil.4:19; Heb.13:5-6). We must with complete faith cast all our cares upon Him, secure in the absolute conviction that He does care for us (1Pet.5:7; cf. Ps.55:22), and put all worry for material things aside, confident in

the knowledge that our God knows our every need and will continue to supply them no matter what the historical circumstances may be (Matt.6:25-34).

3. Fresh Water Stricken (8:10-11)

Revelation 8:10-11:

(10) And the third angel sounded [his trumpet]. And an asteroid (lit., “a large star”) fell from the sky, burning like a torch, and it fell upon a third part of the rivers and upon the sources of [their] waters. (11) And the name of the asteroid was called “Absinth” (i.e., “Wormwood”). And the third part of the waters turned into absinth (i.e., “wormwood”). And many of the people [of the earth] died from these waters, because they had been made bitter.

The progression of falling objects, increasing in size through each judgment, continues here, taking us from the “hail” of the first trumpet judgment (i.e., meteorite fragments), to the “mountain” of the second (i.e., a very large, intact meteorite), and now to a “star” (i.e., a small asteroid). The Greek “large star” must be understood in terms of the times in which the book of Revelation was written. Clearly, should a “star” of whatever size in the sense in which we use the word today impact the earth, complete and immediate vaporization of the entire planet would result. But the Greek word *aster* (αστηρ), refers to any luminous heavenly body (whether meteoroids, asteroids, planets, or even stars). The “largeness” of the “star” is likewise not to be understood from an absolute point of view, but in comparison to the visible size of other luminous heavenly bodies: when this asteroid enters the atmosphere, it will be most impressive compared to anything else visible in the sky. That is true even in comparison to the mountainous meteorite of the second trumpet judgment, for this asteroid will not only be larger, but will also be brighter. It will not only be glowing red with fire [reddish light], but will emit extremely bright, white-hot light like a “lamp”.

Several things are implied by the fact that this asteroid falls upon a third of the world’s rivers and springs. First, instead of the sharp angle of descent probable in the case of the falling bodies of the first two trumpet judgments, it is likely that this asteroid will enter the earth’s atmosphere obliquely and in a gradual descent, thus heightening its worldwide visibility and producing a visual effect even more dramatic than was the case in the previous two judgments. Secondly, in order to achieve the outcome of contaminating a third of the world’s rivers and springs, it is further likely that this asteroid will gradually disintegrate on its extended journey through the earth’s atmosphere (possibly ending in a final explosion), with the result being that the asteroid’s substance will then be spread throughout the atmosphere in the form of noxious fallout. The fallout thus produced will be sufficient to contaminate a full one third of the world’s supply of fresh water, and this dire occurrence will have the effect of killing “many of the people of the earth”. Although it is not specified here that one third of the world’s population is destroyed (as is often wrongly assumed from this passage), this third trumpet judgment will nevertheless

produce more fatalities than the second. Given the increase in the number of deaths, the more lengthy nature of the judgment (lasting for three months according to our projection above), and the fact that this judgment will begin with an event even more dramatic than the other two (i.e., the widely visible brightness of the descending asteroid), we can clearly see the pattern of accelerating judgment continuing.

“Wormwood”, moreover, is not an angel (as is sometimes supposed), but merely the name given to this asteroid on account of the effects it produces. Although we need not understand this asteroid as being entirely composed of “wormwood”, we are meant to take the production of “wormwood” in the affected streams and springs as literal (just as in the case of the first trumpet judgment where the meteorite fragments contained literal blood, and also in the case of the second where the large meteorite produced literal blood). “Wormwood” or “absinth” is a bitter plant of the genus *Artemisia*, often used in a metaphorical sense in scripture on account of its exceptionally embittering properties (cf. Deut.29:18; Prov.5:4; Jer.8:14; 9:15; 23:15; Lam.3:15; 3:19; Amos 5:7; 6:12). It is true that the effect of the fallout this asteroid produces will, in any case, be to turn one third of the world’s fresh water so bitter that it cannot be drunk. However, as was true of the literal blood of the first two trumpet judgments, the presence of literal “wormwood” will be an unmistakable sign to all the inhabitants of the earth that this judgment has come about from the hand of God, and could not possibly have occurred in any other way. The symbolic nature of the wormwood is also important. Just as blood is a sign of coming divine retribution upon outrageous acts that require the blood of the perpetrators, so “wormwood” recalls the poison and the bitterness of idolatry, the turning away from God unto Satan in an overt, willful, and organized way, a key characteristic of the devil’s tribulational false religion as we have seen.

See to it that there not be among you any man or woman or family or tribe whose heart is turning away this day from the Lord your God so as to go and serve the gods of these nations. See to it that there not [spring up] among you [any such] root producing poison and wormwood (i.e., the bitterness caused by idolatry: cf. Heb.12:15).

Deuteronomy 29:18

As to the effects of this judgment, the text of Revelation 8:11 clearly states that many people will die “from the waters, *because they had been made bitter*”. Since wormwood itself is not poisonous, we must assume that the deaths indicated here come as a result of the extensive contamination which will render the waters so affected essentially undrinkable (in the same way that the plague of blood made the waters of the Nile undrinkable for the Egyptians: Ex.7:18; 7:21; Ps.105:29). Thus dehydration itself over this extended three month period, along with the concomitant weakening of overall health such extreme dehydration will produce, is the main proximate cause of the deaths predicted here. At Mara, during the Exodus, a similar bitterness of the waters prevented the Israelites from drinking them (Ex.15:22-26). In that case, God was testing His people’s hearts to see whether they would trust Him in temporary hardship, and we would certainly wish to do better in this drought of fresh water than they did and not grumble against the Lord. After all, as believers we can expect to survive this plague either because our own sources of water will be unaffected (i.e., the “third part” will not include our places of

residence just as the land of Goshen was consistently spared during the Exodus plagues; cf. Ex.7:14-24), or because of some as yet unspecified provision or purification of the water we need to stay alive (compare Moses' and Elisha's healing of bitter waters: Ex.15:25; 2Kng.2:19-22; and God's providence in the case of Elijah: 1Kng.17:1-10; 19:6). Just as God has never stinted in giving us the waters of eternal life in abundance (Rev.21:6; cf. Is.55:1; Jn.7:37-39; Rev.22:17), so we may have absolute confidence in Him that He will not withhold the water we need to sustain our physical lives, even in the midst of the most terrible drought the world has ever seen.

Some wandered in desert wastelands, finding no way to a city where they could settle. They were hungry and thirsty, and their lives ebbed away. Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble, and He delivered them in their distress. He led them by a straight way to a city where they could settle. Let them give thanks to the Lord for His unfailing love (lit., "mercy") and His wonderful deeds for men, for He satisfies the thirsty and fills the hungry with good things. Psalm 107:4-9 NIV

He turned the desert into pools of water and the parched ground into flowing springs; Psalm 107:35 NIV

4. The Heavenly Lights Stricken (8:12)

Revelation 8:12:

And the fourth angel sounded [his trumpet]. And the third part of the sun, and the third part of the moon, and the third part of the stars were stricken, so that the third part of them might be darkened, and so that the day might not shine forth a third part of its [light], and the night likewise.

As with the previous three judgments, the fourth trumpet judgment begins in the heavens (the province of the four angels of the winds: Rev.7:1), but affects the earth (which they were instructed not to harm before the sealing of the 144,000: Rev.7:2-3). In contrast to the previous three judgments, no mediate cause is given (i.e., no meteorite fragments, meteor, or asteroid), and no specific divine sign is rained upon the earth (i.e., no blood mixed with hail, no turning of waters to blood, no turning of waters to wormwood). The very fact of the lack of any appreciable cause for this pronounced dimming of all the heavenly lights, however, will again serve notice on the inhabitants of the world that this worldwide phenomenon can only be of divine origin (for there will be no adequate scientific explanation for this dramatic and unprecedented occurrence). Like the supernatural darkness of the Exodus (Ex.10:21-29; Josh.24:7; Ps.105:28; and cf. Ex.14:19-20), like the supernatural darkness that attended Christ's judgment on our behalf at the cross (Matt.27:45; Mk.15:33; Lk.23:44-45; cf. Ex.12:6; 29:39-41), and like the supernatural darkness that will precede the Second Advent (Is.5:30; 13:10; 60:2; Ezek.32:7-8; Joel 2:2; 2:10; 2:31; 3:15; Amos 8:9; Zeph.1:15; Zech.14:6-7; Matt.24:29; Mk.13:24-25; Lk.21:25; Rev.6:12; 16:10-11), such things are beyond human rationalization and will effectively communicate the

intended divine warning to the world to repent while there is still an opportunity to do so (cf. Rev.9:20-21).

The increased length of this judgment (four months long, according to our projection), its worldwide coverage (for there will be no place on earth which is unaffected by this plague), and the universal pain it produces (everyone will be affected by this diminution of light), all mark out this plague as worse than the three which precede it. We have no specific indication here of loss of life, but given the fact that there has been an acceleration of mortality up to this point, and that the next two plagues also result in progressively greater loss of life, we can assume that over this four month period as well many more will die than was the case in the previous trumpet judgment. Part of this death toll will no doubt be due to accidents, the harmful effects of the resulting cold (it will occur during the worst part of the winter in the northern hemisphere), loss of productivity, depression, and general negative health consequences.⁵⁹ Although it is easy to do as we read these things in the comfort of our homes before the fact, we should in no way underestimate the intense emotional and physical harm that such a drastic reduction in light will produce. In Revelation 16:10-11, a similar judgment of darkness is specifically said to produce pain of the most severe sort (cf. the “palpable” darkness of Ex.10:21). This judgment will indeed focus the attention of the unbelieving world, and it should not be lost on us (though through the hardness of their hearts it will largely be lost on them) that this darkness is meant to be a sign and a portent of divine judgment (cf. Gen.1:2; Ezek.32:3-10; Acts 13:11), and a foretaste of the horrors of the lake of fire, the fiery yet supernaturally dark place of judgment into which all those who do not repent of their evil will eventually be consigned (Matt.8:12; 22:13; 25:30).⁶⁰

In spite of the terrors this judgment holds for the unbelieving world, we have faith that God will provide for those who are faithful followers of His Son. Just as the Israelites had light in their homes while the Egyptians were visited with supernatural darkness (Ex.10:23b), so we are completely confident that we will have all the physical light we need. And not only that, but we are also completely confident that we will have abundant light in our hearts, an illuminated joy that comes from ever fixing our gaze upon Him who is the Light of the world, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (Jn.1:4-5; 1Jn.1:5). Therefore in this and in every plague that befalls the earth during those dark days, we must exercise godly patience and perseverance (Is.26:20-21), remembering that these portents reassure us that our Lord is near (Lk.21:25-31).

Even in darkness light dawns for the upright, for the gracious and compassionate and righteous man. Psalm 112:4 NIV

⁵⁹ It is often the case that widespread phenomena, even relatively mild ones, can be more fatal than even the most dramatic localized ones. To take but one well-known example, the influenza epidemic which followed the First World War killed considerably more people worldwide than died as combatants in the war itself.

⁶⁰ See The Satanic Rebellion: Part 2: “The Genesis Gap”, section II.2.d, “Darkness resulting from divine judgment”.

[4b. The Three Woes (8:13)]

Revelation 8:13:

And I saw and heard a solitary eagle flying in mid-heaven saying in a loud voice, “Woe, Woe, Woe to the inhabitants of the earth on account of the remaining proclamations of [each] trumpet [which] the three [remaining] angels are about to sound”.

The solemn warning given here (along with the dire consequences it presages) serves to distinguish and separate emphatically the next three judgments from the four which preceded them. As both a bird of prey and a carrion eater, the eagle is a natural symbol both for impending attack and for the deadly consequences of defeat. Therefore the eagle who calls out in a loud voice from the sky above is first a general portent of divine wrath and judgment as can be clearly seen from the following passage in Hosea (cf. Jer.48:40; Ezek.17:1-24; Hab.1:8):

Put the *trumpet* to your lips [to blow it] (i.e., as a sign of *warning*). For [it is] as if an *eagle* [is hovering] over the house of the Lord (i.e., as a sign of impending *judgment*). For they have transgressed against my covenant, and they have sinned against my teaching (lit., *torah*). Israel cries out to Me, “O my God, we know You!” But Israel has forsaken the good, and an enemy will pursue him. Hosea 8:1-2

Secondly, as we have seen in our study of the eagle-faced cherub (Rev.4:7; cf. Ezek.1:10; 10:14), the eagle is also a specific symbol of the Messiah soon to come, who likewise appears in mid-heaven, visible to every eye, when He returns to execute judgment upon all His enemies and claim His Kingdom at the Second Advent (Rev.1:7; cf. Ps.110; Matt.24:28; Lk.17:37). With its connotations of forbidding majesty and awe (Deut.28:49; Jer.48:40; 49:22; Ezek.17:3; 17:7; Dan.7:4; Hos.8:1; Hab.1:8), the eagle is an appropriate symbol for Christ’s majestic and awe-inspiring double victory, first at the cross (with its accompanying resurrection, ascension and session at the Father’s right hand), and ultimately at the Second Advent which is in view here (Matt.24:28; Lk.17:37).

The announcement of multiple tidings of disaster through the repetition of the word “woe” is not unprecedented in scripture (as we saw in our treatment of Jesus’ seven woes in Matt.23:13-39 in section II.2.a above; cf. also Is.5:8-30; 10:1-19; Zech.11:17). What all the passages cited have in common (including the very numerous use of single “woes” throughout the Bible) is that the word “woe” looks forward to the divine consequences of abandoning God (in the case of believers), or of opposing God (in the case of unbelievers). That is to say, the inspired use of “woe” in scripture is generally reserved for proclamations of impending judgment upon the objects of God’s wrath (and that is always so in the case of repeated “woes”). Therefore the first thing that believers who are contemplating these terrible judgments to come need to keep in mind is that their dire consequences are meant for unbelievers and apostates, not for those who are

keeping faith with and staying faithful to Jesus. Even though the effects of these last three trumpet judgments will be even more catastrophic in nature than the four which have come before, not a hair on the head of a single believer in Jesus Christ will fall to the ground without the express counsel and foreknowledge of our God (Lk.21:18). Specifically, the fifth and sixth trumpet judgments are administered by demons and will affect only unbelievers. Even during the seventh trumpet judgment, synonymous with the Great Tribulation as we have seen (cf. Rev.12:12), believers will continue to have complete protection from God's judgments upon the world (most perspicuously in the seven bowl judgments, including Christ's victorious return).

Jerusalem staggers, Judah is falling; their words and their deeds are against the Lord, defying His glorious presence. The look on their faces testifies against them; they parade their sin like Sodom; they do not hide it. **Woe** to them! They have brought disaster upon themselves. **Tell the righteous that it will be well with them**, for they will enjoy the fruit of their deeds. **Woe to the wicked!** Disaster is upon them! They will be paid back for what their hands have done. Isaiah 3:8-11 NIV

This is not to say, as we have already stressed, that for this reason believers will have an easy time of things during the Tribulation – far from it. The severe dislocation of human life and society from almost every point of view which will obtain during the Tribulation (and increase in severity with every passing day) cannot help but place tremendous pressures upon God's elect. This is in fact the point behind the name "the Tribulation" as we have seen in the first part of this series. Moreover, during the Great Tribulation there will be a worldwide persecution of the true Church of Jesus Christ such as has never occurred in the history of the world and never shall again thereafter. But even though it be our lot to suffer alienation, contempt, persecution, imprisonment, and even martyrdom (as many who are alive at that time most definitely shall), we must train ourselves ahead of time to take comfort in the fact that none of these things will come against us **from** God. Rather they will be **for** God as He uses us for His glory, demonstrating for all the world of men and angels to see the faith and faithfulness of those who are called by His Name, all those who have dedicated their lives to the Lamb whatever the cost, even should that entail the loss of their lives to witness on His behalf.

[But in contrast to those who receive the mark of the beast and worship him], the saints have perseverance, [even] those who in this way (i.e., by refusing to receive the mark or worship the beast) keep God's commandments and [retain] their faith in Jesus (viz., even though it may cost them their lives). Revelation 14:12

5. The First Woe: Demon Harassment (9:1-12)

Revelation 9:1-12:

(1) And the fifth angel sounded [his trumpet]. And I saw a star (i.e., an angel), which had descended from heaven to the earth. And the key to the shaft [which leads down] to the Abyss was given to him. (2) And he opened the shaft of the Abyss, and smoke came up from the shaft like smoke from a great oven. And the sun and the atmosphere were darkened by the smoke [which came forth] from the shaft. (3) And locusts came out of the smoke [and descended] onto the earth. And the power [to harm people] was given to them just like earthly scorpions have the power [to harm people]. (4) And it was told to them not to harm the earth's grass, or any green plant (lit., "thing"), or any tree, but only the people without the seal of God on their foreheads. (5) And they were given [the power] – not to kill these [people] – but [to bring it about] that they might be tormented [by this plague] over a five month period. And the torment these [locusts inflict] is like the torment [inflicted] by a scorpion when it stings a man. (6) And in those days people will seek death but will not find it, and will wish to die, but death will flee from them. (7) And the appearance of the locusts was similar to [miniature] horses made ready for battle (i.e., in full battle gear). And on their heads were something like crowns similar to gold, and their faces were like the faces of men. (8) And they had hair like women's hair (i.e., long), and their teeth were like lions' teeth. (9) And they had breastplates like [the] iron breastplates [men wear into battle]. And the sound of their wings was like the sound of many chariot horses charging into battle. (10) And they had tails [similar to those] of the scorpions they resemble. And it is in their tails that they have the power to harm people over [this] five month period. (11) They [also] have a king over them, the angel of the Abyss, whose name in Hebrew is "Abaddon" (i.e., "Destruction"), and in Greek he has the name "Apollyon" (i.e., "Destroyer"). (12) The first woe has passed. Behold, two woes are still coming after these things.

The trend which we have observed in all of the trumpet judgments thus far of intensification can also be seen in this fifth judgment. Although it is true that these locusts are prevented from actually delivering mortal wounds, they will afflict the *entire* world (save for believers), and inflict such pain over a five month period that, whenever stung, the affected individual will wish that he or she were dead. This plague will thus produce a long-lasting wave of terror among all the inhabitants of the world who do not acknowledge God. We should also not underestimate the panic and distress that the appearance of these locusts will produce, namely the intimidating clouds in which they will come, their fierce individual appearance, and the psychologically debilitating effect of the constant threat of being stung with such dire consequences.

It needs to be understood at the outset here that this woe, like the one following, is conducted through the agency of demons (i.e., fallen angels). God often makes use of evil human agents for His own divine ends (e.g., the chastisement of Israel by Assyria and Babylon, and the destruction of New Babylon by antichrist in Rev.17:17). This is true also in respect to His utilization of the devil and his lieutenants as is the case here (cf. Paul's handing over of offending believers to

Satan in 1Cor.5:5; 1Tim.1:20).⁶¹ It says much about the unapproachable wisdom of God and the blind folly that evil always induces that Satan and his followers are so easily and completely turned to accomplish God's bidding, failing to appreciate that the "opportunity" He offers in such cases is entirely counterproductive to their interests. But such is ever the case, for our God works *all things* together for good, and nothing that happens in this short span of human history (or has or shall) is unknown to Him or unplanned by Him. For God has so constructed His infinitely wise plan as to bring evil to contradict, refute, and condemn itself, while giving all of His creatures who are willing to embrace Him and His Son the gracious opportunity to do so.

The locusts here are controlled (i.e., possessed) by demons in the same way that the legion of demons cast out by our Lord took possession of the herd of swine at Gadara (Matt.8:28-34; Mk.5:1-17; Lk.8:26-37). The measure of control they are given over these locusts is clearly more complete than in that earlier case, enabling them to carry out God's judgment upon the unbelieving world. Even so, they must comply with the divine directive to restrict their depredations to that unbelieving population. As in the case of the beast's destruction of Babylon, an event that will be seen by antichrist as helpful to his cause and yet will actually be accomplishing the will of God, so also in this instance we should not rule out the possibility that Satan will see these two demon-administered plagues (i.e., both the fifth and sixth trumpet judgments) as positive steps toward the establishment of his own kingdom even though God is using them for righteous judgments which He has sovereignly determined. The willingness of this horde of fallen angels to afflict the very human beings who have likewise chosen to reject God shows irrefutably the complete lack of concern for humanity in general which characterizes Satan and his followers, in spite of the fact that the evil they embody and espouse often masquerades as humanism, civilization, and "good".

A number of factors point to the truth of the above interpretation which identifies this plague as being conducted by demon possessed locusts. Although it is not obvious from an English translation, the command not to harm believers or vegetation is not technically given to the locusts: the Greek word for locust (*akris*, ακρις) is feminine, but the "them" of verse four is masculine, and refers to the demons who possess these locusts (the same holds true for the forms found in verses five and seven). Secondly, in the incident of the swine herd at Gadara (Matt.8:28-34; Mk.5:1-17; Lk.8:26-37), scripture gives us a solid parallel of divine permission given to a large group of demons to enter and direct the bodies of physical creatures (although as we have pointed out above, in Revelation 9:1-12 the control is more complete so as to accomplish God's particular purpose here). Finally, as in the next trumpet judgment, this judgment is administered in a unique way. Although in both the fifth and sixth trumpet judgments the plague is initiated from above (by the "star" here, and by a command coming from the golden altar of incense in the following judgment), nevertheless in both of these cases the phenomena which are responsible for the effects of the judgments originate not from the heavens above (as was the case of the celestial phenomena of the first four trumpet judgments), but

⁶¹ See Bible Basics: Part 2A: Angelology, section II.9.7, "God's employment of evil spirits".

instead proceed from below the earth, and, to be precise, from the Abyss, namely, that compartment of Hades exclusively known as the place where certain demons now not presently at liberty have been incarcerated (cf. 1Pet.3:19-20; 2Pet.2:4-10; Jude 1:5-7; Rev.13:1; 20:1-3).⁶²

The “star” that has descended to the earth with a key which opens the shaft leading to the Abyss is (as in the case of the angel coming down from heaven with a key to everything having to do with the Abyss proper: Rev.20:1-3) an elect angel, a messenger and servant of God, and most likely an “authority” (as in the case of the four angels who administer the first four plagues).⁶³ And while the angel of Revelation 20:1-3 has a key which accesses the entire Abyss, this angel’s key unlocks its entry shaft only. The distinction here is important and its essential meaning can be seen in the fact that the angel of chapter twenty also has “a chain” with which he locks away the devil within the Abyss. Thus that second key to the Abyss proper (as opposed to only its entryway) includes not only the power to open and close the subterranean dungeon, but also to lock and unlock all the restraints therein. In contrast, the opening up of the entryway to the Abyss as we have it here only makes it possible for the incarcerated demons within *who are not otherwise enchained* to exit and participate in this plague. In addition to the future enchaining of the devil in Revelation 20, we also know from elsewhere in the Bible that there are certain other demons who are indeed not only incarcerated in the Abyss (a.k.a. Tartarus), but also bound with restraints therein (Jude 1:6). These are the fallen angels who were involved in Satan’s attempt to fatally pollute the human race through the Nephilim (Gen.6:1-2).⁶⁴ And it will be that more heavily guarded group of demons who will be “released” or “loosed” (i.e., unchained) so as to effect the *sixth* trumpet judgment. On the other hand, the demons involved here in the prosecution of the fifth trumpet judgment are fallen angels who have for other reasons and at other times been imprisoned (but not otherwise bound). The legion of demons cast out by our Lord at Gadara begged Him not to confine them in the Abyss (Lk.8:31), so that we may conclude from this incident that fallen angels who violate the restrictions God has placed upon them are indeed consigned to this subterranean prison. Judging from the enormous number of locusts possessed by them in this plague (enough to afflict the entire earth), and the correspondingly large demon army necessary to possess them, we can say for certain that these violations must have been a relatively common thing throughout human history (a fact which in and of itself should impress upon us the magnitude and the significance of the unseen conflict that rages around us between the forces of Satan and the elect angels of our God).

⁶² See Part 2: “The Genesis Gap”, section II.b, “The Sea as a Sign of Divine Judgment”. See also The Coming Tribulation: Part 2B: “The Heavenly Prelude to the Tribulation”, section I under “The Sea”.

⁶³ On angels as stars, compare Is.40:26 with Lk.2:13.

⁶⁴ See The Satanic Rebellion: Part 5: “Judgment, Restoration and Replacement”, section III.1, “Satan’s antediluvian attack on the purity of the human line (the Nephilim)”.

The locusts described here are not mere symbols for an unseen divine agency (as is the “hornet” which the Lord sent before the Israelites to rout their enemies: Ex.23:28; Deut.7:20; Josh.24:12).⁶⁵ They are real, and will be fully visible to the inhabitants of the earth (and therein lies a large measure of the terror they will produce). Nor do the locusts themselves come out of the Abyss, but rather they emerge from the cloud of smoke once it has already exited from the Abyss.⁶⁶ They will be tangible, material, earthly creatures even though there is as yet nothing like them on earth. What is being described here is different from other instances of God’s use of insects already extant and summoned for some divine purpose (e.g., the flies and locusts of Ex.8:20-32 and 10:1-20, or the flies and bees of Is.7:18). These locusts will be miraculously produced by divine agency in the same way that the Lord brought forth swarms of gnats from the dust of Egypt (Ex.8:16-19). That was a miracle which the talented court magicians of Pharaoh were not able to reproduce, and which they testified to as “the finger of God” at work (Ex.8:19). We have already seen that the first three trumpet judgments will be accompanied by the supernatural production of natural substances (blood in the first two judgments and wormwood in the third). So while it is certainly true that the locusts described here are unique, both in terms of their appearance and in terms of their power to sting, they will nevertheless be literal, genuine locusts, created instantaneously by God for the purpose of inflicting this fifth plague. Just as the Lord caused gnats to spring forth from the dust of Egypt, so here He causes locusts to spring forth from the smoke which issues out of the shaft of the Abyss (Rev.9:3 does explicitly state that these locusts “came out of the smoke”).⁶⁷ The issuing forth of the smoke from the shaft of the Abyss clearly signals its opening and the potential for general upward egress in the manner of the smoke. We may therefore conclude that the demons also come forth with the smoke, and take possession of these supernaturally produced locusts from the instant of their creation.

The sting of the scorpion is notoriously painful so that it would be difficult to underestimate the intensity of the suffering which this plague will produce as these swarms of locust spread out to cover the entire earth. As painful as these stings will be, however, it must be pointed out that their effects will *not* last for five months. Rather, five months is the length of this judgment’s total duration. For that entire period, the population of the world will be afflicted by these swarms, and it stands to reason that many individuals will be stung more than once, with each

⁶⁵ The “hornet” is entirely metaphorical designed to provide a point of human appreciation for the divine demoralization God would produce as comparable to a plague of hornets. This is clear from the fact that the Angel of the Lord is really responsible for this effect in Exodus 23:23.

⁶⁶ The idea that the underworld (Hades-Torments for unbelievers, Tartarus-Abyss for fallen angels, and Abraham’s bosom-Paradise for believers) contains creatures of any other kind (apart from departed human beings and incarcerated demons) is erroneous and non-biblical.

⁶⁷ Clouds whether of water vapor, smoke or dust are all treated as similar phenomena in biblical usage and in the ancient world generally, making the parallel between the dust cloud of gnats and the smoke cloud of locust more precise than is immediately obvious to English readers.

instance bringing such torment that the sufferer would gladly choose death to gain relief (but will apparently be unable to take his or her own life due to incapacitation).

Revelation 9:4 states that only those who have “the seal of God on their foreheads” are exempted from the attacks of these locusts. This statement, however, must be interpreted in the light of verse twenty which seems at first glance to lump *all* those still alive in the aftermath of the first six trumpet judgments into the category of unbeliever, whereas we know for a fact that there will still be many believers alive on the earth at this time (both Jewish and gentile, some destined to fall in the Great Persecution, others destined to experience the living resurrection at the moment our Lord returns). Given that we have also seen that the sealing which all believers enjoy through the Holy Spirit is likewise a mark of divine protection (2Cor.1:21-22; Eph.1:13-14; 4:30; cf. Ezek.9:1-11; Jn.6:27; 1Pet. 1:1-2), we can be assured that all believers will likewise be spared the locusts’ sting just like the 144,000 to whom this phrase refers. As its name portends, the Tribulation will provide believers with more than enough trouble of our own, much of which will be uniquely ours, the satanic pressures to apostatize and the Great Persecution in particular. Therefore since the main purpose of these trumpet judgments is for warning the unbelieving world of the dire consequences of continued resistance to God, it more than stands to reason that all believers will be afforded the divine protection which is ascribed here to the 144,000 as those who preeminently carry God’s message during the first three and one half years.

To return to the locusts, they are also instructed not to harm any plant life. This is significant in that the stripping bare of all vegetation is usual locust behavior (a fact which makes the unique, supernatural origin of these locusts all the more evident). The choice of locusts as the visible perpetrators of these horrendous stings is, however, no accident. Locusts fly (unlike scorpions), making them all the more unavoidable and thus all the more fearsome. Locusts have been a common element in many biblical plagues (Ex.10:1-20; Deut.28:38; 2Chron.7:13; Joel 1:4-7; 2:1-10; 2:25; Amos 4:9; 7:1-3), making them a clear symbol of judgment. Finally, the behavior of locusts is reminiscent of an organized force as they swarm, advancing like an army and irresistibly covering everything in their path (cf. Judg.6:5; 7:12; Joel 1:4-7; 2:25; Nahum 3:15-16), making them a harbinger of the final conflict of Armageddon.

Blow a trumpet in Zion, and *raise the alarm* on my holy mountain. All the inhabitants of the earth are distressed, because the Day of the Lord is coming, because it is near at hand. A day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and deep gloom. An army great and mighty is [coming], spreading itself out over your mountains like the dawn. There has never been anything like it since the beginning of time and never will be again in latter times from generation to generation. Fire devours in front of them, and behind them flames are set ablaze. In front of them the land is like the garden of Eden, but behind them is a desolate desert and nothing escapes them. *Their appearance is like that of horses*, and they race forward just *like mounted cavalry*. Their clatter on the mountains is *like that of chariots*, like the sound of fire devouring chaff, like a mighty army arraying itself for battle. Before them the nations writhe in anguish and every face turns pale. They rush on like mighty men. Like men of war they storm the wall. They all keep their

ranks and all march straight ahead. They do not crowd each other. Each maintains his file. They throw themselves at the defenses. They do not falter. They charge into the city. They rush the wall. They go up into the houses. They enter into the windows like a thief. The earth trembles before them and the heavens quake. The sun and the moon grow dark and the stars contract their light. Joel 2:1-10

In this passage Joel is describing a contemporary divine judgment by means of a plague of literal locusts (cf. esp. Joel 1:4). However, the passage is also to be taken in both a near and far term prophetic sense, drawing on the locusts as a compelling analogy to the coming Assyrian invasion (a near-term divine judgment; cf. Amos 6:14 with 7:1), and to the army that will gather against the Lord at Jerusalem just prior to the Second Advent, a far-term divine judgment (cf. the very next verse, Joel 2:11; also cf. the “Day of the Lord” in v.1 above, and Joel 3:9-16).⁶⁸ Moreover, the similarities between this passage and the description of the demon-possessed locusts of Revelation 9:1-12 are difficult to ignore. In both cases, the locusts are a warning, and in both cases, they resemble horses and military formations. We must conclude, then, that just as the locusts of Joel’s day provided an analogy for the near term Assyrian invasion and the far distant Day of the Lord, so the locusts which John sees are meant to provide a preview by way of analogy to the coming assembly of the fearsome armies of the beast at Armageddon. This goes a long way toward explaining the extensive description we are given of these locusts in our context of Revelation chapter nine, both as to their terrifying appearance and their intimidating behavior. Indeed, the appearance of their bodies (like horses arrayed for battle), their humanoid faces, the gold crown-like apparatus on their heads (analogous to awe-inspiring insignia), their fang-like teeth (indicating fierceness; cf. Joel 1:6), their long hair (they are wild and barbaric), their iron breast-plates (military protective gear), and the awesome sound they make (like an army of chariots) all point to a very close and specific preview of the army prophesied to be mustered by antichrist at the end of the Tribulation.

Son of man, set your face against Gog (i.e., antichrist) of the land of Magog (i.e., Babylon, the home kingdom of the beast) [he who is] chief prince of Meshach and Tubhal (i.e., Revived Rome). Prophecy against him and say ‘Thus says the Lord God. Behold, I am against you, Gog, chief prince of Meshach and Tubhal. And I shall bring you back [here again] (i.e., to Armageddon). For I shall put my hooks in your jaw and make you come, [you] and your entire **army of horses and horsemen**, all of them fully arrayed [in battle gear] (i.e., both horses and horsemen; cf. Rev.9:7: where the locusts look like “horses made ready for battle”), a vast multitude, all of them with shields and bucklers and carrying swords For you will come from your place, from the far north, you and many peoples with you, **all of them riding horses**, a huge multitude and a vast army. And I will bring you up against my people Israel like a cloud covering the earth. At the end of days (i.e., in the last days, the Tribulation: cf. Is.2:2) it will come to pass that I will bring you against my land so that the nations may know Me (i.e.,

⁶⁸ See The Coming Tribulation: Part 1: “Introduction”, section IV.1.b, “The ‘Day of the Lord’ Paradigm”.

understand who I am) when I show forth my holiness in their sight by [destroying] you, O Gog'. Ezekiel 38:2-4; 15-16

A further indication that this judgment is meant to preview the beast's Armageddon campaign is to be found in the fact that the prince who commands this army of demon-possessed, supernaturally produced locusts is analogous to Gog-antichrist.⁶⁹ This is clear not only on the basis of the parallels discussed above, but also from his Greek name, Apollyon, meaning "Destroyer", a title which is not only descriptive of antichrist's career, but is also linked prophetically to the idea and vocabulary of destruction as one of the beast's salient characteristics (Is.14:20; Dan.8:24-25; 9:26; cf. Jer.51:25; 2Thes.2:10).⁷⁰

6. The Second Woe: Demon Destruction (9:13-19)

Revelation 9:13-19:

(13) And the sixth angel sounded [his trumpet]. And I heard a voice from the golden altar which is before God saying to the sixth angel with the trumpet, (14) "Release at the great river Euphrates the four angels who are in bonds [in the Abyss]". (15) And the four angels were released who had been kept from killing the third part of mankind until that very hour and month and year. (16) And the number of their mounted armies was two myriad myriads (i.e., 200 million) – I heard this [very] number. (17) And the appearance of the horses and those who rode upon them as I saw them was thus: [the riders] had body-armor of red, blue and yellow, and the heads of their horses were like lions' heads, and from [the horses'] mouths came forth fire and smoke and sulfur. (18) And the third part of mankind was killed by these three plagues, [that is] from the fire and the smoke and the sulfur which issued forth from [the horses'] mouths. (19) For the power of the horses [to kill] is in their mouths and in their tails. For their tails resemble snakes with heads, and with these they harm [people].

⁶⁹ While it is true that Abaddon-Apollyon is called a "king" here, it is probable that his rank in the hierarchy of fallen angels is that of "prince", the demon equivalent of archangel. The Hebrew word for this rank, *sar*, is translated at least once in the Septuagint as "king" or *basileus* (the Greek word in context here). Significantly, this commander is also called "*the angel* of the Abyss", though we know from our context and other passages (e.g., Jude 6 and 2Pet.2:4), that there are many angels in the Abyss. In the one other scripture where "angel" means more than just some generic angel, 1st Peter 3:22, the phrasing is indeed shorthand for "*arch*-angel". See Bible Basics: Part 2A: Angelology, section II.9.6.3, "Princes".

⁷⁰ The demon commander's Hebrew name, Abaddon, is similar in meaning to the Greek title, although this word technically refers to the place of destruction (i.e., "hell" or Sheol as at Job 26:6; Ps.88:11; Prov.15:11; 27:20; cf. Job 28:22; 31:12).

As we saw in the last installment of this series (and in section I.3 above), the golden altar (from which the voice proceeds which commands the release of this vast demon army) represents Jesus Christ in His glorified, resurrected state. We have already seen our Lord depicted as the Lamb who was slain; now we see Him again symbolically portrayed, but here as the glorious resurrected Son of Man around whom the martyrs of the Tribulation cluster (Rev.6:9). The golden altar of incense speaks of the validation and efficacy of all of our Lord's earthly work and of His complete victory during the First Advent. It is therefore most appropriate that this command to unleash the demon army should issue forth from this altar. For the depredations of this demon horde presage (in a manner very similar to what we saw in our treatment of the fifth trumpet judgment above) the Armageddon campaign wherein His victory of the Second Advent will be won. If the locusts resembling mounted cavalry foreshadowed antichrist's armies of Armageddon, so much the more is that true of these demon riders and their mounts (cf. Ezek.38:2-14). That this is so can especially be seen from the fact that this is the last divine judgment to occur before the commencement of the Great Tribulation proper (which is synonymous with the seventh trumpet judgment), the final period of history before Christ's return and His victory at Armageddon. But while the symbolism of this judgment is similar to that of the fifth trumpet, one critical difference which we should note at the outset is that the means of delivering this last pre-Great Tribulation judgment will be invisible. For unlike the visible locusts of the previous judgment, these demon armies will be imperceptible to the human eye; only the dire effects they produce will be visible.

This plague, prepared precisely for the very hour on which it will be launched, will last for the longest period of all of the first six trumpet judgments (i.e., six months), and will terminate in the Great Tribulation itself. Thus the trend toward intensification which we have noted throughout the trumpet judgments continues here, and is also manifest in the vast numbers of those who will afflict the inhabitants of the earth: although the number 200 million is often described as being merely a biblical way to represent an uncountable host, John's insistence that he "heard this very number" is a clear indication that we are to take it literally. The overwhelming number of human casualties (an entire third of those still alive at this point), and the very nature of this plague also emphasize this point of intensification. For these verses clearly describe fire, smoke and sulfur exploding out of nowhere to destroy the lives of their hapless targets in a terrifying fashion, and the very fact that the people of the earth will not be able to see the source as John does will tend to increase their despair and terror.

Although lacking the uniquely terrifying visible effects of fiery, smokey blasts of sulfur seen here, there are a number of scriptural parallels to plagues inflicted by unseen agents of destruction: 1) the Destroyer of the Exodus (Ex.12:23); 2) the plague which broke out against the people of Israel (Num.16:46); 3) the destroying angel who was stayed at the threshing floor of Araunah (2Sam.24:15-17); and 4) the band of destroying angels who slew Job's family (Job 1:12-19; cf. Ps.78:49). We should also note that in every one of the above examples, including this sixth trumpet judgment, we can clearly see our God setting limits to the destruction for the sake of His elect: 1) the Passover destroyer is stayed by the blood placed on the Israelites' doors (with the blood in the form of a cross symbolizing the sacrifice of Christ that has redeemed us

from death: Ex.12:22-23); 2) the plague that breaks out in Numbers chapter sixteen is stayed by the incense of Aaron's censer (with the sweet savor representing the acceptability of Christ's atonement on our behalf: Num.16:46-48); 3) the destroying angel responsible for administering the plague resulting from David's numbering of the people was stayed at the threshing floor of Araunah (the future place of the altar which represents the work of Christ on the cross for us all: 2Sam.24:18-25); and 4) Job and his wife were protected, and, in the end, blessed beyond measure (Job 42:7-17). In the case of the sixth trumpet judgment, the plague's parameters, while chilling, are yet very precise. This is true both in terms of duration (i.e., the six months preceding the Great Tribulation), and in terms of magnitude (i.e., one third of humanity, and no more). And we should remember that, like the Exodus plague of the first born, this judgment will not fall upon those who belong to Jesus Christ.

Scripture also offers examples of the similarly visible yet likewise supernatural fire in our context: 1) the fire of God called down upon the soldiers of Ahaziah by Elijah (2Kng.1:10-12; cf. Lk.9:51-56); 2) the fire called down by the two witnesses, Moses and Elijah, on their enemies (Rev.11:5); 3) "the fire of God" falling upon Job's flocks and herdsmen (Job 1:16); and 4) the satanically empowered fire called down by the beast's false prophet (Rev.13:13). The last two examples in particular are very close to what will transpire during the sixth trumpet judgment, with satanic forces given permission to produce such miraculous effects. All of this, however, will only serve to further the plan of God, just as our Lord made use of Pharaoh's free will to accomplish His own divine purposes:

Indeed, for this very reason I have raised you [Pharaoh] up, namely, to demonstrate my power to you and to proclaim my Name in all the earth. Exodus 9:16 (cf. Rom.9:17)

To return to the specifics of our context, there is a near universal misconception which holds that the four commanders and their demon legions mentioned here are currently "**bound** at the great river Euphrates". In fact, as is indicated from the translation given above, the prepositional phrase "at the great river Euphrates" gives the point of their release, not the place of their incarceration (i.e., it should be taken with the imperative *lyson*, not with the participle *dedemenous*). When we combine the context with what we know about the status of fallen angels not currently at liberty, the translation "**release** at the great river Euphrates" becomes by far the preferable one. Elsewhere in scripture it is always the Abyss (Tartarus) which is the place of demon incarceration (Is.14:9-20; 24:21-23; Lk.8:31; 1Pet.3:19-20; 2Pet.2:4; Jude 1:6; Rev.9:1-2; 9:11; 20:1-3; 20:13-14). During the previous trumpet judgment, certain demons were allowed to exit the Abyss, but these were released merely by opening the entrance shaft (i.e., they were "in jail", but not in manacles: Rev.9:1-3). We may compare Paul and Silas jailed at Philippi in Acts 16:24, and Peter imprisoned in Acts 12:6. In both cases the apostles were restrained even within their cells as an extra measure of security (though that was not the case for all prisoners: cf. Acts 16:27). The fallen angels and their commanders in question here are those spoken of by Jude, demons of exceptional temerity who were involved in the Genesis chapter six violation of God's ground rules for the contest in which we now find ourselves, and who are now *tangibly* restrained in addition to being confined in the Abyss (cf. 1Pet.3:19-20; 2Pet.2:4-10):

And the angels who did not keep to their own realm but deserted their proper habitation (i.e., the demons of Genesis chapter six) He has imprisoned in the gloom below (i.e., in the Abyss) in everlasting *chains*, in anticipation of the judgment of that great day.

Jude 1:6

The Abyss has a point of entrance (the shaft of Rev.9:1), and this has now been unlocked (Rev.9:1-2; cf. Rev.20:1), and is not said to be re-locked until the return of our Lord (Rev.20:3). Now that the prison door stands open, for these demons and their generals who are still in chains below to come forth and fulfill their destructive purpose, it remains only to release these “bound” fallen angels from their individual bonds.⁷¹

The place of their release, “the great river Euphrates”, is significant. For just as Israel is the geographical center of the earth from the divine point of view (Ezek.5:5), so the Euphrates, which runs through the heart of the Babylonian kingdom, has ever been the geographical center of satanic opposition. This fact is most notable in Nimrod’s plot to enslave the entire human race to demon worship at the tower of Babel,⁷² and in the symbolic designation of antichrist’s tribulational core kingdom as “Babylon”, the future “universal” kingdom which will make a similar attempt to forcibly unite the entire human race for evil purposes (Rev.14:8; 17:18; 18:24; cf. Dan.2:42-43). It is therefore appropriately symbolic that it is from this significant geographical point that the four *sarim* and their armies spread out to plague the entire world.⁷³ At the same time, the association of antichrist’s Babylon with these demon hordes foreshadows its coming destruction, for in a few short years it will be nothing more than a desolate place where demons dwell (Rev.18:2). One other point should also be mentioned in regard to this location. The divine geographical center of the world, the land of Israel, is also the point at which the angels make their passage between earth and the third heaven (Gen.28:12). While the exact location of the shaft leading down to the Abyss is not mentioned in our context, it is possible that the invisible entrance to Tartarus is near this very location, namely, at the great river Euphrates, in relatively close proximity to the ramp that leads upward (making the choice of directions for all creatures all that much more symbolically clear).

As to the riders and their mounts, we have already pointed out that they will be invisible to the world of that future time (though it is given to John to see them in this prophecy and to describe them to us). 2nd Kings 6:11-17 gives us a close parallel of a large, supernatural army which is

⁷¹ The Greek verb *deo* (δεω), is commonly used in the New Testament to describe restraint of or by demonic forces (cf. Matt.12:29; Mk.3:27; 5:3-4; Lk.13:16; Rev.20:2).

⁷² See The Satanic Rebellion: Part 5: “Judgment, Restoration and Replacement”, section III.2, “Satan’s postdiluvian attack on human freedom (the Tower of Babel: Genesis 11:1-9)”.

⁷³ They are described as “*the* four angels”, a title which is shorthand for “archangel” or the demon equivalent, namely *sar* or “prince”. See Bible Basics: Part 2A: Angelology, section II.9.6.3, “Princes”.

real and yet invisible to human eyes. In that previous case, we are told that Elisha's servant could not see them at first, but that when his eyes were opened in response to Elisha's prayer "he saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha" (v.17; cf. Zech.1:8). The supernatural cavalry in both of these cases is invisible yet real. We have seen in the past that angelic beings often have accouterment which, while invisible to the human eye, is also real (the trumpets in our context, for instance). It is also true that angelic beings appear to be able to manifest themselves in a variety of ways for which we have no earthly frame of reference. For example, the four cherubs who attend the chariot throne of God have a four-fold visage which is apparently unique among angelic kind, and it is probable that they were not originally so endowed: Satan was the original cherub (Ezek.28:14-16), and was only replaced by the college of four after his fall. Furthermore, though angels are generally described as having a glorious appearance, so much so that John is moved to worship the one speaking with him at Revelation 22:8-9 (cf. Lk.2:9), they may also manifest themselves in an earthly form which approximates that of ordinary human beings (Gen.19:1-3; cf. Heb.13:2). And the armies of heaven which will accompany our Lord at his Second Advent (of which we shall be a part), are also described as riding on white horses (Rev.19:14).

Putting this information together, we find nothing in this description of the demon armies of the sixth trumpet judgment which is not consonant with and paralleled by scriptural descriptions elsewhere. For neither the fact that these demons take on a unique appearance (i.e., the three-fold color of their armor), nor the fact that they are mounted on these terrifying and extraordinary supernatural steeds falls outside of the realm of what is biblically possible and precedented. Scripture does not provide us with the specifics of either the limits or the possibilities of angelic self-modification of appearance, or of their ability to procure supernatural items (such as the horses in this context). What we can say is that these demons and their supernatural chargers are real, and that while they will be invisible, the fiery blasts of smoke and sulfur that issue forth seemingly from nowhere to kill a third of those still alive will be all too visible to the inhabitants of the earth. It is probable that the three colored body armor worn by the demon riders is meant to symbolize the threefold manifestation of this destructive plague, with red representing the flames, blue the smoke, and yellow the sulfur.

7. The Hardness of the Unrepentant (9:20-21)

Revelation 9:20-21:

(20) And the rest of mankind who were not killed by these plagues directed at them (i.e., the warning judgments of the Tribulation's first half) did not repent of the works of their hands so as not to worship demons and idols made of gold, silver, bronze, stone and wood, which are not able to see or hear or walk about, (21) nor did they repent of their murders nor their potions nor their sexually immoral acts nor their thefts.

We have already considered this passage in section II.3.a above (the unleashing of the “mystery of lawlessness”), pointing out that during the Tribulation God will, in the manner of His allowing Pharaoh to harden his heart beyond normal human parameters, allow the unbelieving world of that future time to indulge in idolatrous behavior beyond anything yet seen on earth. The growing pervasiveness and prevalence of idolatry in our own day should not be underestimated. For in addition to clearly pagan practices, it should also be remembered that 1) worship of any sort directed towards anyone but the true God our Father through His Son our true Lord Jesus Christ is idolatry, and 2) placing anything before Jesus in one’s heart (be it self, or money, or any number of desires and false priorities) is idolatry (cf. Eph.5:5; Col.3:5).

These two verses are a potent and chilling summary statement about the inherent negativity of the world’s unbelieving population whose hardness of heart has endured these six judgments and not been moved to repentance. In spite of God’s grace, in spite of their suffering, they have not and they will not take warning so as to turn away from evil and towards God. These verses make an important point for believers to understand vis-à-vis unbelievers and human free will in general. The determination and certainty with which so many will continue to flout God and his warnings shows beyond any doubt that everyone who chooses against God in this life does so from the considered decision of their own free will. In terms of our attitude as ambassadors of the good news of Jesus Christ, we should remain enthusiastic about sharing the gospel, but we should never forget that the decision lies in the heart of the person receiving the truth.

IV. The Angel and the Little Scroll: Revelation 10:1-11

Revelation 10:1-11:

(1) And I saw another powerful angel coming down from heaven with a cloud wrapped around him. And the hair of his head and his face were like the sun, and his legs were like pillars of fire. (2) And he had a little scroll in his hand which had been unrolled. And he set his right foot on the sea and his left [one] on the land. (3) And he cried out in a loud voice like a lion roaring. (4) And when he cried out, seven thunders gave forth their utterances. And I was about to write all that the seven thunders had spoken, when I heard a voice from heaven saying, “Seal up all that the seven thunders have spoken, and do not write these things down!” (5) And the angel whom I saw standing on the sea and on the land lifted his right hand to heaven (6) and swore to the One who lives forever and ever, the One who created heaven and everything in it and the earth and everything in it, that there would be no further delay (lit., “time”), (7) but that in the days of the seventh angel’s call, when he is about to blow his trumpet, the mystery of God will be concluded in the exact manner in which He has proclaimed its good news (lit. “gave its gospel”) to his servants and to his prophets. (8) And the voice which I heard from heaven was speaking to me again and saying, “Go and take the scroll which has been opened and is in the hand of the angel who has taken his stand on the sea and on the land.” (9) So I went over to the angel, telling him to give me the scroll. And he said to me, “Take it and eat it,

and it will make your stomach sour, but in your mouth it will be as sweet as honey.” (10) So I took the scroll from the hand of the angel and ate it. It was like sweet honey in my mouth, but my stomach was filled [past capacity]. (11) And they said to me, “You must prophesy further about many peoples and nations and languages and kings” (i.e., the course of human events during the Great Tribulation prior to the Second Advent).

The precise *timing* of these events is crucial to understanding the particular meaning of their symbolism. The “strong angel’s” descent to earth and proclamation come at the conclusion of the second woe, the last event of the Tribulation’s first half, and precede the beginning of the third woe, which is synonymous with the Great Tribulation (introduced by the seventh trumpet in Revelation 11:15-19). The oath sworn by this angel (to the effect that “no further delay” will occur before the entire mystery of God shall have been concluded) launches us immediately forward in time, past the entire Great Tribulation on whose threshold we now stand at this point in the narrative, to the point where our Lord returns in complete and total victory. The overall message of chapter ten is therefore one of great hope and exceptional encouragement for all believers. For even as the Great Tribulation is about to begin, we are given to understand unmistakably that God’s victory in Jesus Christ, and our victory in Him, is absolutely sure and certain on the other side of that unprecedented conflagration. With this in mind, the symbolism of chapter ten becomes clear.

1. The Powerful Angel is a Type of Christ: Just as in the case of the two angels who harvest the earth in Revelation chapter 14, this powerful angel represents Jesus Christ.⁷⁴ Here we see the angel descending from heaven to the earth, anticipating the Second Advent of our Lord, and all the features which John observes are indicative and symbolic of that glorious return:

- The cloud: Just as this angel is “wrapped in a cloud”, so our Lord will return with “clouds” of heavenly armies (of which we shall be a part: Matt.24:30; 26:64; Mk.13:26; 14:62; Lk.21:27; 1Thes.4:17; Rev.1:7; cf. 1Cor.15:51-52; Rev.19:14).
- His hair and face: This description is highly reminiscent of the appearance of our Lord to John in chapter one. In that context (Rev.1:14), His head and hair were unique for their bright whiteness; here they shine “like the sun” in a clear manifestation of His divine glory. At the transfiguration, another preview of our Savior’s glorious return, His face likewise “shone like the sun” (Matt.17:2).
- His legs: The fiery appearance of the angel’s legs here is also evocative of the “white-hot bronze” appearance of Jesus’ feet as He appeared to John in chapter one (Rev.1:15; cf. Rev.2:18).

⁷⁴ The fact that John makes a point of calling this angel “strong” or “powerful” (Greek *ischyros*, not *dynatos*), means that we should understand him to be of high rank. Since this description is distinct from that normally applied to archangels, we may assume that he is of the next highest classification, namely, that of “authority”. See Bible Basics: Part 2A: Angelology, section II.9.3.4, “Authorities”.

- His posture: Standing on the surface of the land (the realm of mankind: cf. Gen.1:26-28; Ps.115:16) and on the surface of the sea (the realm of the devil: cf. Rev.13:1) at one and the same time is a clear indication of our Lord's coming dominance of the entire earth. That is, the angel's posture here symbolizes Christ's imminent conquest of the entire world at the Second Advent (cf. Rev.11:15).
- The lion's roar: As the "Lion of Judah", this metaphor is clearly symbolic of our Lord (Rev.5:5; cf. Gen.49:9-12; Is.31:4).
- The scroll: This scroll *is* the book of Revelation (Rev.10:9-10; cf. Ezek.3:1-3), bitter to experience, but sweet to read (see our discussion in part 1 of this series, section I). Since Revelation is about the revealing of Jesus Christ to the world, the presence of this book or scroll of Revelation in the angel's hand is a clear sign that he is a type of Christ (cf. Rev.5:6-7).⁷⁵
- The completion of the mystery: As the Word of God, Jesus Christ is Himself the mystery, and, by application, the completion of His Body, the Church, is the completion of the "mystery of God".⁷⁶ This phrase thus refers to the resurrection to take place at the point of our Lord's return to the world at His Second Advent, an event which only Jesus is authorized to bring about on the basis of His victory at the cross (Lk.10:18; Jn.16:33; 19:30; Col.2:15; Rev.5:5).

2. The Oath is a Guarantee of Victory: We have it from the book of Hebrews that since God cannot lie, when He does make use of an oath it serves to lay stress upon the validity and reality of His words (Heb.6:13-18). The unalterable certainty of Jesus' coming victory is hereby divinely guaranteed. And the timing of this guarantee is very important, for here we have God assuring us that on the other side of the greatest period of tribulation the world has ever seen there will be complete and total victory over all of the forces of evil which will hold sway within that period, a guarantee given here *even before the Great Tribulation begins*. This is part of the "good news" or gospel of Jesus Christ, for it includes along with Jesus' conquest of the world our gathering together with Him (1Thes.4:13-17), our resurrection (1Cor.15:23), and our reward (Rev.11:18; 22:12). We are indeed saved *by* the power of the gospel (Rom.1:16-17), and we are saved *for* a glorious eternal future with the One we love so much. Indeed, the significance of the angel's descent from heaven is precisely to evoke the idea of the return of our Lord from heaven on that great day, with the touching of his feet to land and sea a sign of the coming complete control over all the earth that our Lord Jesus Christ will exercise throughout His millennial reign. The lifting up of the angel's hand is yet a further indication both of the divine authority he has been given to make this proclamation and of the unalterable certainty of the fulfillment of these words (cf. Deut.32:40).

⁷⁵ See The Coming Tribulation: Part 1: "Introduction", section I.2.c.

⁷⁶ See The Satanic Rebellion: Part 5: "Judgment, Restoration and Replacement", in section II.8.b, "The Church" and "the Mystery of Christ".

3. The Mystery is a Promise of Deliverance: The guarantee that the mystery of completing the Church (i.e., our resurrection as explained above) is certain of fulfillment in a very short time is truly a great encouragement. It is in fact “good news” since our resurrection and eternal reuniting with Jesus is a large part of the gospel (cf. verse seven in our context: “the mystery of God will be concluded in the exact manner in which He has proclaimed its *good news* to His servants and to His prophets”). Though we may be called upon to undergo the Great Tribulation, these words are a source of solace and comfort to us, because they make it plain to us that in God’s eyes that period of testing will be short indeed. This promise focuses our attention on the blessed **result** that will come out of that darkest of all historical periods. And it will be of critical importance for all believers who find themselves confronted with it to keep this perspective in mind. The time is short. If we will but endure a little while, there will be nothing but unimaginable joy on the other side.

For yet a little while, how short, how short [the wait], and He who is coming shall come, nor will He delay. “And [in the meantime] my righteous one shall live by his faith, but if he shrinks back, My heart takes no pleasure in him.” Hebrews 10:37-38 (cf. Habakkuk 2:3-4)

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 (i.e., until the Tribulation is over). Isaiah 26:20

4. The Scroll is a Sign of Fulfillment: The scroll or “little book” is, as we have said, the Book of Revelation. In the ancient world, of course, “books” were papyrus scrolls. Because of the limitations of that technology, an epistle of the size of Revelation would take up the greater part of the usable writing surface of such a scroll (hence we have the “book” of Revelation, etc.). Not only are the words which describe the final fulfillment of God’s plan in Jesus Christ and His revealing to the world written down as the crowning book of the Word of God forever, but they are also depicted as such in this vision, with the angel who symbolizes Jesus returning to earth holding these very words, this very scroll, in his hand. And it is “opened”, that is, unsealed and unrolled, meaning that its complete fulfillment is imminent. John is also given to eat the scroll, a clear demonstration of the unalterable fulfillment of the things written therein – we shall experience all the sweet blessing of their complete fulfillment (even if the actual experience of the Great Tribulation causes us indigestion).

5. The Thunders are a Prediction of Judgment: Since the seven thunders speak in response to the angel’s lion-like roar, and since the angel is meant to be seen as portraying Christ’s return to earth at the Second Advent, it is probable that the utterances which John is told not to report here correspond to proclamations given by our Lord in connection with His victorious return. Thunder often reflects the awesome majesty of God and presages divine judgment (cf. Ex.9:23-34; 19:16-25; 1Sam.2:10; 7:10; 12:17-18; Job 40:9; Ps.29:3-9; 77:18; Rev.4:5; 8:5; 11:19; 16:18; 19:6; and compare Mk.3:17 with Lk.9:54-55). Given the symbolism of this angel, therefore, the thunders most likely represent specific judgments associated with our Lord’s Second Advent.

You will experience visitation (i.e., the judgment of Armageddon) from the Lord of Hosts [Himself], with *thunder* and quaking [of the earth] and a loud voice, with tempest and whirlwind and devouring flames of fire. And the hordes of the nations mustering against Ariel (i.e., “Jerusalem”) will become like [just] a dream in the visions of the night, even all those who camp against her and her fortress and besiege her. Isaiah 29:6-7

Coming here as they do, just prior to the Great Tribulation but in anticipation of God’s overruling and undoing of everything the adversary undertakes during that terrible time, it would seem that the seven thunders must be giving specifics about the divine response (in the form of awe-inspiring judgments) to the abominations of Satan and his antichrist. What the thunders actually say was indeed perspicuous to John as we are told – he was only forbidden by a heavenly voice from writing down their precise content (v.4). This situation is paralleled in 2nd Corinthians 12:4, where Paul makes mention of things heard in heaven itself which cannot now be made known.⁷⁷ Nevertheless, we do know much about the heavenly scene from Revelation and elsewhere, even if we are not told all of the specifics. An additional reason for the “sealing up” of the voices of the thunders at this point is made clear in verse eleven of our context: John must still prophesy for us about the events of the Great Tribulation before we are given to see the judgments God will bring about at the *close* of that terrible period, so that it is not yet appropriate to discuss them. Extrapolating from other scriptures, we may postulate that the seven thunder-judgments are exactly those seven judgments recorded in prophecy to occur in close proximity to our Lord’s return (a subject which we, like John, shall take up in detail at the proper time):

1. Babylon destroyed (Rev.18).
2. The Armies of Armageddon destroyed (Rev.19:1-21).
3. The Beast and the False Prophet consigned to the lake of fire (Rev.19:20).
4. The Incarceration of Satan and his Demons (Rev.20:1-3).
5. Fire upon Magog and the Coastlands (Ezek.39:6; cf. Rev.20:9).
6. The Regathering and Purging of Israel (Ezek.20:34-38; cf. Rev.21-22).
7. The Judgment of the Church (Rom.2:16; 2Cor.5:10; cf. Rev.2:26-27; 3:21; 20:4-6).

V. The Two Witnesses: Revelation 11:1-14

We find the description of the two witnesses and their ministry placed here, just *after* the vision of the powerful angel in chapter ten and just *before* the sounding of the seventh trumpet in the second half of chapter eleven. It is inserted here for a reason. The ministry of the two witnesses covers the entire first half of the Tribulation, but is terminated by antichrist on the eve of the Great Tribulation. Since the termination of their ministry is included, this description could not be placed earlier without anticipating the end of Tribulation’s first half. Coming here as it does directly between the powerful angel’s prophecy of victory at the end of the Great Tribulation and the seventh trumpet’s commencing of those final three and one half years, the description of the

⁷⁷ See Swete’s The Apocalypse of St. John in loc.

two witnesses and their ministry serves to sum up the Tribulation's first half from the divine perspective, and to set the stage for the conflagration ahead. Through an examination of their ministry at this point we are given to see what has been happening on earth from the point of view of God's witness of truth which goes hand in hand with His judgment (grace and mercy even in the midst of judgment).

Revelation 11:1-2:

(1) And a reed was given to me like unto a measuring rod, [with the One who gave it to me] saying, "Get up and measure the temple of God and the altar, and [count] the worshipers within it[s precincts]. (2) But exclude this inner court and do not measure it. For it has been handed over to the gentiles, and they will trample the holy city for forty-two months" (i.e., during the Great Tribulation which will begin after the events of chapter eleven).

This begins the fulfillment of the command of Revelation 10:11 about John's imminent prophesying of tribulational events. The measurement of the temple and its altar (along with the count of the worshipers), the exclusion of the inner court (i.e., the so-called "priest's court" which contained the brazen altar),⁷⁸ and the prophecy of the forty-two months of gentile control of Jerusalem (which is clearly seen to overflow into the temple here) give us a short, effective synopsis of events "on the ground" during the Tribulation. For here on the one hand we see the rebuilt temple (it can be measured), the restored Jewish rites (obvious from the altar), and evidence of a significant Jewish revival of genuine faith (these are true worshipers of God so numerous it takes effort to count them). On the other hand, we are also told that in relatively short order this temple precinct will be taken over by unbelievers, and that Jerusalem itself will be under the control of hostile forces for three and a half years (at least to some degree). It is important to note at the outset that in this entire chapter only verse two (the prediction of forty-two months of gentile control) describes events which will take place during the Great Tribulation (by way of foreshadowing). Everything else in this chapter takes place during the Tribulation's first half. While we can see the beginning of the fulfillment of verse two in the later half of this chapter (as the two witnesses are opposed and slain by antichrist), actual control of Jerusalem and antichrist's defiling of the temple and its grounds will occur after the seventh trumpet sounds and the Great Tribulation begins (all of which will be covered in Part 4 of this series).

The Forty-Two Months: This period of time wherein the gentiles will "trample" Jerusalem is, as explained above, a reference to the Great Tribulation (which commences with the seventh

⁷⁸ As pointed out in the previous installment of this series, codex Sinaiticus correctly reads "inner" here (Greek *esothern*: εσοθεν). The *naos* or temple includes the innermost or priest's court with the altar which has been "given to the gentiles" who will trample the city – i.e, these gentiles should *not* be in this sacred place. The reading *exothern* is incorrect, and we do not have here a reference to the Herodian "court of the gentiles".

trumpet directly after the termination of the two-witness ministry discussed in chapter eleven). Our Lord makes a similar reference to the trampling of Jerusalem by gentiles in Luke 21:24, and tells us that this situation of gentile intrusion and conquest will continue “until the gentiles’ times have been fulfilled”, that is, until His Second Advent brings antichrist’s control of Israel and Jerusalem to a violent and immediate conclusion. It will be useful at this point to summarize the various scriptural designations for the forty-two month time period covered by the Great Tribulation:

- In Daniel 7:25, the saints of the Most High (i.e., believers) are said to be handed over into the power of the little horn (i.e., antichrist and the Great Persecution) for “a time, times, and half a time”, a biblical way of expressing the three and one half years of the Great Tribulation.⁷⁹
- In Daniel 9:27, “the people of the prince which is to come” (i.e., antichrist as the ruler of revived Rome) will make a treaty during the last “seven” and break it in the middle of the “seven”, that is, during the middle of the seven years at the outset of the Great Tribulation.
- In Daniel 12:7, the angel speaking with Daniel declares that it will be “a time, times, and half a time” before the persecutions stop and everything comes to an end, that is, the Great Tribulation will last three and one half years.
- In Revelation 11:2, our context, the gentiles (i.e., the army of antichrist) will afflict Jerusalem for 42 months, that is, during the entire three and a half year period of the Great Tribulation (albeit under varying circumstances).
- In Revelation 12:6, the woman Israel is said to be protected for 1,260 days, that is, during the whole 42 months of the Great Tribulation (expressed in standard 30 day months).
- In Revelation 12:14, the woman Israel is said to be protected for a time, times, and half a time, that is, during this same period of the Great Tribulation’s three and a half years.
- In Revelation 13:5, the unbridled reign of antichrist is said to last for 42 months, that is, for the duration of the Great Tribulation.

The one (often misunderstood) exception to the pattern above where all the references are to the Tribulation’s second half is the verse immediately following our context, Revelation 11:3. In

⁷⁹ On the biblical practice of using shorter units of time (such as hours, days, weeks, times) to express prophetically much longer divisions, see The Satanic Rebellion: Part 5: “Judgment, Restoration and Replacement”, section II.8, “Evidence for the ‘The Seven Days of Re-Creation’”, and The Coming Tribulation: Part 1: “Introduction”, section IV.1.b., “The ‘Day of the Lord’ Paradigm”.

that passage, although the 1,260 day period is identical in length to that of the final forty-two months of verse two, the time being described in Revelation 11:3 is that of the ministry of the two witnesses, an event which takes place during and is contemporaneous with the Tribulation's *first* half (i.e., *prior* to the Great Tribulation or second half of the seven year period of the Tribulation).

The Tribulational Temple: While the “forty-two months” of verse two refer to the Great Tribulation, the remainder of this section of chapter eleven (up until the seventh trumpet of verse fifteen) is a description of events which take place during the Tribulation's first half. We see here for the first time in the book of Revelation that while the unbelieving population of the earth has been undergoing a series of horrific judgments, a significant revival has been taking place in Israel. As part of this revival, the temple has been reconstructed, and John is here invited to take precise measurements of all its dimensions. The temple rite has also been reinstated as we may conclude from the presence of the altar which meets the Mosaic specifications (implied by the command to measure it). And a considerable number of genuine worshipers (large enough that they will have to be counted with some effort) is present paying homage to God, a clear indication that by this point the revival associated with the ministry of the 144,000 witnesses has born significant fruit.

The description of the measuring rod given to John is purposely reminiscent of the scene in Ezekiel chapter 40 and following. In that passage, Ezekiel is brought to the millennial Jerusalem and sees a “man whose appearance was like bronze” (i.e., a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ). Our Lord there holds a similar rod in His hands wherewith He likewise measures the millennial temple complex. It is no doubt for this reason that Revelation 11:1 has only the participle “saying” and does not identify the speaker, for, as we learn later in verse three, the speaker is also divine, and is none other than our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, whose servants the two witnesses are (i.e., they are “My servants”; cf. Matt.16:28 - 17:13). From this set of facts we may deduce that the rebuilding of the tribulational temple is divinely ordained and supervised, for it corresponds to divine specifications of measurement (and it is given to John by our Lord to see for himself that this is true).⁸⁰ The restoration of the temple rite must also therefore have come at God's behest (cf. the pattern of restoration recorded in Ezra chapter 3 and following), with the worshipers also legitimate followers of God, namely, those of Israel who have turned to Jesus Christ through the ministry of the 144,000 witnesses. The fact that these true, legitimate, and divinely ordained things (i.e., the temple, its rites, and the mass of worshipers) are here directly juxtaposed to and opposed by anti-God “gentiles” (i.e., antichrist and his followers) who will shortly defile the temple and thus of necessity interrupt its rites and scatter the worshipers is further evidence that the restored temple and worship of God therein has truly been of God, for God, and by God.

⁸⁰ The process and concept of such measurement with rods and plumb lines often involves the idea of employing a divine standard, often one which results in judgment when these standards are violated (cf. Job 38:5; Is.28:17; 34:11; Jer.31:39; Lam.2:8; Ezek.40:3; 47:3; Amos 7:7-9; Zech.1:16; 2:1; 4:10; cf. also 2Sam.8:2). Ezekiel 43 contains the procedures for its initial ceremonial cleansing.

Inasmuch as the Tribulation is an era of restoration jointly shared by Israel and the Church in which Israel once again claims the leadership role, it should come as no surprise that we find here the reinstatement of the temple rites in a rebuilt temple.⁸¹ Coming as it will after so long a hiatus, and coming as it will as a direct result of two messengers sent from God, there will be no confusion about the meaning of the renewed sacrifices: rather than shadows of things to come, it will be clearly understood that these are memorials to the already accomplished work of Christ (i.e., these rites will be different in purpose from the Mosaic sacrifices just as the millennial sacrifices will be; cf. Ezek.45:13-25). This principle of the “restoration of Israel” (that is, a turning of their hearts back to God and a reinstatement of appropriate worship; cf. Elijah’s words on Mt. Carmel: 1Ki.14:12-13), is, as we have already seen in the case of the ministry of the 144,000, very closely associated with the two witnesses and their ministry:

Remember the Law of *Moses*, My servant, which I commanded him on Horeb (i.e., Sinai) concerning all Israel, [with both its] statutes and judgments – behold, I am about to send you *Elijah* the prophet before the coming of the Day of Lord, [that] great and awesome [Day], so that he may *restore* [to God] the hearts of the fathers along with [their] children and the hearts of the children along with their fathers, lest I come and smite the land with complete devastation
Malachi 4:4-6

And behold, *Moses* and *Elijah* appeared and were talking with Him (v.3). And His disciples questioned Him, saying, “Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first (i.e., before the Kingdom)”. And He answered, saying, “Elijah is coming, and he will *restore all things*”.
Matthew 17:3; 17:10-11 (cf. Mk.9:4; 9:11-12)

So repent and turn back [to God] for the blotting out of your sins, so that *times of refreshment* may come from the Lord, and so that He may send to you the One acknowledged as the Christ [Messiah], [namely] Jesus, who must remain in heaven (lit., “whom heaven must receive”) until the times of *the restoration of all things* of which God has spoken through the mouths of His holy prophets from of old. For *Moses* said, “The Lord God will raise up for you from among your brothers a Prophet like me”.
Acts 3:19-22a

These passages closely connect the future spiritual restoration of Israel to the two witnesses and their ministry. Given that in our context of Revelation chapter eleven the two witnesses are also placed in close association with the rebuilt temple, the revived rites, and the reinvigorated

⁸¹ See The Coming Tribulation: Part 2B: “The Heavenly Prelude to the Tribulation”, section V, “The Sealing of the 144,000”, and part 5 of The Satanic Rebellion: Background to the Tribulation: “Judgment, Restoration and Replacement”, section II.8.b.i, “The Uniqueness of Israel”.

worship, we may conclude that the rebuilding of the temple and the restoration of the godly worship associated with it is indeed directed by these two heralds of the Kingdom.

We would certainly be hard pressed to choose two other Old Testament figures more suited to spiritual revival and the reestablishment of the orthodox worship of the Lord. Moses was sent to a people far removed from the Lord and mediated to them the covenant written by God Himself (Gal.3:19). Elijah was sent to a people long in the grasp of pagan idolatry, and presided over a great and dramatic spiritual victory on Mount Carmel (2Kng.18:16-46). Elijah's rebuilding of the altar of the Lord on Mount Carmel foreshadows his leading role in rebuilding the temple during the Tribulation (1Kng.18:30-32), and Moses, of course, oversaw the construction of the original tabernacle, its furniture, and the rites ordained by God to serve it (so that there could be no better person to oversee its restoration: Ex.25:40). We should also point out at this juncture that the time required for the reconstruction of the (relatively small) temple itself need not be prohibitively time consuming. The massive structure of Herod's design (which took so long to build: Jn.2:20) was in fact an elaboration of the original second temple rather than the temple proper. Chapters 40-43 of Ezekiel which describe Ezekiel's vision of the massive millennial temple complex are also consistent with this interpretation. The temple structure itself (Ezek.40:48-49) is relatively modest, and, as in the case of the second temple set in the midst of Herod's massive complex, constitutes only a small part of the overall design. It is thus entirely consistent with the scriptures which deal with this subject to posit that Moses and Elijah rebuild the temple proper, leaving its elaboration (as described in Ezekiel and elsewhere) for the millennial reign of our Lord as indicated by the following passages:⁸²

The entire flock of Kedar will be gathered for you. The rams of Nebaioth will serve you. They will be sacrificed as acceptable offerings on My altar. And as for My glorious house (i.e., the temple), ***I shall glorify it.*** Isaiah 60:7

The entire glory of Lebanon will come to you, the fir, the pine, and the cedar together, to beautify My holy place (i.e., the temple), the place of My feet. And ***I shall glorify it.***
Isaiah 60:13

(12) And He said to me, "Thus says the Lord of Hosts: Behold a Man – 'Branch' is His name (i.e., the Messiah; cf. Is.4:2; 11:1; 53:2; Zech.3:8). And He will branch out from His place and will build [up] the temple of the Lord. (13) For it is He who will build [up] the temple of the Lord. And He will raise up [its] glory. And He will sit and rule [as

⁸² Rather than providing parameters for its construction, Ezekiel 43:10-11 is meant to promote 1) the godly contemplation of the future temple before construction, and 2) the preservation of the temple and its complex once constructed.

King] upon His throne. And He will [also] be Priest upon His [kingly] throne. For there will be a [unity of] consultation between the two [offices].”⁸³
Zechariah 6:12-13

Behold, I am about to send [forth] My messenger, and *he will prepare* the way before Me. Then the Lord whom you are seeking will suddenly *come to His temple* (i.e., it is already built in “preparation” for that great day). Malachi 3:1

Moses and Elijah will possess all the divine authority necessary to complete this third and final temple in the correct, godly and sanctified fashion just as God has ordained it. All problems of time, placement, politics, and logistics will dissolve under the leadership of these two divinely appointed, divinely inspired, and divinely empowered heralds of the Kingdom of our coming Lord Jesus Christ.

Revelation 11:3-4:

(3) And I shall grant [life] to My two witnesses, and they shall prophesy dressed in sackcloth for 1,260 days (i.e., for the three and a half years which precede the above mentioned forty-two months). (4) These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands standing before the Lord of the earth.

As we have maintained in previous studies and suggested above, the two witnesses are none other than Moses and Elijah, brought back to life for this extraordinary ministry (albeit resuscitated rather than resurrected). Although not named here, the fact that they are called by the Lord “My two witnesses” is significant, for this mode of expression indicates that these are two definite and specific individuals who need not even be named.

1. The two olive trees and the two lampstands: The appearance of the two witnesses here in context with the reconstructed (third) temple also leads us to connect them to the detailed description of “the two anointed ones” of Zechariah chapter four who are prophetically associated with the second temple’s reconstruction. Zechariah’s description of these two throughout chapter four is critical to understanding the meaning of the symbolism of the olive trees and the lampstands. In Zechariah’s vision of a single, solid gold lampstand with seven lamps, there are two olive trees standing by the lampstand on the left and on the right (Zech.4:3). When he asks the meaning of this vision, Zechariah is first told “Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit” (Zech.4:6). This part of the answer explains not the details of the vision’s symbolism, but rather the overall principle that it will be God’s Spirit which empowers the rebuilding of the temple. Inasmuch as the second temple was not reconstructed without divine

⁸³ This was written after the second temple had already been begun (compare Zech.1:7 with Hag.1:15). And we know from Zechariah’s contemporary and associate, Haggai, that even the foundation of the temple without any superstructure could be referred to as the temple (Hag.2:3, “this house”; cf. Ezra 3:12).

help, and given that the two witnesses are a prophecy connected to a future rebuilding (i.e., there is no further mention of them in the rebuilding of the second temple), we may conclude that the rebuilding of the third temple seen in Revelation chapter eleven will also be accomplished by God's Spirit, and that its reconstruction will be overseen by the two witnesses of Zechariah four (who *are* mentioned as being present after its construction in Revelation chapter eleven). This is clearly the main reason for the Spirit's inclusion of the "two anointed" in Zechariah's vision. The vision thus has both a near and far term application, namely, to look to that future reconstruction by analogy in order to provide present encouragement, and thereby also to provide us with the prophecy of "two anointed ones" and their involvement in that future rebuilding (the same sort of analogy we have so often seen used in the case of the "Day of the Lord").

The name given to these two in Zechariah, generally translated "anointed ones", is actually "sons of oil". True, this is a Hebrew idiom (whereby "sons of" represents membership in a category), but the usual translation makes the idea *passive*, whereas it should be taken *actively*. The translation "anoint-*ing* ones" gives the correct sense, because, like the word "witness" used in Revelation, it indicates that they are *conduits* of God's power and God's light rather than merely being recipients. This is the point behind the symbolism in Zechariah 4:12 where the two olive trees pour out their oil into the lampstand's golden bowl. The lampstand has seven lamps which are "the seven eyes of the Lord" which range throughout the earth. These "eyes" are often mistaken to have a purely investigative purpose, but, just as the human eye can sparkle and reflect light, so the Hebrew word *'ayin* (אין) sometimes refers to an object's appearance as a reflector of light as well (Lev.13:5; 13:37; 13:55; Num.11:7; 22:5; 22:11; 1Sam.16:7; Ezek.1:4; 1:7; 1:16; 1:22; 1:27; 8:2; 10:9; Dan.10:6; cf. Prov.23:31). Similarly, these two witnesses will be the primary "reflectors" of the light of God's truth during the gathering darkness of the Tribulation.

Zechariah's seven lamps which are also seven eyes are identical in symbolism to the seven Spirits of Revelation chapters four (where lamps = spirits) and chapter five (where eyes = spirits). In all these cases, we have to do with the perfect seven-fold witness of the Holy Spirit, shedding forth God's light to illuminate the darkness of this world, making use of human agencies, but always in behalf of Him who is the true Light (and *the* Lampstand in the temple), our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ ("Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit": Zech.4:6).

And there [stood] burning before the throne seven lamps of fire, **which are** the seven spirits of God. Revelation 4:5 (cf. Rev.1:4; 3:1)

And I saw in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, a Lamb standing [there, looking] as if He had been slain, with seven horns and seven eyes **which are** the seven spirits of God sent out into the entire earth.
Revelation 5:6 (cf. Rev.1:4; 3:1)

In the context of Zechariah chapter four, the lampstand and its lights are clearly speaking of just such a witness of God's light in the world during the dark time to come (just as we saw the Church in its seven eras represented as a series of lampstands giving forth God's witness of light

to the world: Rev.1:20).⁸⁴ Empowering this tribulational witness of light are the “two anoint-*ing* ones”, the two witnesses, Moses and Elijah. During the dark days of the Tribulation, they and the ministry of the 144,000 directed by them, will constitute the major witness of God’s light in the world, just as in our own day that witness is provided by the Church. In this vein, it is important to stress again that it is Jesus who is *the* Light of the world, and that whether it be Israel in particular, or His Church in general (which, of course, is inextricable from true Israel; cf. Rom.11:11-24), or these two unique men of God and the ministry they will direct, we are all merely reflectors of that one true Light, and we all receive our ultimate empowerment from Him, from His Spirit.⁸⁵

“Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit” says the Lord of Hosts. Zechariah 4:6

2. The two pillars: In the portico or entrance porch of the first temple, Solomon placed two massive bronze pillars, one on the north side, and one on the south. These pillars, flanking the threshold of the temple like two giant guardians, would doubtless have been in the mind of anyone hearing Zechariah’s vision of the olive trees and the lampstands, especially had they lived long enough to have seen that first temple before its destruction (as some of the older people indeed had: Ezra 3:12; Hag.2:3; cf. Zech.4:10). Columns are, in any case, originally architectural representations of trees and the same was true of the lampstand (i.e., with its “flower-like cups, buds, blossoms, and branches”; cf. Ex.25:31-32). Moreover, when one considers that the lampstand within the holy place was not far removed from these two pillars (and that it was also designed to represent a tree: Ex.25:31-40; 37:17-24), the connection between it and the pillars on the one hand and the lampstand in Zechariah’s vision with its two olive trees on the other is hard to ignore. We may add to this picture that the unique and unparalleled verbal phrasing used in both Zechariah 4:14 and Revelation 11:4, “who are standing by/before the Lord of the earth”, suggests a permanent and stable positioning, exactly in the manner of pillars.

Virtually everything else in the temple had a symbolic and prophetic meaning (see part 2B under “The Earthly Tabernacle and Temple as a Type of the Heavenly Temple”), and the lampstand

⁸⁴ This is yet another clear indication that the final Church era of Laodicea has come to a close with the inception of the Tribulation: its “lampstand” of witness ministry has been replaced by the ministry of the two lampstands, the two anointing witnesses Moses and Elijah. See The Coming Tribulation: Part 2A: “The Seven Churches”, section 7, “Laodicea”.

⁸⁵ In Zechariah 4:12, instead of again being termed olive *trees*, the two are suddenly called olive “branches”, in emulation of the Branch who is Savior of us all (Is.4:2; 11:1; 53:2; Zech.3:8). The Hebrew word used there (*shebholeth*, *tlbw*; literally, “spike of grain”), however, is chosen to emphasize the subordination of these two to The Branch (cf. Zech.6:12-13).

itself is, as we have also seen, a type of our Lord Jesus Christ.⁸⁶ It is therefore more than likely that Solomon's naming of these two pillars is prophetic. Moreover, Revelation 3:12 provides a close parallel for connecting temple columns to individual believers: "The one who wins the victory I will make *a pillar* in the temple of My God and he shall never go out again". We believers will be, in resurrection, integral and irremovable parts of Christ's Body, just as these two "pillars" will "stand before the Lord" forever. Indeed, without just such a prophetic and symbolic purpose, for Solomon to have given names to these two inanimate columns of bronze would have been, at the very least, a puzzling thing to do. As it is, if we connect the two pillars with the other sets of pairs treated above, all of which we have already shown to refer to the same two individuals (i.e., the two olive trees, the two lampstands, the two anointing ones, and the two witnesses are all one and the same), then the names of the columns at the entrance to Solomon's temple will be seen to be significant as well.

The Hebrew word for pillar, *'amudh* (dvmi; viz., "a standing thing"), is derived and virtually indistinguishable from the verb used in Zechariah 4:14 of the anointing olive trees who are "*standing* by the Lord", making the connection between these pillars and our two witnesses even more certain. Just as the two witnesses, the anointing ones, the two lampstands, and the two olive trees all "stand [solidly like pillars] by/before the Lord of the earth", so these two pillars stood solidly on either side of the entrance to the first temple (which contained the lampstand). The one on the north side was named *Boaz*, while the one on the south was called *Jachin* (1Kng.7:21). *Jachin* is to be translated "He (i.e., the Lord) establishes", while *Boaz* means "strength in Him". Both of these names sum up the careers of the two witnesses Moses and Elijah respectively. *Jachin* is erected first and *Boaz* second (just as Moses' first earthly ministry preceded that of Elijah), and *Jachin* takes the first place of honor on the south (i.e., the "right hand" as the temple faced east with the ark or chariot throne oriented in that direction), while *Boaz* stood on the north, the second most honorable place. In a similar way, while Elijah's ministry was remarkable in every way, Moses' was superior (compare Paul's use of Moses' ministry as the closest parallel to that of the ministry of our Lord in Hebrews chapter three). Their ministries, after all, served somewhat different purposes. Moses was the Lord's instrument for effectively "establishing" the spiritual groundwork for Israel through his mediation of the Law ("He establishes"), while Elijah presided over a significant overture from the Lord for spiritual revival (renewed "strength in Him").⁸⁷ From the divine viewpoint, history has always

⁸⁶ See The Coming Tribulation: Part 2B: "The Heavenly Prelude to the Tribulation", section I.2.b, "The Golden Lampstand", and The Satanic Rebellion: Part 1: "Satan's Rebellion and Fall", section II.5.b, "The Illustration of the Tabernacle".

⁸⁷ The Hebrew preposition *'al* (li) used in Zechariah 4:14 may also be rendered "who stand *for* the Lord of all the earth", i.e., as surrogates, witnesses, forerunners and heralds of Christ. It may be, therefore, that we are also to understand Moses and Elijah as symbolically portraying the kingship (cf. Mic.6:4) and high priesthood (Jas.5:17-18) of Christ respectively, the two offices which He will combine into one as He rules as King from the temple, representing all mankind before God as the appointed Sovereign of the earth (cf. Zech.6:12-13).

been supported by these twin pillars of original establishment *of* the truth and restoration *to* the truth, with both pillars ever looking to Him who is the truth, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the “Lord of all the earth”. At His right and left hand these two witnesses stand as solidly as columns of bronze. To serve directly by the Lord’s side is clearly a preeminent honor. When the mother of James and John requested this privilege for her sons, our Lord’s response was “... to sit at my right or left is not for Me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared” (Mk.10:40; cf. Lk.14:8-11). For even though the twelve apostles of our Lord will indeed occupy unique positions (“judging the twelve tribes of Israel”, i.e., to be heads of the twelve divisions of the family of God: Matt.19:28; Lk.22:30), it is to Moses and Elijah that this most prestigious honor will fall. Being so close to our dear Lord for all eternity is indeed an exceptional and sublime reward, earned in the case of these two by exceptional earthly service on not one, but two occasions.

But I, [in contrast to the wicked,] will be like an olive tree flourishing in the house of My Lord, for I have trusted in the mercy of God forever and ever. Psalm 52:8

3. The restoration ministries: During the Tribulation, two main areas of restoration will need to be addressed for the ministry of Moses and Elijah and the 144,000 to be effective: 1) the temple and its rites will need to be restored as a focus for renewed Jewish worship; and 2) the hearts of a large number of their countrymen will need to be won back to their Lord and ours, Jesus Christ the only Messiah. As God’s instrument in founding, constructing and instituting the original tabernacle along with its statutes and ceremonies, no more authoritative person than Moses can be imagined. As God’s instrument in His most dramatic offer of spiritual revival in Israel’s history, one, we might add, which took place in spite of the most severe opposition from a pagan government which had wedded satanic worship to the governance of the state (reminiscent of antichrist and his false prophet), no more highly qualified person than Elijah can be found. Moreover, the future ministries of both of these great men of God in restoring and multiplying the remnant of Israel during the Tribulation’s first half is sufficiently documented in scripture.

“The Lord Your God will raise up from your midst, from among your brothers, *a Prophet like me* (i.e., the Lord Jesus Christ, to whom Moses will be analogous in type). You must give heed to Him, just as you requested from the Lord your God at Horeb (i.e., Sinai) on the day of your assembly [there], when you said, ‘May I not hear the voice of the Lord My God any longer, nor see this great fire lest I die!’ Then the Lord said to me, ‘They have done well in what they have said. I will raise up for them from the midst of their brothers *a Prophet like you*. And I will put My words in His mouth, and He will tell them everything I command Him. And it will come to pass that the person who does not listen to My words which He will speak in My Name, that I will require it of that person’ (i.e., hold him responsible).” Deuteronomy 18:15-19

Elijah’s future return is more generally accepted and understood because in Old Testament prophecy the antitype of our Lord is stressed rather than the type (i.e., the Messiah instead of Moses), but in the case of His herald, it is the type who is set in the forefront of prophecy rather

than the antitype (i.e., Elijah instead of John the baptist).⁸⁸ So while the passage above does have a general application for all of the true prophets of God (cf. the following verses 20-22), it is also clear from the emphasis it places upon a single prophet that we have to do here with a future coming of a single Person who would proclaim the Word in a way so preeminent that only Moses' ministry is worthy of comparison (cf. Lk.9:8; Jn.1:21; 1:25; 1:45; 6:14; 7:19; Heb.3:1-6). The sublime fulfillment of these verses is therefore in the first coming of our Savior (cf. Acts 3:22-26; 7:37). This fact, however, does not preclude a final application of the passage to Moses' return. For while the salvation of Israel has indeed been accomplished by our Lord's first advent, present and prophetic circumstances still require just such a preeminent prophet to resurrect the true worship of God, and, other than our Lord whose return must await the Tribulation's conclusion, no one is more "like Moses" than Moses himself. In John 1:25 we find both sets of types and antitypes linked where, speaking to the Messiah's herald, John the baptist, the type of Elijah, the Pharisee's disciples ask, "So why are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?". It is generally accepted that one half of this pair of types will precede Jesus' return (i.e., Elijah). Given the consistent linkage of the two in scripture, there is no more likely candidate to be identified as the second witness than Moses.

Remember the Law of Moses, My servant, which I commanded him on Horeb (i.e., Sinai) concerning all Israel, [with both its] ***statutes and judgments*** – behold, I am about to send you ***Elijah*** the prophet before the coming of the Day of Lord, [that] great and awesome [Day], so ***that he may restore [to God] the hearts*** of the fathers along with [their] children and the hearts of the children along with their fathers, lest I come and smite the land with complete devastation. Malachi 4:4-6

The first thing to note about the passage above, a fact usually overlooked in interpretation, is that Moses also figures prominently in this prophecy. The specific mention of Moses in connection with "remembering" the Law with all its "statutes and judgments" foreshadows the reinstatement of the temple rite in the reconstructed temple. "Remembering the Law", in fact, comes first, and is followed by the heart-restoration said to be mediated by Elijah. As in our other parallels, Moses is first, then Elijah, indicating that the rebuilding of the temple and the reinitiating of the sacrifices will be instrumental in and fundamental to the spiritual revival (Elijah's area of expertise) and the ministry of the 144,000. Incidentally, in both passages quoted above, Sinai is called by its alternative name, "Horeb", which means "devastation" in Hebrew. This appellation brings to mind the desolate spirituality of Israel which will obtain when the two witnesses begin their ministry, and the concomitant need for complete restoration not only in terms of spiritual response, but also of the main concrete features of the Law (namely, the rebuilding of the temple and the reconstitution of its rites, Moses' area of expertise; cf. also Ex.32-34).

⁸⁸ Simply put, "typology" is the use of an analogous substitute (a "type") to represent, explain or symbolize an exemplar or model (an "antitype"), as, for example, the brazen altar being a type of the cross (it both foreshadows it and explains its significance). See [The Coming Tribulation: Part 1: "Introduction"](#), section IV.1.d, "Typology and Sequence in Old Testament Prophecy".

So repent and turn back [to God] for the blotting out of your sins, so that *times of revival* may come from the Lord, and so that He may send to you the One acknowledged as the Christ [Messiah], [namely] Jesus, who must remain in heaven (lit., “whom heaven must receive”) until the *times of the restoration* of all things of which God has spoken through the mouths of His holy prophets from of old. For *Moses* said “The Lord Your God will raise up for you *a Prophet* like me”. Acts 3:19-22

In the context above, Peter is referring to our Lord Jesus Christ when he mentions the Prophet who was to come in order to explain to his contemporaries that Jesus was that Prophet in the most direct fulfillment of Moses’ prophecy. But it is significant that in this context of *future* revival that precedes our Lord’s return (i.e., “so that times of revival *may* come” and “Jesus, who must remain in heaven *until* the times of the restoration”), that Moses is mentioned, once again the inseparable type to our Lord’s antitype whenever the issue of the future revival and restoration of Israel comes up. Also present in the passage above is the dual focus of the two witnesses’ ministry, both revival (the spiritual aspect represented by Elijah) and restoration (the visible aspect represented by Moses). That both aspects of preparation for Jesus’ Second Advent should be so mentioned is not surprising, for it is through the persons of both of these two witnesses that God will prepare His people for His return.

For all the prophets and the Law prophesied until John [the baptist]. And if you are willing to accept [this], he himself (i.e., John) is [typical of] Elijah who is destined to come [in the future]. Matthew 11:13-14

And He answered and said, “Elijah *is* coming [in the future] and will [then] *restore* all things. And I tell you that Elijah has [also] already come [in true type] and they did not acknowledge him, but did to him such [terrible] things as they desired. In the same way the Son of Man is also going to suffer at their hands”. Matthew 17:11-12 (cf. Mk.9:12-13)

In both of the above passages, our Lord confirms to His contemporaries the still future coming of the actual Elijah. His true type, however, had already come (i.e., John the baptist), just as Moses’ true antitype was standing there among them (i.e., our Lord Himself, *the* Prophet about whom Moses spoke). The return of Elijah, the type of John, will be accompanied by the return of Moses, the type of Christ.

To help illustrate this point, a few words are in order here concerning some of the similarities between this dual set of types and antitypes.⁸⁹

⁸⁹ For more specifics on this point, see The Coming Tribulation: Part 2B: “The Heavenly Prelude to the Tribulation”, section V, “The Sealing of the 144,000” under “The Course of the Ministry of the 144,000”.

- The two witnesses minister for three and one half years (Rev.11:3), as did John and our Lord Jesus Christ.⁹⁰
- John ministered “in the spirit and power of Elijah”(Lk.1:17), while Christ spoke of Moses’ testimony about Himself (Jn.5:45-46; cf. Lk.24:44), and typicality to Himself (Jn.3:14).
- Elijah’s extensive exile in the wilderness (1Kng.17:1-9) provides the type for John’s ministry in the wilderness (Is.40:3-5), while Moses’ forty days on Mount Sinai (Ex.24:15-18) is a type of Jesus’ forty days in the wilderness of testing and communion with God (Matt.4:1-11).
- Elijah’s persecution by Jezebel and Ahab (1Kng.19) is typical of John’s persecution by Herod and execution at Herodias’ behest (Matt.14:1-12), while Moses’ disappearance and reappearance to His rebellious congregation (Ex.32:1) is typical of Christ’s death and resurrection appearances to His doubting disciples (Jn.20:9; 20:25).
- Both John and Jesus were martyred (although this word hardly does justice to our Lord’s unique sacrifice of Himself for the sins of the world), just as the two witnesses will be.
- Both Jesus and Moses are mediators of the New and Old Covenants respectively, wherein they represent man to God and God to man (Gal.3:19-20; 1Tim.2:5; Heb.8:6; 9:15; 12:24), while both John and Elijah called their countrymen to repent and adhere to these covenants (1Kng.18:21; Matt.3:1-2).
- Only Moses spoke with the Lord face to face (Ex.33:11), and only Christ has seen the Father (Jn.1:18), while both John and Elijah received special communication from our Lord Himself when they faltered in their faith (1Kng.19:9-18; Lk.7:18-28).

4. Miracles: Another point at which the ministries of the witnesses are clearly parallel to those of Moses and Elijah is their association with exceptional miracles (cf. Rev.11:6, where “blood” and “drought” are two of the most notable plagues actually accomplished at the hands of Moses and Elijah respectively). We have already drawn the parallel between the trumpet judgments and the ten plagues called down upon Egypt by the Lord through Moses’ agency. The ten Egyptian plagues, as we shall see below as well, also bear a strong resemblance to the plagues personally administered by the two witnesses later in chapter eleven. Indeed, there is very little in the Exodus which is not typically present in the Tribulation, which represents a sort of “sea” through which believers must pass to reach the safety of the other side (i.e., antichrist and Pharaoh, Egypt and Babylon, etc.).⁹¹ Besides Moses, no other Old Testament believer was responsible for administering more numerous and more impressive miracles than Elijah (e.g., the bottomless jars of oil and flour, the raising of the widow’s son, the heavenly fire which consumed the altar

⁹⁰ See The Satanic Rebellion: Part 5: “Judgment, Restoration and Replacement”, section II.9.a.2, “The Crucifixion of Christ”.

⁹¹ This analogy, a deliberate and scriptural one, will be explored in detail in part 7 of this series.

sacrifice, etc.).⁹² Apropos of our point here is that supernatural blood was the crucial third “sign” given to Moses by the Lord to validate his authority (Ex.4:9 with Rev.11:5-6) – *precisely the same supernaturally validating sign of the first two trumpet judgments* – and that by Elijah’s word and through his prayer no rain fell for three and one half years – *precisely the same period of the two witnesses’ ministry*, that is, the first half of the Tribulation (Lk.4:25; Jas.5:16-18; c. Rev.11:5-6).⁹³

5. The Transfiguration: One of the clearest proofs of the identity of the two witnesses is their appearance with our Lord at His transfiguration (Matt.16:28-17:13; Mk.9:1-13; Lk.9:27-36). That event is expressly stated to have been a prophetic foretaste of our Lord’s Second Advent and the coming of His kingdom (i.e., His *parousia*: 1Pet.1:16; cf. Matt.16:28; Mk.9:1; Lk.9:27). Given that the passages which deal with the transfiguration mention both Moses and Elijah, the literal Moses and Elijah, in connection with this preview of Christ’s return, it is natural and necessary to connect them with the two witnesses of Revelation chapter eleven who herald that very return. After the event, Jesus’ disciples asked Him only about Elijah and He responded in kind. But our Lord’s response, that Elijah would come “first” (i.e., before the Second Advent which His recent transfiguration had previewed), gave them (and give us) no reason to suppose that *both* of His famous interlocutors on the mountain would not do so. Moses’ presence on the mountain *with* Elijah thus serves to demonstrate that, following our Lord’s death and resurrection (also represented in this context: cf. respectively Lk.9:31 and Jesus’ glorified, resurrection-like appearance), *both* will precede His return (as the two witnesses to and heralds of that return).

6. The bodies of Moses and Elijah: Moses and Elijah have been physically dead for thousands of years. Their return in a real, tangible, physical way therefore requires some explanation. First of all, as Christians, we accept God’s ability to raise the dead, and we all expect to enjoy this blessing in the resurrection to come – that is our Christian hope (cf. 1Cor.15:12-19). The return of Moses and Elijah will not, however, be a case of *resurrection*, but of *resuscitation*. Although the latter is admittedly not a word used in scripture, scripture does clearly make this very distinction between those on the one hand who are brought back to this earthly life (and are again subject to physical death just like the rest of us), and those who, on the other hand, once raised in true resurrection, are no longer subject to death (1Cor.15:54).⁹⁴ The ruler’s daughter, the widow’s son, and Lazarus, all brought back by Jesus (Matt.9:18-26; Lk.7:11-17; Jn.11:1-44), Tabitha brought back by Peter (Acts 9:36-42), and the boy brought back by Paul (Acts 20:7-12),

⁹² Only Elisha comes close, and his miracles were performed through the granting of a double portion of *Elijah*’s special unction of the Spirit, before the granting of which Elisha did no miracles (2Kng.2:9-10; cf. Lk.1:17).

⁹³ The “third” year mentioned in 1st Kings 18:1 dates from Elijah’s stay in Zarephath, rather than from the beginning of the drought.

⁹⁴ For a full treatment of these issues, see Peter’s Epistles: lesson #20, “The Resurrection”.

the young boys brought back by Elijah and Elisha respectively (1Kng.17:17-24; 2Kng.4:8-37), the dead who rose following the crucifixion (Matt.27:52-53), and all of the other examples of this miracle whether recorded in the scriptures or not are without exception examples of what we are calling here “resuscitation” rather than “resurrection”, because in all of these cases the individuals later died again physically. The only exception to this so far in the working out of the plan of God is the true and genuine *resurrection* of the humanity of our Lord Jesus Christ. The next echelon of the resurrection will not take place until He returns to earth to claim all that is His, “those who are His at His coming” (i.e., the Bride of Christ: 1Cor.15:23). Then and only then will we receive our eternal bodies over which death no longer has any power (Rev.20:6). Since Moses and Elijah reappear physically *before* the Second Advent, and since they are in fact killed by antichrist at the end of their ministry, we may say of a certainty that what we have here is indeed a case of resuscitation rather than of resurrection.

In the cases of both Moses and Elijah, their departure from this life the first time was absolutely unique (as indeed it will also be the next time: Rev.11:11-12). Elijah’s departure in the heavenly chariot needs no great elaboration (2Kng.2:1-18). Elisha’s extensive search after the fact (at the request of the company of prophets) demonstrates that no physical trace of his body was left behind. In Moses’ case, we are told that he was “buried” in the valley opposite Beth Peor (Deut.34:5-6). However, we are also told in the same verse that “to this day no one knows where his grave is”. One would have thought that Moses’ grave would have been of no small interest for that as well as for all later generations, if it were but possible to know the location. Deuteronomy 34:6 actually attributes the burial to God Himself, and Jude clarifies the situation: the “burial” was only temporary (thus explaining why the site could not be known). Jude 1:9 explains that, like Elijah’s physical body, Moses’ body too was uniquely taken to heaven by angelic agency, an operation which was carried out by the archangel Michael and contested by the devil. Thus, the physical bodies of both of these two extraordinary servants of our Lord left earth in an extraordinary way (and thus kept from physical decay), precisely so that they might later return via resuscitation after so many years in an equally remarkable and unprecedented way.

7. Unfinished Business: One other significant factor common to both of these great believers is that their ministries were cut short. Moses did not enter the promised land and it was left for Joshua to settle the Israelites in Canaan. Elijah did not complete his ministry of revival and miraculous witness, but was succeeded in his work by Elisha. Neither man enjoyed great spiritual response from the congregation to whom each ministered so exceptionally, and both men were, in effect, “replaced” by God on account of momentary lapses in their otherwise magnificent service to the Lord (each of which was motivated in no small part by their reaction

to this lack of response).⁹⁵ In anger at the abuse heaped upon him by his stubborn charges, Moses violated God's specific instructions at Kadesh (i.e., Meribah: Num.20:1-13; Ps.95:8). In fear for his life from the pagan government which the people did not overturn after the miracles on Mount Carmel, Elijah temporarily abandoned his ministry and retreated to the desert (1Kng.19:1-4). In both cases, each was temporarily acting contrary to his own character (Moses, normally the most humble of men [cf. Num.12:3], reacting in arrogant anger, and Elijah, normally so courageous [cf. 1Kng.18:8-19], reacting in self-pity and fear). Both men recovered swiftly from what may seem to us understandable and perhaps even minor transgressions, but the termination of these great ministries as a result of their failings shows us an important biblical principle: to whom much has been given, much is expected (Lk.12:48). Perhaps only a handful of believers in the history of the world have attained anything like the spirituality of these two men, and even fewer have been entrusted with ministries of the magnitude they enjoyed. With such great privilege comes great responsibility. Scripture is very clear about the fact that both men's ministries were prematurely terminated (Num.20:12; Deut.1:37; 3:23-26; 32:48-52; 1Kng.19:15-18; 2Kng.2:9-10; Ps.106:32-33). It is more often the case than not that, for those who are otherwise committed and dedicated to serving Jesus Christ, improperly reacting to unexpected and unwelcome circumstances will produce either unrestrained fear or uncontrolled anger (in turn motivating un-Christian and self-destructive actions and behaviors). For whether one falls prey to sin out of either fear or anger, both emotions when untempered suggest a lack of faith in God's disposition of events. Fear suggests to us (falsely) that God will not protect us when we fall into sudden dangers (as in Elijah's case, although he was normally a man of exceptional zeal: 1Kng.19:10), while anger suggests to us (falsely) that God will not vindicate us when we fall victim to exceptional abuse (as in Moses' case, although he was normally a man of exceptional humility: Num.12:3).

In the return of Moses and Elijah, therefore, we once again see the awesome grace of God at work. For both men are going to be given a "second chance", so to speak (although, in comparative terms, the rewards they have already earned even without this new opportunity will be surpassed by few if any). This observation helps to explain the symbolism of the posture of the two witnesses (1Kng.18:15 [KJV]; Lk.23:33; Jn.19:18; cf. Ex.33:21; 1Kng.19:11). Along with the olive trees, lampstands, and columns, they are standing rather than sitting. Just as the Lamb stands up to receive the scroll from the Father's hand to begin the Tribulation which terminates with His glorious return (Rev.5:6; cf. Ps.110:1), so the standing posture of Moses and

⁹⁵ Incidentally, both men are "followed" by Christ-types, Moses by Joshua who brings the Israelites into the land (just as the Messiah will do at the Second Advent), and Elijah by Elisha who performs even more miracles than Elijah (very reminiscent of those accomplished by our Lord during His First Advent). The names Joshua and Elisha, moreover, are very close, meaning "The Lord saves" and "My God is salvation" respectively, with the name "Joshua" being the Hebrew name to which Jesus is the Greek equivalent.

Elijah in all of the citations and analogies given above indicates that their work is not yet done.⁹⁶ They will return to earth once more to set the capstone on two of the most spectacular performances in history of believers in the service of our Lord.

The main duties of Moses and Elijah during their forty-two month ministry have in the main been adumbrated above and covered in the previous installment of this series. They will

- 1) bring about the reconstruction of the temple (see above).
- 2) reconstitute the temple worship (see above).
- 3) direct the ministry of the 144,000 (see Part 2B of this series).
- 4) be involved in the earthly direction of the trumpet judgment plagues, as well many other similar plagues of more limited scope (see below).

In regard to their direction of the 144,000, it should be mentioned here that by their very celebrity Moses and Elijah will facilitate that ministry. By being the “lightning rods” of world ire at the plagues which God will bring upon the earth in those days, Moses and Elijah will deflect the attention of that enraged world from the 72,000 pairs of witnesses.⁹⁷ These two will be the target of the world’s wrath (Rev.11:7-10), so that persecution will not fall upon the 144,000 until Moses and Elijah have been called back to heaven for the last time (Rev.14:1-5). While they do minister, they will also be beacons of light in an ever darkening world, and particularly to their own countrymen, as they serve to rekindle the light of Israel on behalf of Him who is the Light of the world (compare Is.42:6; 49:6 with Jn.8:12; 9:5; 11:9).

One last similarity between the original ministries of both Moses and Elijah appropriate to emphasize here is the point made above that, despite their own extraordinary devotion to the Lord and the exceptional nature of their respective ministries, neither man experienced great response from those ministered to. In Moses’ case, only Joshua and Caleb proved faithful out of the entire congregation of Israel (cf. Num.26:65), and in Elijah’s case as well, the revival was limited at best and we are given no indication that it ever gained traction with the populace as a whole (witness the fact that the regime of Ahab and Jezebel did not come to an end even after the events on Mount Carmel: 1Kng.19:1-3). Both men’s failures, moreover, came as a direct result of their reaction to this lack of response (cf. Num.20:10-11; 1Kng.19:10). It is therefore a testimony to the mercy, grace and faithfulness of our Lord that both of these great believers will at last be allowed to experience a significant positive response to their efforts in ministry, as a large portion of Israel turns back to Jesus Christ through their work and that of their associates, the 144,000.

⁹⁶ See The Coming Tribulation: Part 2B: “The Heavenly Prelude to the Tribulation”, section II, “The Lamb and The Scroll”.

⁹⁷ Compare the similar effect that John the baptist had on behalf of our Lord’s ministry until he was executed by Herod: see The Satanic Rebellion: Part 5: “Judgment, Restoration and Replacement”, section II.9.3, “The Crucifixion of Christ”.

Revelation 11:5-6:

And if anyone wishes to harm them, fire proceeds out of their mouths and devours their enemies. And if anyone should wish to harm them, he must die in this way. These [two] have the power to close up the sky so that rain will not fall during the days of their prophecy, and they have power over the waters to turn them to blood and to strike the earth with every [sort of] plague as often as they wish.

This overtly miraculous and obviously divine protection extended to the two witnesses is beyond anything the world has yet witnessed. That is true even taking into account the previous earthly ministries of Moses and Elijah, wherein they experienced from God a level of miraculous shielding that was arguably also beyond what any other believers have ever known. For example, Moses' enemies were swallowed up by the earth (Num.16:28-33) and turned leprous in an instant (Num.12:1-15), while at least on one occasion Elijah's enemies were devoured by heavenly fire (2Kng.1:9-14). Here, however, we see fire coming out of the *very mouths of the two witnesses themselves*, destroying their enemies without any mediation from God (i.e., it does not come as the result of prayer, nor does it come from heaven, but directly from them as a result of their own will). This is a unique and unprecedented situation, for nowhere else in scripture are imperfect human beings, no matter how great they may be as believers, given similar powers. From these facts we may safely conclude that 1) the spirituality of the two in question here far exceeds what even most of the great believers of the Bible were ever capable of producing, for it would take an incalculable degree of humility, restraint, spiritual maturity, and a near complete harmony with the will of God *not* to abuse such power, and 2) the opposition these two will face from the devil and his forces, seen and unseen, will likewise be unprecedented to make such unique powers necessary. This combination of unparalleled power and extraordinary opposition makes it entirely necessary, therefore, for the two God has chosen for this special ministry to be exceptional believers. Only two great men of God of the caliber of Moses and Elijah could ever be equal to either aspect of this task (i.e., humility in power, the hallmark of Moses, and courage in the face of opposition, Elijah's key trait).

The second point to note here is the relationship of the two witnesses to the trumpet judgments. True enough, the "closing of the heavens", the "waters turned to blood" and the "plagues" described in context are not part of the trumpet judgments per se. But while it is not explicitly so stated, the very mention of these additional powers given to the two witnesses draws an association that no one who will experience those horrendous days to come will be likely to miss. That is to say, even were Moses and Elijah *not* given a manifest role in the trumpet judgments themselves, their power to produce very similar judgments during the exact same period of time would lead almost anyone to make such a connection. And, indeed, there is a connection, for God customarily assigns human beings the role of mediation in His overt judgments of the world (as in the case of many of the Old Testament prophets). Moses did not produce the ten plagues against Egypt, nor did Elijah call down the three and a half years of drought upon Israel by his own authority (cf. Jas.5:17-18). Nevertheless, God arranged both of those events in such a way

so as to make it clear that each of these prophets was the “point man”, for want of a better expression, in God’s administration of the respective judgments. Pharaoh and king Ahab certainly saw them as such (cf. Ex.8:8; 9:27-28; 12:31-32; 1Kng.18:17; cf. Jas.5:17-18). In most such cases, God provides an earthly focal point for the divine judgment in order to demonstrate and prove the true attitude of those being judged. Without Moses’ involvement in the ten plagues on Egypt, Pharaoh would have lacked an earthly object against which to vent his spleen. But by having such an object (i.e., Moses), we see the true nature of unbelief, and in the process of Pharaoh’s opposition to God manifested in his opposition to Moses, God is glorified quite against Pharaoh’s will (Ex.10:1-2). And had not the three and a half year drought been placed into Elijah’s hands, we would not be privy to the details of Ahab’s rebelliousness under the influence of his wife Jezebel (1Kng.17:1; cf. 1Kng.18:4). In the former case, we see a man defying God in an extraordinary way (Ex.9:16). In the later case, we see a man attempting to destroy God’s agent with all the resources at his command (cf. 1Kng.18:9-14). In both cases, God’s ability to overcome even the most powerful and vehement human opposition shines through, and, taken together, we have in the opposition to these two instances a preview of antichrist, whose hostility to God and to His two witnesses will combine the arrogance of Pharaoh with the implacability of Ahab. Antichrist will actively try to destroy Moses and Elijah, despite the folly of this undertaking, and will eventually succeed (but not until the time destined by God for their return to heaven).

Inasmuch as these two witnesses are God’s witnesses, will be carrying our Lord’s message, and will be specially empowered by Him, the world will be left in no doubt about their status as God’s own agents, and we should therefore understand this agency to extend to some visible administration of the trumpet judgments as well. In antichrist’s direct opposition to them, therefore, we will see set in the clearest relief the essence of human rejection of God’s will on the one hand, and of complete acceptance of that will on the other. By making the two witnesses the visible focal point for evil opposition, God will demonstrate the extent, the vehemence, and the implacability of that ingrained evil to a degree that would be impossible without the provision of just such a tangible, earthly target as Moses and Elijah will provide.

In addition to their connection to the trumpet judgments which will produce worldwide effects and reactions, the two witnesses are also said here to administer other similar judgments, plagues of a comparable nature though with lesser and more localized effects. These are said to be called down “as often as *they wish*”. The Greek phraseology is very similar to the preceding condition of their use of miraculous force “if anyone *should wish* to harm them”. In neither case is the “wishing” or “willing” arbitrary. Just as Moses and Elijah will only use deadly force against those who attempt to harm them directly (and thus intend to hamper or end their service to God prematurely), so we may be sure that their use of localized plagues will also serve a definite purpose. Specifically, just as the fire which will proceed from their mouths will be protective in nature, so we should conclude that the limited judgments mentioned here will also be protective, specifically, in defense of the ministries of their associates, the 144,000. In addition to the personal protections which we have already noted in regard to these 72,000 pairs of special witnesses, there will apparently be numerous occasions upon which various localities,

governments, and peoples will oppose their work. It will be Moses' and Elijah's task, among their other duties, to administer God's judgment upon every group that stands in the way of the completion of the 144,000's unique ministry.

There is also an important symbolic meaning to take away from the two examples of localized plagues mentioned here, namely "blood" and "drought". Both of these miraculous judgments, each being characteristic of the respective ministries of the two men as we have seen, are also connected to water, a literal substance which is necessary for physical life, and a symbol for the Word of God which is absolutely essential for spiritual life (Is.55:1; Jer.2:13; 17:13; Jn.3:5; 4:10-14; Eph.5:26; Rev.22:17; cf. Ps.36:8-9; Is.8:6-8; 1Cor.10:4; Tit.3:5; 1Pet.3:21). The judgment of drought symbolizes a taking away of the truth from those who have no desire for it, while the judgment of blood symbolizes the truth meant for blessing but willfully rejected now transformed into a means of cursing judicially imposed. Just as Ahab's attitude represented the general rejection by his countrymen of God's "water of truth" subsequently punished by the withholding of literal water, and just as Pharaoh's attitude represented the general disdain by the gentile world at large for God's "water of truth" subsequently punished by the transformation of literal water into undrinkable blood, so in the times of these two witnesses the world in general will continue to disregard and reject God's truth, and will be subsequently punished through the very water which represents it (cf. Rev.16:5-6).

Revelation 11:7-14:

And when they have completed their testimony, the beast who is going to come up out of the Abyss at that time will make war upon them and will defeat them and will kill them. And their bodies will [lie] in the square of the great city which in spiritual terms is called "Sodom" and "Egypt", where our Lord was crucified. And for three and a half days, people from [every] tribe and race and language and nation will gaze upon their bodies, and they will not allow their bodies to be placed in a tomb. And the inhabitants of the earth will rejoice over them and be glad and send gifts to one another, on the [false] grounds that these two prophets had tortured the inhabitants of the earth (i.e., this is how the unbelieving world will see it). And after the three and a half days, a living spirit from God entered into them, and they stood up on their feet. And a great fear fell upon those who were watching them [arise]. And they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, "Come up here!" And they went up into heaven in the cloud, and their enemies watched them [do so]. And at that hour a great earthquake occurred, and the tenth part of the city collapsed, and the [number of] persons killed in the earthquake was seven thousand. And the rest [of the population] became afraid and gave glory to the God of heaven. The second woe has passed. Behold! The third woe is coming quickly.

No harm will be allowed to come to the two witnesses, Moses and Elijah, until such time as their mission has been entirely completed. For three and a half years, their enemies, seen and unseen, have been unable to interfere with their efforts to evangelize Israel and restore the true worship of God in Jesus Christ. Now that their work is done, God will grant them one final honor, and a

double one at that. Not only will they die as martyrs for Jesus Christ, but they will also be revived an unprecedented second time and again taken up into heaven in a miraculous way.

The beast out of the Abyss: The beast mentioned here is, indeed, none other than antichrist.⁹⁸ The name “beast” brings to mind both the outrageous bestiality of his conduct and previous prophetic references to him (e.g., Dan.7:3-27; cf. Rev.13:1-3; 17:1-14). As the place of the dead, the mention of the Abyss here has a twofold meaning.⁹⁹ First, it refers to the resuscitation of the Roman empire in a new form (for that is essentially what the beast’s kingdom will be; Dan.7:7; 9:26; Rev.17:8-11). Second, it also refers to the origin of antichrist, the ruler of that kingdom (for the sea is often symbolic of the evil he represents and the evil one by whom he is spawned).¹⁰⁰

The war against Moses and Elijah: The Greek phraseology here, specifically the use of the words “war” (*polemos*) and “conquer” (*nikao*), strongly suggest that the beast’s elimination of Moses and Elijah will be far from an easy or instantaneous matter. It will be, as the context intimates, a genuine battle. The God-given ability of the two witnesses to unleash blasts of fire from their mouths proved an effective deterrent during the three and a half years of their ministry, and we may expect that, just as Elijah’s prayers were answered with the result that several large detachments of soldiers were similarly destroyed, so here as well a large number of antichrist’s henchmen will meet their doom. We are not told the precise means used by antichrist to overcome the two prophets, and it is possible that part of antichrist’s approach will be to “fight fire with fire”, making maximum use of the satanic power given to him and his key lieutenant, the false prophet (who likewise has a similar ability to bring fire down from the sky: Rev.13:13). However, we may safely say that no means available to antichrist would have been capable of removing Moses and Elijah from the scene had it not been the will of God for their ministry to conclude in this dramatic fashion:

Behold, if anyone does strive with you, it will not be from Me. Whoever strives with you will fall on account of you. I have created the smith, he who blows the coals into fire and sets his tools to the work, and I have created the destroyer to bring ruin. No weapon forged against you shall prosper. And you shall reprove every tongue that rises up to judge you. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and My vindication on their behalf, says the Lord. Isaiah 54:15-17

⁹⁸ Antichrist forms the main topic for part 3B of this series. Consequently, a detailed treatment of this subject has been reserved for the following installment.

⁹⁹ See The Satanic Rebellion: Part 2: “The Genesis Gap”, section II.3, “The Sea”.

¹⁰⁰ See The Satanic Rebellion: Part 2: “The Genesis Gap”, section II.3.e, “The Sea as the Point of Origin for the Antichrist”.

The naming of Jerusalem (without question the city in which our Lord was crucified) as “Sodom” and “Egypt” denotes the sad spiritual state of the majority of the population of Israel at the time of antichrist’s warring against Moses and Elijah. As the city notorious for placing earthly sensuality above all spiritual priorities, Sodom signifies the unwillingness of the greater part of the people to respond to God’s unprecedented ministry of grace in the persons of the two witnesses and the 144,000 (cf. Is.1:9-10; 3:9; Jer.23:14; 2Pet.2:6-8; Jude 1:7). While Sodom represents a disinterest in divine solutions, the mention of Egypt is a commentary on the people’s willingness to choose human solutions instead. Israel had been called *out* of Egypt (Hos.11:1), but it had been a tendency throughout antiquity for both the northern and southern kingdoms of Israel to rely upon Egypt for help and support when they were threatened by attack from the north, rather than to rely upon God (Is.30:1-7; 31:1; Ezek.29:6-7). As the two witnesses depart to the apparent satisfaction of the majority of their fellow countrymen, this doubly damning pair of appellations lets us know that even though many responded to the call to return to God through Jesus Christ, most in Israel will remain hard in spite of witnessing this series of unprecedented and miraculous events (including the double resuscitation of Moses and Elijah).

And [Abraham] said to them, “If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets (e.g., like Elijah), they will not be convinced if someone rises from the dead”. Luke 16:31

The three and a half days: As we have seen, days frequently represent longer periods of time in biblical symbolism.¹⁰¹ Here the three and a half days during which the bodies of Moses and Elijah will lie lifeless in the center of Jerusalem represent the three and a half years of spiritual desolation and persecution which are about to commence (i.e., the Great Tribulation). The two witnesses will be, in effect, precursors of the martyrs of the Great Persecution which is about to break out upon believers all over the world (with the 144,000 being the first to fall in it). The deaths of the two witnesses will serve to alert those faithful to Jesus Christ of that coming storm of unequalled tribulation and persecution.

For if they do [such] things when the tree is alive (cf. the “two olive trees”), what will happen when it is dead? Luke 23:31

The reviving of Moses and Elijah, on the other hand, will be a matter of great encouragement, reminding all God’s people of His complete power, even over death. For their resuscitation at the end of the three and a half days will symbolize the resurrection of all believers three and a half years from this point at the end of the Great Tribulation.¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ See The Satanic Rebellion: Part 5: “Judgment, Restoration and Replacement”, section II.8, “Evidence for the “The Seven Days of Re-Creation”.

¹⁰² See Peter’s Epistles: lesson #20, “The Resurrection”.

But each [will be resurrected] in his own echelon. Christ [is the] first-fruits. Next [will be] those belonging to Christ **at His coming**. 1st Corinthians 15:23

For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout of command, with the archangel's blast on the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ shall rise first, then we who are alive and remain will be snatched up together with them in clouds **to meet the Lord** in the air, and in this way we shall always be with the Lord.

1st Thessalonians 4:16-17

The deaths of Moses and Elijah will be met with great joy on the part of the majority of the earth's inhabitants. Rather than being grateful to God for His gracious warnings and turning to Him, the unbelieving world will be all too pleased to see these two great men of God destroyed. In this we see the results of the processes of hardening and polarization discussed at length earlier in this installment. The world is now ripe for dominance by antichrist, and in choosing to support him in his "war" against the two witnesses, and by rejoicing in his victory over the servants of the Lord, the world will not only be openly and unreservedly choosing for the beast, but will also be handing him the ultimate opportunity to establish his own alternative religion, and thus impose a large measure of religious dominance over the entire globe by its establishment (a development which will in turn cement the political, economic, and social control he will gain at the Tribulation's midpoint with the defeat of the last coalition to oppose him; see part 3B). Thus the ministry of the two witnesses and of their agents the 144,000 will have a dual effect. For this ministry will not only lead to an unprecedented revival among the Jewish people throughout the world. The unbelieving world will actually **blame** Moses and Elijah for these gracious warnings (Rev.11:10), and the identification of the two witnesses with these plagues of ever increasing intensity will thus be the cause of forcing the rest of the population of the earth to abandon all neutrality and to choose once and for all which side they are on. Rather than turning to God, most will direct their anger and rage at His two witnesses, thus hardening their hearts and preparing the ground for the equally unabashed persecution of the remainder of God's people which will follow.

At that time they will surrender you to persecution and will put you to death, and you will be hated by all the gentiles (i.e., unbelievers) on account of My Name. Matthew 24:9

But a time will come when everyone who kills you will think that he is making an offering in worship to God. John 16:2

The revival and ascension of Moses and Elijah: We have already discussed the issue of (temporary) resuscitation as opposed to (permanent) resurrection, but it should be pointed out that this *second* revival for each man is also without parallel in scripture, as is this *second* ascent

into heaven apart from normal physical death.¹⁰³ It will be to the great shock of the rejoicing world that the lifeless bodies of the two witnesses are “quicken” by God through the reintroduction of their spirits into their bodies.¹⁰⁴ This dramatic, instantaneous, and seemingly impossible return to life (and subsequent ascension) after the great exertions of antichrist and his forces to eradicate the two witnesses will be a clear sign to the world of the futility of opposing God.

[These types], though always learning, are never able to accept the truth. In the same way that Jannes and Jambres (i.e., types of the beast and his false prophet) opposed Moses, so these men also oppose the truth, for their minds have been corrupted and they have been found wanting concerning the faith. But they will not keep on striding forward forever. Their folly will become obvious to all, just as in the case of those two. 2nd Timothy 3:7-9

On the other hand, the astounding sight of their ascent into heaven at the Lord’s audible behest will leave no doubt as to either the heavenly favor in which their ministry was held, or of the power of our God to rescue and redeem all who place their hope in Him, or, finally, of the absolute certainty of His ultimate victory. As Moses and Elijah depart “in the cloud” just as our Lord Jesus Christ departed (Acts 1:9; cf. 2Kng.2:11), so all His saints who see these sights and who read these words can have complete confidence that we too will assemble together with Him “in clouds” on that blessed day of His return on the other side of the gathering storm, no matter how tempestuous and violent it may be (Dan.7:13; Matt.24:30; 26:64; Mk.13:26; 14:62; Lk.21:27; 1Thes.4:13-18; cf. 1Cor.15:51-52; Rev.19:7-8 with 19:14).

Behold! He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him, and all the peoples of the earth will grieve on account of Him. Revelation 1:7

The great earthquake: The local earthquake which takes place in verse thirteen following the departure of the two witnesses in which seven thousand are killed and a tenth of the city of Jerusalem is destroyed must be distinguished from the temblor of verse nineteen which will be felt around the world. The worldwide earthquake (along with the lightning, thunderous voices, and hailstorm) will be a sign that the Great Tribulation has begun (similar to the warnings that preceded the beginning of the first three and a half year period: Rev.8:5). Rather than being a warning, this local earthquake acts as divine punctuation for God’s gracious gift of the ministry

¹⁰³ This is technically true only of Elijah, but, as we have seen, Moses’ body was later given similar treatment (Jude 1:9). Of course only our Lord Jesus Christ has ever truly “ascended” into heaven in bodily form. It is the *method of transition* of the two witnesses from this earth into heaven above that is unique, not their status once they arrive in the presence of God.

¹⁰⁴ See The Satanic Rebellion: Part 3: The Purpose, Creation and Fall of Man, section II.3, “The human spirit”.

of reconstruction and revival which has now come to an end. Rather than responding to His favor, the world rejected His grace, and it is no accident that their unashamed opposition to and murder of Moses and Elijah is so reminiscent of the similar rejection and crucifixion of our Lord. His death too was followed by an earthquake (Matt.27:45-54; Mk.15:33-39; Lk.23:44-47), and more than any sign or symbol, His resurrection proves the reality of our God's power and victory over death for all time. No creature can oppose the living God, and none can hope to thwart His will. All opposition to Him is possible only because He chooses to allow it. But God also always makes clear the issue of what His will truly is. Just as the miracles that followed our Lord's death for us all on the cross are an unmistakable divine imprimatur of approval (and of disapproval for those who condemned Him), so the miraculous departure of Moses and Elijah is God's seal upon the validity of their ministry, and the earthquake that follows an indication of His displeasure with all who opposed them, as well as a terrifying sign of things to come for the enemies of God.

The third woe: The termination of the joint ministry of Moses and Elijah and the 144,000 marks the conclusion of the second woe, because at this point the first six trumpet judgments as well as all the localized plagues administered by the two witnesses in support of the 144,000 have come to an end. The third woe, said here to be "coming soon", begins immediately hereafter when the seventh angel sounds his trumpet (Rev.11:15). For the third woe, the seventh trumpet judgment, and the Great Tribulation all refer to the same period of time, the horrific final three and a half years that precede our Lord's return. That period will be a period of woe, because the earth has never and will never again see darker days (Dan.12:1; Joel 2:2; Matt.24:21; Mk.13:19). That period will be in its entirety a period of warning (symbolized by the seventh trumpet), because its terrifying nature warns of the day of judgment soon to come (Matt.3:10-12; 2Pet.3:10-13). And that period will be a period of unparalleled tribulation, because within it the greatest persecution in the history of the Church of Jesus Christ will take place, when Satan and his fallen angels are cast down to earth (Rev.12:7-9), and through his minion antichrist he vents his wrath on the Body of Christ (see part 4).

That Great Persecution along with the other events of those final three and a half years comes next in the chronological sequence of the Tribulation. But before we turn to the Great Tribulation itself, we must first discuss the central personality used by Satan to drive, direct and guide those events, namely, antichrist.

The Seven Trumpet Judgments of Warning

(Revelation 8:6 - 11:19)

— The Tribulation —

