



GOD AND GOVERNMENT: A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

THE BIBLE AND LIMITED GOVERNMENT

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The subject of this paper is the biblical basis for the conviction that government must be limited in its reach and coercive force.ⁱ It recognizes the tension implied in Paul’s admonition to the Christians in Rome to render the proper honor to a pagan government that was “instituted” and “appointed” by God but had a “sword” for a defined purpose only (Rom. 13:1-7). It also recognizes that the founding documents of the American republic presuppose a Creator and presuppose creatures—both governors and governed—whose governance is problematic. The American Revolution is unique in history in that it proposed to institute practical republicanⁱⁱ governance (actual experimental politics as opposed to intellectual “political science”) based on this presupposition.ⁱⁱⁱ

America's unique mix of individuals tasked with *inventing* a new way of political organization and interaction differed from European revolutionaries (mostly French) in that the Americans sought a working experiment, not a utopian intellectual construct, and they tempered their enthusiasm for European Enlightenment thinking with a clear biblical understanding of the nature of mankind. Consequently, for its fundamental sense of guidance, American revolutionary thought was derived from biblical roots, variously interpreted but formative of a political consensus regarded as capable of producing a *novus ordo seclorum* (New Order of the Ages). The overwhelming conviction of colonial governors and legislators was that man is bound by original sin and that government has limitations imposed by the God of the Bible.

The American consensus differed markedly and deliberately from the foundational presuppositions of the contemporaneous French Revolution. In France a different unique blend of individuals sought to jettison the legacy of Christian, biblical antecedents to European politics of the time (the *ancien regime*) in favor of a perpetual *revolution* (an evolving democratic attempt to “go where no man had gone before”). The British had settled their constitutional dilemma in the Revolution of 1688 by recognizing that “one of the objects of a mature political philosophy is to reconcile people to the painful limitations of their condition.”^{iv} On the other hand, expansive government such as the French model is fueled by the faulty belief that government can guarantee happy outcomes for all, as opposed to equal access to opportunity. When the utopian vision of egalitarian outcomes fails, governments reach for more and more control over lives and circumstances in the vain hope of finally attaining their unlimited vision.^v

The views of the American founders were regularly the topic of conversation in public forums and informal gatherings in colonial America. Most importantly, they were the subject matter of sermons for special occasions in the political year and at any other time a pastor felt the need to expatiate on political themes from the Bible. The sermons were widely disseminated in the popular press and other publications. Most influential among them were the “election sermons,” delivered annually to the seating of the legislatures of New England.

Election sermons were attended by the governor, members of the upper and lower houses of the legislatures, magistrates, and various notables and dignitaries. These sermons regularly dealt with the whole range of topics relating to God and his relationship to man (and man’s role before God in the creation) in politics, government, and societal obligations. They were delivered for the longest period of time in Massachusetts from 1634 to 1884 and in the other colonies for periods of 80 or so years during the same time frame.^{vi}

Of course the original Puritan vision of a Shining City on a Hill depended for its inspiration on the Scriptures interpreted in a Calvinist reformational milieu that included a postmillennial view of eschatology. The postmillennial eschatological vision of the Puritans was expansive in its view of theocratic government, but it did not survive intact into the eighteenth century. Cotton Mather in particular illustrates the mixture of thinking that influenced views of governmental responsibility, as during his lifetime he moved from the postmillennial to the premillennial view.^{vii} This tension is at the heart of Protestant conflict over the role of government throughout the period following the Revolution, a period that segued into the Second Great Awakening, most commonly associated with the ministry of revivalist Charles Finney. Finney was the catalyst for large scale social involvement of Christian institutions *alongside* government, but not *of or by* the government.

The crisis of the Civil War tested the dependence of Protestant Christianity in America on commonly held biblicist ideas of government. Both North and South had fervent advocates for the view that God was on their side. The divide eventually led to separation within Protestant denominations of the U.S. over the fundamentals of the faith and the role of government and church in society.

Postmillennialism died somewhere between Gettysburg and the Somme. What took over in mainline denominations was a secular vision of expansive government driven by a new reading of Scripture from a critical perspective. Premillennialists and amillennialists maintained their commitment to societal reformation through evangelism, revivalism, church planting, and private and sectarian works of charity and humanitarian rescue of soul and body. They did not find commitment to big government “solutions” to social problems compatible with their theological commitments, which they believed were compatible with a proper reading of the Bible.

THE BIBLICAL VIEW OF GOVERNMENT THE NATURE AND CALLING OF MAN

There can be no denying that the fundamental truth about government in the Bible’s worldview and meta-narrative is that the one triune God revealed in the Old and New Testaments is the sovereign ruler from which all authority flows (Rom 13:1-7). We will not attempt to demonstrate this fact, but it is everywhere assumed in this paper. Whatever man and human governments are, they are not to be confused with god(s), although they may make such claims. On the other hand, man and human governments are not mere usurpers upon the creation, as some environmental activists assert. Man is the pinnacle and destination of the creation coming from the hand of God. The Psalmist, echoed by the writer of Hebrews in the New Testament, marveled aloud and poetically that God was “mindful” of man at all (Ps 8:4-6; Heb 2:6-8). But God’s purpose in man is too marvelous to contemplate, for he is/was/will be only a little below God himself. Adam and Eve, by design, were created for rule (Gen 1 and 2)^{viii} in a universe whose complexity we are only now beginning to glimpse. Together they will be “blessed” in the pursuit of God’s mandate for their “rule” and “fruitfulness.” This condition can imply nothing less than a full partnership, so God calls “them” Adam.^{ix} In the stead of all mankind, they together have dominion over God’s creation as his vice-regents. This narrative is polemically designed in the Pentateuch to assert that all mankind (and woman-kind) rule over the creation, but not over other men.^x And it is certain that the creation cannot reach its potential in the plan of God without them, for it is less than complete without a man to “till the ground.”^{xi}

Within the Garden spot of Eden, man/woman walk as only kings and gods of Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) cosmologies were supposed to walk. Made to enjoy, tend, and create from earth’s rich resources (made “resources,” instead of mere raw materials, by the mind of God endowed to man and woman), they alone carry the capacity to act from their own will, rather than to behave as mere animals. They were given the rich capital of God’s image and likeness and all the creative capacity that implies, and the whole earth in its rich resources was theirs to command and exploit (in the best sense of the term).^{xii} They were not created only to labor and toil and bear offspring, for it is not from these actions alone that rule and dominance will proceed. This can only happen through the employment of creative genius and, by implications associated with the Garden as a mirror image of the tabernacle to come, the true worship and fellowship with God they were intended to enjoy.^{xiii}

Man was created free under God's rule and as God's vice-regent for rule over creation. He is destined to return to this state in the new heavens and earth, as we shall see. The original Adamic rule is marred, essentially destroyed in its true intent, by his failure to govern himself appropriately and to fulfill his original "dominion" in the Garden (Gen 3). Between the two termini of history, mankind's fallen state intrudes, and governments have their function and purpose as sanctioned by the Creator.

The pre-flood world appears to have been "ruled" by "heroic" strong men whose only standard of conduct was their own whims and forcefulness, a characteristic foreshadowed in Cain.^{xiv} No external standard called them to "just" governance (though the "mark" put on Cain seems to imply God's own direct intervention as his protector) so the world became "filled with violence." This violence has its origins not in structural evils but in the "thoughts and imaginations" of mankind's inner nature, and it is a continual and pervasive problem (Gen 6:5-8).^{xv} The biblical conclusion is that God's judgment, in the form of the flood, was the only answer to man in his raw and ungoverned state.^{xvi} The effect is that chaos, now evident in sociological terms, returns in the natural world to wreak judgment.

In this environment only Noah "found grace" as a "righteous" man (Gen 6:9; 7:1) who could be called "blameless" in his time (Gen 6:9). The post-flood law is established among men to curb and avenge the violence they do to one another (Gen 9:5, 6). This rule (*lex talionis*) appears to establish the extreme limit at which vengeance may occur and includes those retributive actions that might accrue to lesser crimes. Further, as the statement of respect for man made in God's image, it appears to limit the use of the death penalty.

The patriarchal narratives show plausible examples of the interaction of wealthy nomadic (*habiru*) clans in the Ancient Near East (ANE) with local "kings" in both confrontational and contractual relations (cf. Gen 14, 20, 21). This localized and clannish rule is clearly in contrast to early contact with the Egyptian empire and fledgling Babylonian civilization of Nimrod, which God himself disperses.^{xvii} The intra-clan dealings between Jacob and Esau and Jacob and Laban are carried on with no apparent interference or oversight by any other local authorities.^{xviii}

The special case of Sodom and Gomorrah, both of which have "kings" (Gen 14:1), calls down the direct judgment of God. It is possible that the "cry" that "went up" to God (Gen 18:20, 21) is a call for "justice and righteousness" (and is a cry against oppressive governance), standards to which God expects Abraham and his people to adhere (Gen 18:19). This seems to explain the extended prayer/conversation/negotiation between Abraham and God on the subject: "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?" (Gen 18:25 ESV). Ultimately, judgment again prevails.^{xix}

Egypt looms large in the last chapters of Genesis as both savior and potential tyrant. Joseph's wisdom and character combined with unlimited power (Gen 41:40) "save" Egypt's people but also enslave them as un-landed tenants (Gen 47:21, 25). While Joseph is seen as thoroughly virtuous (Gen 39) and trustworthy, a man "in whom is the Spirit of God," one who was incomparable in discernment and wisdom (Gen 41:38, 39), a character formed in the crucible of

sufferings in the sovereign plan of God, he is nevertheless the one who made slaves of an entire people with the odd exception of the pagan priests (Gen 47:26).^{xx} It is a small step from this development to the oppression of Exodus 1 and the “cry” of Israel to God for deliverance.

Pharaoh’s tyrannical and god-like claims to ownership over the people of Israel, their children, their labor, their livestock, to the exclusion of all other claims, even the worship of Yahweh (Ex 5:1-4; 8:25-28; 10:8-11, 24), leads to an ever-widening “judgment” on Pharaoh and his gods (Ex 6:6; 7:4; 12:12). This is exactly as it had been promised to Abraham (Gen 15:14). There is even a hint that the providence that brought Joseph to power and issued in Pharaoh’s unparalleled suzerainty (Gen 50:19, 20) led to this very judgmental confrontation with Pharaoh (Ex 9:15-17). Judgment again prevails.

FROM THE EXODUS TO SAMUEL YHWH RULES THROUGH THE JUDGES

Israel’s redemption and freedom prepare them for service to Yahweh, as Moses repeatedly tells Pharaoh (Ex 4:23; 7:16; 8:1, 13, 20, etc.), and thus for his exclusive reign over them, as is celebrated in the hymn of Moses at the sea (Ex 15:13-18). Their freedom is not absolute and autonomous, for they have been “redeemed” (Ex 15:13) that they might be Yahweh’s “slaves,” his “possession,” his “kingdom” as “priests” (Ex 19:4-6), as God reveals through Moses at Horeb. Thus, their mission in earthly terms is to exemplify for the nations how a people ruled by God through the instrumentality of his revealed standards, clearly delineated in the “ten words” of Sinai, should “live” (Deut 5:5-8), a path hinted at in the exchange over the judgment of Sodom (Gen 18:17-19).^{xxi}

Though this arrangement is clearly theocratic, it is eventually to be mediated by “wise,” “discerning,” truth-loving, bribe-hating, God-fearing and even Spirit-filled men.^{xxii} This is the governance anticipated in advance of the occupation of Canaan.^{xxiii} The unit of Torah (Deut 16:18—18:22) which integrates the institutions of Israel’s national life—political and religious, with the religious divided between priest and prophet and the political involving judges and priests (17:8-13)—allows for the possibility of a king “whom Yahweh your God shall choose” (17:15).

All institutions are, of course, subject to Yahweh’s direct and indirect supervision by Torah and prophetic word (Deut 17:18, 19; 18:15-22). Significantly, judges are to be chosen by the people themselves, based on their possession of wisdom and reputation among the people (Deut 1:15); but a king is to be chosen by Yahweh “from among your brothers” (Deut 17:15). The prohibitions against accumulation of horses, wives, and wealth (Deut 17:16, 17) are unique in the ANE. Further, the requirement that the future king be a student of Torah (Deut 17:18-20) sets the spiritual parameters. Thus, contrary to standard practice in the ANE, the king of Israel, should one be needed, is subject to brotherhood, Torah, and Yahweh—making him more a shepherd than a monarch.^{xxiv}

The king-less governance prevails until the time of Samuel, the beginning of the period of the prophets, when the people rebel against Yahweh's kingship and demand a human king (1 Sam 8:4-8).^{xxv} However, the proper relationship of priesthood and judge appears not to have been established until Eli united the offices and Samuel succeeded him (1 Sam 4:18). Moreover, these "judges" are said to be "raised up" (Jdg 2:16) by Yahweh. He was "with them," but it was Yahweh who "saved" them (Jdg 2:18). He also made it clear that these judges were "commanded" (or "appointed") by him (2 Sam 7:11). Even when the Davidic kingship was ratified by the promise of God, the system of local judges carried out the rule of God and his "prince" David (2 Sam 7:8) and later Solomon (1 Chr 23:4; 26:29; 2 Chr 1:2). Significantly, a renewal of this system forms a part of the spiritual reform carried out under Jehoshaphat (2 Chr 19:5, 6) and also appears in the time of Ezra (Ezra 10:14) during the reform over intermarriage.^{xxvi}

THE DEMAND FOR A KING

The entire history of the attempt to centralize government in Israel is fraught with ambiguities and outright negativity. It is evident from the beginning that Israel's desire for a "king" to "go out before us and fight our battles" (1 Sam 8:19) (the one thing not authorized in Deuteronomy 17) in addition to "judge us," is a call for a kind of security and showiness that Yahweh has not given and that Samuel (at Yahweh's command) warns against.^{xxvii} Samuel appears to characterize Israel's attitude in terms of covetousness, when he refers to Saul as the one to whom "all the desire of Israel is turned" (1 Sam 9:20 ESV).^{xxviii} The prior experiment with the ill-fated requests to Gideon and the perfidy of Abimelech (Jdg 8 and 9) foreshadowed things to come, even though it is evident that the anarchy of the five citations of Judges is undesirable.^{xxix} Here is the beginning of another "fall" sequence, where a supposed "good" is obtained in a way that dishonors man's relationship to God.

Samuel's warnings about the king go unheeded: his "ways" (lit., "judging" or manner) will be to "take" (used 6 times) what he desires for his own use and that of his "slaves," meaning his own servants (1 Sam 8:14, 15) and subordinates and will do as his title ("king") implies.^{xxx} Samuel warns that the people will one day "cry" (see their "cry" in Egypt against Pharaoh) to Yahweh for relief from this oppression, and he will not hear (1 Sam 8:18), for it will be "your king, whom you have chosen for yourselves."^{xxxi} YHWH clearly foreshadows this style of leadership by Saul as oppressive in 1 Samuel 9:17. The translation of "restrain" (ESV only) is surely correct, for it is the only place in the OT this word is used to refer to ruling in any sense, and it is always used to convey some sense of negativity.^{xxxii}

The tone is now set for what follows. Samuel steadfastly seeks to communicate the true position of Saul as the new leader. He is a "prince,"^{xxxiii} but the people choose him as "king," and Samuel anoints him as such to "save" Yahweh's people. From here on the situation is tenuous at best, for the people have "rejected" their God who "saves" (1 Sam 10:19). Saul's career is marked by capricious and rebellious moments and ends in the clutches of witchcraft and suicidal depression, a man rejected by God in favor of another. The idea of ANE-style dynastic succession (cf. Deut

17:20) is in the background, having been part of the original proposal to Gideon (Jdg 8:22), but it is specifically denied to Saul's line because of his usurpation of priestly duties, as Yahweh seeks "a man after his own heart" to be "prince" over Israel.^{xxxiv}

The terminology for designating God's future choice has some ambiguities. The traditional understanding sees "man after . . . heart" referring to God's knowledge of David's sincere devotion in contrast to Saul's rebellion. The terminology coincides well with Samuel's references to David as Saul's "neighbor . . . who is better than you" (1 Sam 15:28 ESV).^{xxxv} The other possibility is that this phrase refers to Yahweh's own elective choice as opposed to the action of the people in their earlier demand to Samuel.^{xxxvi} In either case it is Yahweh's choice to make, though we are left to wonder, given the prior generalized warning about the *mishpat* ("manner") of kings, whether this is an accommodating choice or that now is the correct timing for a choice.

Despite this turn of events, Saul appears to have solidified public approval through waging war against surrounding peoples and to have collected a standing army (1 Sam 14:47-52). Saul's campaigns, though defensive rather than expansionist, had the effect of both "deliverance" and the centralizing of his own power.^{xxxvii} This power is now tested to see if it is at the disposal of Yahweh in holy war, or if it is merely Saul's personal fiefdom (1 Sam 15:1-3). The well-known outcome is that Saul is charged with "divination" (the "rebellion" that presumes to know the mind of God apart from and subsuming the prophetic word), "idolatry" (the "presumption" that sacrifice could manipulate God's will), and outright "rejection" of the Word of Yahweh (1 Sam 15:22, 23). God's condemnation seals the fate of Saul's kingship, the previous confrontation having foreclosed on his dynastic pretensions. The condemnation is couched in the poetic statement of a universal principle that will echo to the last prophetic words of the Old Testament (Mal. 1:10 and its full context). Israel's God is the manipulator, not the manipulated—unlike the gods of the surrounding peoples.

The ambiguity of Saul's situation is further emphasized by the interposition within the narrative of Yahweh's conversations with Samuel on the subject of "regret" over the installation of Saul (1 Sam 15:11, 29, 35). Samuel is clearly "hot" (v. 11) over the change of direction indicated by Yahweh's "regret." After all, had not Samuel himself sought to forestall this scenario and been overruled by Yahweh? No wonder he "shrieked" all night! That Yahweh is being fair and just in all that transpires is clearly seen as Saul repeatedly refers to Yahweh as "your" (Samuel's) God and carries out a "worship"-full display only for public consumption (v. 31). This picture is entirely consistent with all we know of Saul's persona—a man consumed with public perceptions (v. 24), which may very well proceed from some sense of his own inferiority within (cf. 1 Sam 9:21; 10:22).

Nevertheless, does Yahweh not know this all along, and is it not his immutable nature *not* to "regret" or "change his mind" (1 Sam 15:29 with Num 23:19)? How can Samuel maintain his stature as prophet and anointer of kings in the face of such apparent vacillation? Despite the conundrum, the episode closes with Samuel's "mourning" for Saul and a reaffirmation of Yahweh's "regret" (1 Sam 15:35).

The narrative continues, without apparent pause, as Samuel once again becomes the messenger of Yahweh (following a rebuke) on a mission for the obvious “king” in the entire sequence. Samuel is told once again that Saul is “rejected” and that Yahweh has “provided (lit. *seen*) for myself a king” (1 Sam 16:1), in contrast to “make them a king” (1 Sam 8:22). We cannot be certain if Yahweh had this as a preferred plan all along (thus making the earlier demand by the people premature) or if he is working out his will in spite of the rebellion of his people. The idea of “restraint” in our previous comments would tend to bear out this last possibility. The declarations in 1 Samuel 12:12-25 leave room for either possibility, but the prior deliverance from Philistine oppression by nature miracle (1 Sam 7:10, 11) in response to repentance and prayerful sacrifice tend to make a human king superfluous, especially with reference to national security concerns.^{xxxviii} The repeat of the nature miracle at Gilgal (1 Sam 12:16-18) would tend to reinforce this conclusion as well. Israel’s concern for its security among the nations, as well as its desire to be “judged like all the nations” (1 Sam 8:5, 6), are declared by Yahweh to be an extension of the rebellion that has been going on since the deliverance from Egypt (1 Sam 8:8)—the equivalent of idolatry!^{xxxix}

The resolution of ambiguity and tension over Israel’s true kingship is surely being conveyed in the term “prince” (*nagiyd*) to refer to the human personage from the perspective of Yahweh and the prophets^{xl} and its association with shepherd terminology at David’s full accession to leadership at Hebron (2 Sam 5:2). This terminology defines the ideal human “king” as clearly subservient to Yahweh and his prophets and priests.^{xli} Despite his great sin and failures as leader, David personifies this ideal as he is brought up short by the ill-advised first attempt to bring the ark to Jerusalem (2 Sam 6 vs. 1 Chr 15:13) and then forbidden to build the central shrine (2 Sam 7). His respect for the prophetic word and the priestly institution contrasts sharply with that of Saul. Even in his tragic sin and subsequent exposure and humiliation, David exemplifies the limitation of monarchy under Yahweh (2 Sam 12:13; 15:25, 26).

The well-known promise(s) of 2 Samuel 7 continues the same theme of David as “shepherd” and “prince” (v. 8), with the addition of “servant,” but there is clearly a distant, even eternal horizon involved here, as well as a perspective on “house”-building that goes well beyond the temporal (vv. 11-17, cf. Ps 127:1ff.), even though Solomon’s reign and mission are in the foreground.^{xlii} Solomon is, of course, a prime example of the failure of human delegated authority—marvelously gifted with wisdom, blessed with epiphanic visions, but disobedient to the three-fold prohibition against the multiplication of horses, wives, and gold.

THE FAILURE OF THE HUMAN MONARCHY

Solomon’s oppressive policies (1 Kgs 12:4) pursuant to his glorification of himself, his kingdom, and even the Lord’s house lead to the breakdown of kingdom unity^{xliii} at the time of Rehoboam’s assumption of rule (1 Kgs 12:16, 17). The breakdown is the direct result of Solomon’s failure to assume a role as “servant” and in fulfillment of prophecy and against his father’s practices (1 Kgs 12:6-15; cf. 11:11). Solomon, unlike his father, had grown up in as much luxury as was available to a 10th century BC Israelite. He understood power, or at least he thought he did, and when he

came to the throne he was committed to maintaining a strong governmental hand, one even stronger than that of David.

Solomon, following the deathbed advice of David, dealt harshly with most of the ones who had either deeply disappointed David, or who represented threats to the security of Solomon once he became king. In a manner similar to the ending of a *Godfather* film, he had his half-brother Adonijah killed, he exiled the priest Abiathar, he had the former general of David's army, Joab, assassinated, and eventually he had Shimei, a man who had cursed David when he was deposed and then repented when he returned, killed as well (all of this is related in 1 Kgs 2).

Solomon accumulated great wealth due to heavy taxation. His wealth included imported weapons and horses (2 Chr 1:14-17) and imported wood and other building materials to be used in the construction of the temple and in the construction of a very ornate kingly palace (2 Chr 2-7; 1 Kgs 7). The utensils for the temple were also very expensive (2 Chr 4). The reputation of Solomon's wealth spread far and wide so that when dignitaries like the Queen of Sheba visited, they testified to his great wisdom and wealth and added more wealth besides. The Queen of Sheba alone gave Solomon the equivalent of two tons of solid gold. One has to wonder what intentions lay behind such a gift! And it was *extracted*, not earned by capitalistic enterprises. It was wealth flowing to government, not to the people.

As Rehoboam took the throne on the death of his father, he consulted with his father's "cabinet." The people had already spoken to him and informed him that Solomon had "put a heavy yoke" on them, a yoke of a heavy handed centralized government exercising its will in an unimpeded manner. Their immediate response makes it clear that Solomon's fiscal policies had been nothing short of confiscation for the glory of his own kingdom. His father's advisors replied, "Be kind to the people and give them a favorable answer." Rehoboam, however, chose to listen instead to advice from his younger peers, young men of the court who had also grown up in luxury and prestige. Their advice: "Tell these people who have asked you to lighten the load that the load is about to get much heavier. Tell them that your father scourged them with whips, but that you will scourge them with scorpions" (2 Chr 10:8-11). In other words, government is about to get even bigger, and the people will simply have to put up with it. If you know the rest of the story, you know they did *not* put up with it. Ten of the twelve tribes of the nation of Israel (the northernmost tribes) seceded from the union and went to war to secure their secession.

Solomon had pushed the size of government too far, as he built a giant Administrative State that brought him fame and glory. The divided kingdom(s) assumed a direction that can only be called a descent into ultimate judgmental destruction. Once the dominating human monarchy was fully established, the downward spiral was only briefly slowed by the occasional efforts of Davidic descendants in Judah.^{xliv} This would appear to be the dire end predicted from the outset of the demand for a king—no "cry" would be heard, for consequences are to be carried out against "both you and your king" (1 Sam 8:12; 12:15, 25). This fate, which swallows up people and king, is also what causes such pain and bewilderment to the suffering "remnant"—what Kidner calls "painful tension."^{xlv}

The lure of kingly prerogatives warned about during the initial clamor for a new form of government in the days of Samuel proves too much to overcome. No attempts at establishing treaty relationships with the great powers of the day—Egypt, Syria, Assyria, Phoenicia, Babylon—whether through Solomon’s “marriages” or through standard alliances against common enemies, suffice to save the kingdom(s). The Assyrians swallow up the north (722 BC), and Babylon carries off the south (607-586 BC).

From this point forward there appears to be little interest (at least in the biblical record) in re-establishing the human monarchy. However, there is great interest in what Yahweh may (or may not) do to set someone on the “throne of Yahweh.”^{xlvi} The history of this concern is undoubtedly the core of the messianic hope and promise. Davidic psalmody repeatedly takes up the theme of Zion as Yahweh’s city of rule, the Temple as his footstool, and the Davidic king as but a type of the heavenly coming reality.^{xlvii}

Isaiah, as premier representative of the early (8th century) writing prophets, emphasizes Yahweh as king and the coming one as his ideal ruler in light of the failure of the Davidic monarchy and the capital city with its complement of officials, bureaucrats, and political entrepreneurs.^{xlviii} Hosea echoes the theme by harking back to the very beginning of the monarchical regime in Israel.^{xliv} Micah recognizes the need for a remedy and looks to the future (Mic 5:2). Jeremiah and Ezekiel, during the Babylonian crisis, agree that there is no hope for the Davidic line of their time (Jer 22:1-23:2; Eze 21:25-27). Both agree that a new kind of leader, a new people under a new covenant, and a new Jerusalem are needed.^l

The Psalms of royal idealization^{li} do not present prophetic condemnations. Rather they offer a call to Israel’s kings to measure up to the hope and promise of their Davidic origin. They clearly and repeatedly point to one who will fulfill the promise, of one who will suffer for/with his people (Pss 22, 69) and will be their shepherd (Pss 23; 95:6, 7; cf. 2:9). The depression, sorrow, and bewilderment seen in the reflection of Psalm 89 on the failure of the ideal king serve to confirm the prophetic word prior to the people’s relinquishment of their own direct relationship with Yahweh in order to get a king “to fight our battles.”^{lii} Finally, 25 years into the Exile, Ezekiel is given a vision of an ideal Temple and rule to come where the “prince” will no longer cheat the people in the marketplace or steal their land (45:7-12; 46:16-18), nor shall he be allowed to make a gift of his own land outside his own family except temporarily until the Jubilee.

In contrast to the foregoing descriptions, Daniel is given visions of the “beast”-ly nature of pagan rule and its ultimate doom at the hands of Yahweh’s chosen,^{liii} an equally stylized negative view compared to the Psalter’s view of Davidic rule. Daniel at this point has already interpreted a “word” from YHWH to Nebuchadnezzar through a dream. This word predicted the descent of the monarch into a beastly state because he would not give glory to the God of Israel for having put him on the throne of Babylon. Such an assessment of pagan governments is common to the prophets and needs no special citation here. Israel, from Abraham’s day forward, has always found itself in juxtaposition to incipient and overpowering empires as well as petty kings. The unique character of the Hebrew Scriptures is that they unrelentingly concentrate on Israel’s

failure to live up to the call and mission she has been given to exhibit justice/righteousness to the nations.

THE UTOPIAN VISION: GOVERNMENT IN THE PLACE OF GOD AND ISRAEL'S CALL FOR A KING

Israel's call for a king in the "days when the judges ruled" (lit. "judged" [Ruth 1:1]) is arguably a call for a utopian answer to the ancient problem of God's "unfair" administration of a sinful world. Apparently the theocracy was in disarray for two reasons other than the sheer anarchy of the times: 1) the matter of succession—i.e., Eli and Samuel both were failures on this account, even though the level of their own character was decidedly higher than what had gone before; 2) perhaps more importantly, the matter of security—i.e., "someone to fight our battles" appears to call for some sort of mercenary army in the place of occasional call-ups of "all Israel." This will require centralization and all its attendant complications. What at first appears to be a "solution" becomes a disaster, as Israel becomes subject to first the exploitation and finally the fate of its kings. The outcome is not undeserved, for it is clear in the prophets that the "servants" of the kings (Dearman designates them as "officials or royal servants")^{liv} join in the economic oppression of the people as they always do—what Block calls "feudalism"^{lv}—but it also means that the "remnant" (the primary designees of the term "the poor") will also be carried along in the ensuing disaster. This is the most profound conundrum in the search for "justice" by both worldly governments and the suffering remnant. It is to this remnant that we owe the record of the story and the hope of a truly "anointed" one, who will fulfill the aspirations of the ages.

The call for "justice" that is used to legalize and legitimize expansive governmental intrusions is typically based on some perceived and nebulous sense of "fairness," a concept which nullifies the revelational justice of the Bible in favor of evening out economic and social outcomes through the perceived egalitarian wisdom of the coercive state. "Distributive justice," the kind that government provides, is coercive by nature. It must take in order to give. The prophets note that the kings of Israel do this in collusion with their "servants." According to biblical justice, no governmental coercion may exceed the *lex talionis*, for that is fundamental to the very definition of justice.^{lvi} The problem with "distributive justice" is that it exceeds the *lex talionis* by taking from one group to give to another.

The nature of pagan coercion is that it is unjust by definition, for it excludes the worship of Yahweh and has no foundation in Torah upon which to act. The problem with the monarchy in Israel and later Judah and Israel is that what Samuel predicted about the "taking" by kings so they might "give it to their servants" came to pass and led to

denunciations by the later prophets.^{lvii} Only theocratic justice is “just” by definition in the mind of the prophets of the Old Testament, for the ideal “Servant” must come to establish this “justice” as a matter of his own commissioning from Yahweh (Isa 42:1-4).^{lviii} By its very nature this justice begins with the conversion of the human heart and the giving of the Spirit in the new covenant before the political kingdom can be established as a working institution upon the earth (Eze 36:22-31 and chapter 37; Jer 31:31-34).

THE NEW TESTAMENT JESUS AND THE KINGDOM

The records of the NT open with the announcement(s) that “the kingdom of God/Heaven” is “near,” immediately in the offing. The preaching of John, Jesus, and the apostles follows in the train of the prophets of the Old Testament, but most of the people of their day had been hearing and were influenced by another voice. It was the voice of Jewish apocalyptic thought, a vision not of history and its meaning but of a longing for the cataclysmic end of history. George Ladd has rightly characterized the apocalyptic writings as dualistic (seeing the evil of the present age as mostly the work of Satan and evil spirits), non-prophetic (losing the prophets’ emphasis on the current judging/blessing acts of God and their relationship to human sin), pessimistic (having no hope except an eschatological one), deterministic (nothing new or good can come until certain time periods have elapsed), and ethically passive (almost devoid of any challenge to repentance and faithfulness).^{lix} This misapprehension of both the kingdom and the prophetic mission of the earlier messengers animates Jesus’ (and John’s) preaching/teaching about the kingdom in the NT.

The prior manifestations of God’s rule, played out against the backdrop of human aspiration and folly (personal, national and imperial), serve to usher in the “fullness of times,”^{lx} when the person of his perfect rule is manifest among men and as a man. The NT consistently and constantly witnesses that there is no discontinuity among what went before and what is now being manifest and what will be consummated in the future. Any apparent inconsistency is simply a mark of the mystery surrounding God’s plans and workings and of the insufficiency of the understanding of these things in the mind of man—a mind seemingly infinitely capable of sloth, folly, and perversity (Mk 4:11-13). Into the mix of personal, national, and imperial misappropriation of God’s rule John and Jesus come to preach and in Jesus’ case to exercise authority. As N. T. Wright so eloquently puts it, Jesus goes about his business as one who is obviously “in charge.”^{lxi}

This is not the place to engage in a thoroughgoing theological discussion of Jesus’ kingdom teaching. We can only note the high points and refer the reader to the broad body of material on the subject. Here we will summarize briefly what Jesus taught: The kingdom is present in his work and that of his disciples,^{lxii} but the power to exorcise demons and/or heal earthly illnesses is no substitute for present and eternal salvation (Mt 12:43-45; Lk 11:24-26) or the complete elimination of evil powers (Mt 25:41)^{lxiii} and men who follow them. The kingdom is present in the preaching of the Gospel (Mt 4:23; Lk 4:43; Mk 2:2), but “the word” may still be rejected with

eternal consequences (Mk 4:14ff.). The kingdom is present in ongoing activity of God as he seeks out “the lost” (Lk 15), invites them to his table (Mt 22:1ff.; Lk 14:16ff.), and urges them to fellowship with him as Father;^{lxiv} but the rejection of his overtures by men can lead only to judgment.^{lxv} God’s judgment can descend on cities (Mt 11:20-24; Lk 10:13-15) and nations (Mt 21:43). Note that the judgment to come is seen in the background of all kinds of sinful activity: failure to teach the entire Law (Mt 5:19), hatred and disdain for others (Mt 5:21-26), careless words (Mt 12:36, 37), judgmentalism (Mt 7:1, 2), failure to forgive (Mt 18:21-35), hindering “little ones” in the kingdom (Mk 9:42; Mt 18:6),^{lxvi} hypocrisy (Mt 23:33), failure to relieve the needy at one’s door (Lk 16:19-31), failure to receive and assist the teachers of the Gospel (Mt 25:31-46; Mt 10:40-42 and its context),^{lxvii} and many other sins of omission and commission, public and private. It is a complete misapprehension of these last two passages that causes both evangelical and liberal interpreters to place exaggerated emphasis on the judgment upon political and personal treatment of the physically and socially “poor.”

Finally, and most telling for our present purpose, Jesus taught that the kingdom is supernatural in its origin, its progress, and its consummation (Mk 4:26-32). The process is what happens in the material world when seed is planted and a harvest comes through the dynamics of God’s creation and Noahic promise. Man may follow the rules for a harvest and cultivate to his advantage, but God gives the increase (1 Cor 3:6). Thus Jesus teaches that the kingdom can come near (Mt 3:2 and parallels), arrive (Mt 12:28), appear (Lk 19:11), and be active (Mt 11:12).^{lxviii} Men can enter it, receive it, possess it, or inherit it,^{lxix} or they can reject it (Lk 10:11; Mt 23:13). They can seek it, pray for it and look for it.^{lxx} Men can sacrifice for the kingdom (Mt 19:12; Lk 18:29), preach the kingdom (Mt 10:7; Lk 10:9), or they can prevent others from entering it (Lk 23:13). In none of these teachings is there a hint that men might establish, build, or bring in the kingdom, nor can they give it to another.^{lxxi} Conversely, neither can they destroy it, take it from others, or prevent its triumph. Consequently Jesus could confidently go to his crucifixion with the words “my kingdom is not of this world” (Jn 18:36 ESV), otherwise his servants would “fight” to prevent his death. It is clear that Jesus and his followers were preaching the Gospel of a theocratic kingdom now dawning on the earth.

THE KINGDOM IN THE NEW TESTAMENT EPISTLES

We have already noted that the apostles early on and consistently couched their preaching in kingdom terminology. The epistolary materials of the NT help to flesh out for us what they taught. Paul’s body of work is, of course, the most instructive. He consistently emphasizes the rule of Christ (as Jesus exalted) over the churches^{lxxii} in particular, the present world^{lxxiii} in a permissive and providential way, and the world to come in an all-encompassing and compelling mandate of righteous wrath and promised blessing.^{lxxiv} While he never equates the church with the kingdom nor participation in the church with belonging to the kingdom, Paul regularly urges upon the churches behavior that bespeaks submission to Christ’s rule.^{lxxv} This is Paul’s characteristic way of teaching ethics: Jesus Christ is Lord (a declaration implying that nobody else in the Roman world is Lord)^{lxxvi} and head of the church (a grouping of confessed individual believers). Therefore Christ’s subjects should reflect his rule in their behavior. To the extent that

the church does so in her corporate life, she is an exhibit for all to see, even to the “principalities and powers in the heavenlies” (Eph 3:10), of the power and grace of her Lord.

But the church is only *a* (not *the*) manifestation of Christ’s rule. The church is more rightly denominated “the people of the kingdom,” as Ladd puts it.^{lxxvii} These people, insofar as they are truly “kingdom people,” band together in association for the purpose of preaching the kingdom as Paul did, showing forth kingdom behavior as Paul urges them to do through their ethics and fellowship around the table (1 Cor 11:23-26),^{lxxviii} anticipating and awaiting with eagerness the “blessed hope,” which is the arrival of the Messianic King in his glorious power.

Meanwhile, in the world at large and in the whole created universe, a “subjection to futility” (Rom 8:20) is continuing, implying by the language that there is a ruler who subjects. The situation is only temporary, for the whole creation will be “delivered from corruption” (v. 21), and the deliverance will be coincident with and dependent upon the arrival of the “glorious liberty of the children of God” (v. 21b). Paralleling this condition is the activity of the “rulers of this age” (1 Cor 2:8) who missed God’s revelation by following their own “wisdom” to the dark deed of crucifying (ironically) “the Lord of glory” (2:8b). Nevertheless, it is the wisdom of God that “ordained” these events, once again asserting the kingdom’s rule despite appearances. Even more compelling is Paul’s teaching that evil itself is being “restrained” (2 Thess 2:7) until a time when it will be personified in “the man of sin” or “lawless one” (v. 8) whose manipulator is Satan and whose powers will extend to “lying signs and wonders” (v. 9). Such is the manner of the providential and permissive rule of the heavenly king for the present age—subjection, ordination, and restraint.

Such a situation, where the king can be murdered and his followers are subjected regularly to persecution (1 Thess 1:15), tribulations (2 Thess 1:4), and death (2 Tim 4:6; 1 Cor 15:32), and where men steadily proceed from bad to worse in rejecting the message of the kingdom,^{lxxix} cannot be allowed to prevail or go on indefinitely. First, God will send a “strong delusion” (2 Thess 2:11) to surface in the world the desire to “believe the lie” (v. 11b). He will do this because men “received not the love of the truth” (v. 10) and they take “pleasure” in unrighteous behavior (v. 12). Second, by sending the Lord Jesus “from heaven with his mighty angels” (2 Thess 1:7), God will institute a compulsory rule that cannot be ultimately resisted or denied (1 Cor 15:25). Finally, the “Son himself . . . will also be subject to him who put all things under him, that God may be all in all” (1 Cor 15:28; cf. Phi 3:21).

Other NT epistles confirm and support Paul’s theology. James is apparently the earliest to urge faithful and patient behavior on his Christian auditors based on the era in which they live, “the last days” (James 5:3), which will see their tormentors punished, for the cries of the suffering ones have reached “the ears of the Lord of hosts” (5:4), whose *parousia* (coming) is “at hand” (5:8), even “standing at the door” (5:9). Peter urges faithfulness and obedience to Christ in the face of “various trials” (1 Pet 1:6), because Christians have a “living hope” (1:3), which is “reserved in heaven” (1:4) and will be manifest “at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1:7). His explanation of “this salvation” (vv. 10-12) visualizes prophets of the OT era and the “angels in heaven” eagerly seeking to understand the mysterious working of God’s “foreknowledge” (1:2) and

“foreordination” (1:20) in the present era. Peter’s readers are urged to act out their role as God’s “special people” (1 Pet 2:9), even though they live in the world as “sojourners and pilgrims” (2:11). Though they do not rule in this age, because they are obedient to the heavenly ruler, they “may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men” (2:15). They can afford to walk in this fashion because, since his resurrection, Jesus Christ has “gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to him” (3:22 ESV). Their sufferings along the way not only serve to unite them in Christ’s sufferings and give them cause to “glorify God” (4:12-16), but they also show that judgment is presently at work in “the house of God” (4:17), a way of speaking of the church. In this way Peter confirms that the church cannot be synonymous with the kingdom.

Peter’s second epistle joins in Paul’s warning to Timothy that men who do not hear and obey the truth will corrupt and seduce the church (2 Pet 2:13). In a stinging diatribe he makes clear that judgment will come swiftly and surely (2:4-22). Chapter three parallels Paul’s teaching in his Thessalonian correspondence, emphasizing that before “the day of the Lord” arrives, “scoffers” will arise to deny that such an event is any longer conceivable (3:4), since the length of this era tends to deny the lordship of the heavenly king—that is, his “promise” has failed. Peter’s conclusion is that delay is within the purpose of God (3:9) and the suddenness of the final cataclysm will swallow up the scoffers (v. 10). In light of this approaching reality, Christians should conduct themselves in a godly manner and anticipate with eagerness the coming of a “new heavens and a new earth” (v. 13), even “hastening” its approach (3:12).^{lxxx} Peter does not elaborate on this last idea, but we can only conclude from our current study that Jesus’ command to pray for the coming of the kingdom (Mt 6:10) and his statement that the “gospel of the kingdom” must be preached worldwide “as a witness” (Mt 24:14) are the catalysts for this exhortation.

The primary focus of the writer of Hebrews is Christ’s utter superiority to all things and persons that came before him. As Son of God, Christ is above the angels (Heb 1:4-14), and he is the one to whom all things are being subjected (v. 13). His role as king-priest is mirrored in the mysterious appearance of Melchizedek, “king of peace” and “king of righteousness,” in the days of Abraham (7:1ff.). Christ’s sacrifice for sin happened “at the end of the ages” (9:26) and he will “appear a second time . . . for salvation” (9:28). In light of the utter superiority of Christ and his program over all other preceding administrations, Christians are urged to “hold fast the confession of our hope” (10:23), for “yet a little while and he who is coming will come and will not tarry” (10:37). Meanwhile, believers can expect their lives to resemble those of the faithful in prior ages (chapter 11)—a pilgrimage full of uncertainties, challenges, deliverances, temptations, rejection, persecution, torture, and death. They must endure in faith their pilgrimage as an arena for child-training (12:5-11), for they/we are “receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken” (12:28). It follows that ordinary duties and a contentment devoid of covetousness should characterize those expecting to receive such a blessing (13:1-6).

John’s ethical concerns in his epistles revolve around the contrast between the love of the Father and the love of “the world” and its “things” (1 Jn 2:15), seen as a system in rebellion against God. The world is in its “last hour” (2:18), and the spirit of the coming Anti-Christ is already abroad in

it in the form of defectors from among Christian congregations. The world is a place where the devil and his works, first seen biblically in the story of Cain and Abel, are encountered as hatred for righteous people (3:12, 13). No wonder the only thing to be done about such hostility is that the Son of God must “destroy the works of the devil” (3:8). The world loves the message of anti-Christ-like false prophets (4:3-5). But Christians can “overcome the world” (5:4, 5) by maintaining their faith even though “the whole world lies in the wicked one” (5:19), who for a time manipulates the system behind the scenes by the will of God. Consequently, “keep yourself from idols” (5:21) is a terse but fitting summary exhortation for those who would be *in* but not *of* the world.

Jude’s short polemic has the stated purpose of exhorting his readers to “contend earnestly for the faith once that was once for all delivered to the saints” (v. 3 ESV). Jude urges this against the same backdrop we have seen in Paul, Peter, John, and Hebrews. Deceptions and defections within the ranks of believers threaten to carry away even those who would be faithful. But since “the Lord comes with ten thousands of his saints” (v. 14), Christians should concentrate on strengthening their faith, prayer, guarding their own spiritual condition (vv. 20, 21), and rescuing from the encroaching flames of judgment those they can rescue (v. 23).

In conclusion, the correspondence with the churches of the 1st century in the NT epistles is consistent with the teaching of Jesus and the methodology of the prophets who went before. The kingdom of God has its present manifestation and a future consummation. The believing community is expected to behave personally and socially as those who expect a future blessing and who know they are not exempt from God’s judgments present and future. The church is a place for Christ’s kingship to be displayed insofar as his will is obeyed. The church is also his instrument for good in the private and public lives of the community around it. Paradoxically, the more faithful the church is to its true mission, the more it draws upon itself hatred, persecution, and martyrdom. But as the church and/or defectors from it depart from Christ’s commands and teachings, it becomes an anti-Christ influence. This tension characterizes the present age and mitigates against utopian visions of change for a truly “better world,”^{lxxxix} for as John shows, “the world” is the problem, and the “evil one” is behind its beastly system(s). Governmental growth and coercion cannot be baptized into “kingdom building.”

JOHN’S APOCALYPSE OF JESUS CHRIST

John’s account of “the revelation of Jesus Christ” rightfully brings to its conclusion the teaching of the Bible about the “things about the kingdom.” Commonly spoken of as “apocalyptic” because of the Greek word translated “revelation,” it is often treated as a close kin to the Jewish apocalyptic (so-called) literature produced during the intertestamental period. However, this is a case of *ex post facto* descriptive comment, for the Johannine material is the true apocalypse from which attempts have been made to make applications to the prior Jewish materials and to certain portions of the OT material in the prophets.^{lxxxii}

We have previously noted that biblical prophecy, with its firm rooting in a God at work in history and an ethical and socio-political challenge for the present, stands in marked contrast to intertestamental “apocalyptic.” John’s “prophecy,”^{lxxxiii} for so it is called, is the last in the line of biblical prophetic works. It is apocalyptic in the strict sense of the term, as it purports to unveil what is mysterious, and it defines the genre that speaks of the end of all things as we know them in the present age. John’s clearest message is that heaven’s hero, the Lamb “bearing death marks” (5:6), is the only one “worthy” (5:2, 9ff.) to bring to a close with righteous judgments and rewards the age in which we live and to inaugurate the age to come. The Lamb’s worthiness is based in his self-sacrifice and the weight of his character implied by such love and obedience to the will of the Father. Only such a One as he can be trusted to receive and exercise the unlimited “power and riches and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and blessing” (5:12) that are required to right all wrongs and bring in a new age of true peace and blessing. Only the slain Lamb, now risen and ruling, is worthy of such hegemony, no matter what Cain or the mighty men of old or Pharaoh or Goliath or Nebuchadnezzar or Caesar or any other would-be tyrant may think.

Furthermore, not even a Noah or Moses or David or Josiah or Hezekiah or a prophet or an apostle or a pastor of one of the seven churches of Asia, though all may be justified by the blood of the slain Lamb, is worthy. No prior figure, no matter how heroic, is worthy as the Lamb. He is heaven’s and John’s centerpiece in the apocalypse. Without this One and this truth, there is no hope. In him reside all the hopes of mankind for “dominion” and the kingly reign that was envisioned in the beginning. Mankind will reign when Christ reigns. Christ secures the promise of the Father.

This figure first appears to John, the exile of Patmos, as “one like the Son of Man” (1:13) whose glory dwarfs the light of the seven golden lampstands symbolizing the churches of Asia. He walks among them as their Lord and in prophetic fashion exhorts, challenges, and warns them. Only Smyrna and Philadelphia receive no call to repentance. All are called to endure and “overcome.”^{lxxxiv} Their own internal flaws and their consequent failure to mirror Christ’s glory to the world, especially if they do not adequately repent, make the case that they can be only poor and hazy reflections of the glory that must come and that is to come. Meanwhile, “he that has ears to hear” must “keep the words of the prophecy of this book” (22:7 ESV), for the Lamb is Lord of the churches and will judge them as he does all the world.

John’s next vision of the Christ is the one we began with here and is given for the purpose of revealing Christ’s lordship over the current age in the unrolling of the scroll. We believe this vision is symbolic of his rule in history, for the first four seals reveal the march of empires, war, famine, and death. The fifth seal reveals martyrs slain “for the word of God and the testimony which they held” (6:9) crying out for justice and the vengeance of God in the terminology of those wearied by delay (“How long, O Lord”). The sixth seal ushers in an eschatological moment signifying the end of what now is systemically and in all creation. John’s vision parallels the manner in which previous prophets saw the end of all things. Here is the answer to the prayer of the martyrs and, by implication, that of all world-weary Christian pilgrims, for not all the heroes are dead.^{lxxxv}

After the interlude of chapter seven, the culminating events of the end of the age are announced by successive trumpets heralding massive natural and cosmic disasters, the release from restraint of demonic power, and the resulting torments of “those who dwell on the earth,”^{lxxxvi} a reference to those whose mindset makes them at home and at rest in the present age and on the present terrestrial creation. These can be contrasted with the martyrs and the pilgrims and “those who are coming out of great tribulation” (7:14), who are looking for a new heavens and a new earth (2 Pet 3:13). Dwellers on the earth do not repent of all kinds of immoral behavior no matter the pressures brought to bear on them (9:20, 21).

In contrast to the seven-sealed scroll, the “little book” (10:2) appears to symbolize a shorter period in which the Christ will exercise his lordship. Its contents are both “bitter” and “sweet” to John. The sweet is undoubtedly the arrival at last of deliverance and justice for the faithful, but the bitterness is just as certainly the terrible vengeance that shall fall upon the earthbound we have previously described. These are portrayed as rejoicing and celebrating over the martyrdom of the two prophets who “tormented” them (11:10) and as giving their “worship” to “the beast” who wields full political, economic, and religious power (13:11-18). It is certainly a monstrous evil that all earthly types of power and authority should become concentrated in a single coercive governing force, perverting the whole plan of God, wielded by a single personality, and acceded to by all those caught up in deception and/or cowardly enough to prefer life as slaves over death in faithful resistance. They will be deceived because “they received not the love of the truth” (2 Thess 2:10), and they will choose temporary life over eternal glory because they lack the courage of the heroes of the faith (Rev 21:8; cf. Heb 12:1-4).^{lxxxvii}

The vision presented in the interlude of Revelation 18 fills out the picture of the last great monstrosity that bids all peoples everywhere on earth to give allegiance or die. It is personified in the first empire in the biblical record, which attempted to circumvent the prime directive to go out into the earth and subdue it and bring it into the service of God and man. At Babel the choice to seek security above courageous obedience led first to a sovereign scattering and eventually to a wicked empire.^{lxxxviii} John sees this same evil in the final convulsions of a corrupt world system. The collusion of the “kings of the earth” with “the merchants of the earth” (18:3, 9, 11) and the “shipmasters” and “sailors” (18:17-19) in concert with the Babylonish idea of seeking security in ungodly alliances is rightly called whorishness and fornication. Here is a kind of ultimate evil. Using government’s coercive powers to acquire and manipulate wealth for imperial control of the lives and livelihoods of others is a complete perversion of God’s original command to subdue and have dominion over the earth and all creation. The prophetic charge is that “all the nations” (18:3) have drunk the intoxicating nectar of governmental power being manipulated for the aggrandizement of the elitist few at the expense of those loyal to Christ, who are unable or unwilling to play Babylon’s game.^{lxxxix} It was peculiarly the game of Rome, the certain object behind the imagery of Babylon in John’s vision. This is hellish work, for it acquires wealth through intrigue, reputation (the “name” of Gen 11:4), coercion, and the politics of preferential legalities, rather than through God-honoring labor, toil, thrift, and deferred rewards. Rome’s wealth was built on confiscations from the provinces of all kinds of necessities. In the third century pork was added to the “entitlement,” so that the citizens of Rome were parodied with names such as “Piglet” and “Sausage” by those living in the Provinces. Historian Raymond Van

Dam comments that “the food supply of Rome had become, literally, pork barrel politics.”^{xc} Such wealth and power is destined to be “made desolate in one hour” (v.19).

Babylon is symbolic of all the great imperial visions that have been swept away in the march of God’s sovereignty throughout history. Some have been directly destroyed by God’s revealed actions (Israel and ancient Babylon), others have been shown to be unable to resist his mighty works even as they continued to stand (Egypt), but all have passed from the scene just as surely as Rome did after its long run. All of them partook of Babel’s failed promise to deliver security and wealth through unholy and unbiblical departures from God’s rule fueled by covetousness, envy, and power-mongering. Just as in the past, whatever final form the utopian vision takes, it will be judged by the one who rules “with a rod of iron” (19:15). The warning to all is not to become worshippers of such a vision, particularly when it involves one’s own security and livelihood (13:16-18), for this is “the mark of the beast” (13:16; 20:4), mankind able to build the perfect world without God.

To those who, through the faith they hold in “the testimony of Jesus” (19:10) and the courage they show in doing God’s will (20:4; 22:14), overcome by endurance and patience (14:12, 13), the heavenly king will come at last to rule first on the old earth and finally over a new heavens and a new earth (21:1). Only here is the better world which utopian visions of the present age can only imagine. Such a world must have the right king, have the right subjects, and be a place without a curse from sin’s presence (22:3). Here and here alone can the commission and the promise of human dominion be realized.

John’s account of the unveiling of Christ in his kingdom power closes out the Bible’s ongoing polemic against the tendency of government, religion, and the masses of the people to confuse their assigned roles in order to create a false god. God’s world was created for men and women to rule and subdue as God’s stewards by adding their labor and God-given ingenuity to natural resources for the production of goods and wealth. Sin’s ravages first dethroned God in the hearts of men and women individually and then proceeded—first by one-on-one coercion born of religious envy (Cain and Abel), then by the false heroism of small-time despots (Lamech and the men of renown), then by joining forces to seek security apart from God (Babel)—to create political, religious, and cultural structures that would make God irrelevant. In time great empires that slaughtered and enslaved whole civilizations took the place of God. Tragically, millions upon millions whom God created to freely and voluntarily exercise their stewardship under his leadership and that of his own special kind of servant hero/leaders were martyred or shackled; or, worse, they cooperated with evil despots for their own advantage.

The Law said government’s job was to stand as an impartial arbiter (Lev 19:15 and others) dispensing punishment to the evil and justice to the righteous. The Davidic ruler was enjoined to “crush the oppressor” (Ps 72:4 and others) of the needy and afflicted. But the prophets found even in Israel there was rampant coercive oppression of those in league with government to seize and defraud the property of others and otherwise rob them and do violence to them by “legal” means.^{xcii} This collusion is a perversion of God’s mandate to both individuals and governments. Government is best when it confines its business to arbitration between those aggrieved and their

clear oppressors. Government is at its worst when it makes its own increase a goal and uses the moral perversity of its subjects to practice favoritism through legal immoralities and presumes to have the wisdom of God to “make a better world” or some such monstrosity.

Government elites have consistently justified their activities by asserting some form of divine or moral right to do what they do. It is, therefore, no surprise to see in the Bible’s final prophetic words a picture of a great whore aided by religious perversity and deception convincing a world full of peoples and nations that government, not God, is the great blesser. To those whose stock-in-trade is not loving, seeking, and doing the truth, the pull of this great lie is irresistible. In this way a world gone astray from its true king can be convinced to surrender its liberty to one who sits in the place of God.

Finally we note the obvious throughout the biblical survey we have traversed and especially “what the Spirit says to the churches.” Revelation and the entire biblical record are overwhelmingly a call for the faithful to get their own house in order, not to seek to get the world’s twisted caricatures and dreamy, vaporous hopes in line with God’s revelation. Thus the King's promise to "make all things new" assures us of his sovereign intention and our subordinate role. Just how people of faith should relate to this promise is the stuff of aspirations for the "city which hath foundations."

CONCLUSION

This somewhat lengthy (yet truncated) look at the biblical materials on government has been necessary to come to some balance on the subject. Hopefully, that goal has been achieved, for the American experiment has been subjected on the one hand to the Winthropian vision of a City on a Hill fashioned after theocratic Puritan thinking, and on the other hand to a secular vision of a socialistic egalitarian state devoid of theocratic principles or presence. Both visions have used biblical terminology to justify coercive actions that are dubious at best and disastrous generally in their practical outworking. The Puritans learned they could not make the state into a church, or vice versa; the social gospelers have been learning they cannot make man into an angel. The biblical picture is tragic and hopeful at the same time. It is tragic that the mind and heart of mankind is deviously opposed to the rule of God on earth while continuing to seek hegemony over the creation. It is cause for unbounded hope that a new Man has in fact arrived on the planet and has been exalted even now to his rule. It is not the same “blessed hope” of the Puritan vision, but it is the only hope for a shattered world.

Meanwhile the Christian is admonished to do three things besides what we have shown are his ongoing public and private responsibilities. (1) As we wait for the final denouement of history and the arrival of the King, we must “seek the welfare of the city” (Jer 29:7 ESV) where God has sent us “and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.” “Welfare” here is the loaded term “shalom” and is surely Paul’s referent in 1 Tim 2:1, 2. (2) We must not think that our mission is to overthrow governments. Rather it is to be submissive to appropriate authority, that is, those that reward good and punish evil (Rom 13:1-7; Tit 3:1). Paul’s concern in

the Romans 13 passage is not to baptize all governments as legitimate in themselves, but to establish government over anarchy as God's will. We are in agreement with John Calvin that it is right under extreme circumstances to join with others to depose oppressive regimes and establish new ones, but we cannot condone lawlessness.^{xcii} (3) We must "render to Caesar" what is appropriate to him and "to God the things that are God's" (Mk 12:17), remembering the question Jesus uses to put his ruling in context. By calling attention to the "image" of Caesar on the coin of tax payment, he reminds his hearers that they themselves are the only "image" of the living God. Thus, as with the *monogenes* Son^{xciii} standing before them, they belong wholly to God, and Caesar can claim only what God temporarily allows as Caesar's. Some things will never belong to Caesar, and what he has now is only on loan.

It is well to remind ourselves of the fate of the French, who voted on September 11, 1789, to ratify a constitution that had no checks and balances built into the process of legislation, a unicameral assembly. Such a governing document meant that it could be "altered, amended, and changed at will." In effect it became a formula for constant revolution. "They had created a constitution synonymous with the general will. In other words, they had no constitution at all."^{xciv} Thomas Jefferson was an immediate observer to these events. The wisdom of "checks and balances" within American constitutional law is the legacy of a biblical understanding of the nature of man and his relationship to "nature's God."

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All other Scripture references are from the author's own translation.

ⁱ For an exhaustive treatment of these issues, see the forthcoming Chad Brand and Tom Pratt, *Seeking the City: Christian Faith and Political Economy, A Biblical, Theological, Historical Study* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2013).

ⁱⁱ The term *republican* is used here in its generic sense, derived from the Latin *res publica*, meaning "public matter." It designates representative government not derived from hereditary or monarchical powers. Montesquieu allowed democracies, aristocracies, and oligarchies to assume this appellation. The American model requires government to be "of the people, by the people, and for the people," which is about as "public" as one can get.

ⁱⁱⁱ For several essays pertinent to the subject matter of this section, see *The Legacy of the French Revolution*, ed. Ralph C. Hancock and L. Gary Lambert (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 1996), espec. 81-151.

^{iv} Michael Knox Beran, *The Pathology of the Elites: How the Arrogant Classes Plan to Run Your Life* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2010), 114. Beran quotes Schopenhauer: "'The pain which is essential to life cannot be thrown off. The ceaseless efforts to banish suffering accomplish no more than to make it change its form.' If we succeed in removing pain in one of its forms 'it immediately assumes a thousand others.'"

^v Thomas Sowell addresses this subject in *A Conflict of Visions: Ideological Origins of Political Struggles* (New York: Basic Books, 1987). Several of Sowell's other works address this topic as well.

^{vi} See on this point Barry Alan Shain, *The Myth of American Individualism: The Protestant Origins of American Political Thought* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 6, 7. This volume documents the keen awareness of public responsibility that animated the religious life of New England and other regions during the revolutionary period.

^{vii} On Mather's understanding of this issue see Richard F. Lovelace, *The American Piety of Cotton Mather: Origins of American Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979), 65-72. All stripes of millenarian speculation at the time seem to have been united by the idea that the last harbinger of Christ's return would be a great Jewish conversion, a prospect they assumed would require a spiritual reformation in the Protestant churches. All were agreed that the Roman Catholic Church was Anti-Christ.

^{viii} See Peter Gentry and Stan Norman, "Kingdom of God," Butler, Trent C., E. Ray Clendenen, Chad Brand, Charles Draper, Archie England, Steve Bond, and Bill Latta, eds., *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville: Holman, 2003), 987. Also see the discussion in Eugene Merrill, *Everlasting Dominion* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2006), 136: "The technical terms are not to be hastily dismissed. The verb, *to rule*, . . . bears overtones of oppression in some instances and even here suggests dominion of a dictatorial nature. There is no question who is in charge! This is supported by the companion verb, *subdue*, the meaning of which elsewhere is to subjugate (by force) or even to humiliate." Note that this is without reference to subsequent sin on the part of Adam and Eve. Man and woman are expected to exert appropriate force to organize and develop the planet and its surrounding environment.

^{ix} There is "mystery" here, as Paul notes (Eph 5:32), for Gen 1:27, 28 implies that it is in the original union of creation that the "image of God" resides. This cannot be pressed too far, but the juxtaposition of "our image" describing the nature of God begs to be explored in the profundity of man and woman as truly one in Adam. See Anthony Hoekema, *Created in God's Image* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986), 75-82.

^x Only in a fallen world is politics necessary or even an option.

^{xi} It is clear from the beginning that this planet has potential that only mankind can unlock through development in imitation of the creative work of God, *contra* modern ideas about pristine wilderness as the ideal.

^{xii} Lengthy debate and discussion are evident in the literature on the image of God in man. I find John Walton's take to be the best in *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), loc. 2313-24, Kindle Edition. Man is the image of the king stationed in the king's territory and placed to do the king's work and establish his rule. This contrasts with the ANE idea that the king alone bore the image of a god. See also G. K. Beale, *We Become What We Worship: A Biblical Theology of Worship* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2008), for additions to this basic conception.

^{xiii} G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004).

^{xiv} Walter Kaiser, *Toward an Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Academie, 1978), 80.

^{xv} Gordon Wenham, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1987), 142, comments: "Few texts in the OT are so explicit and all-embracing as this in specifying the extent of human sinfulness and depravity (cf. Ps 14:1-3; 51:3-12 [1-10]; Jer 17:9-10). But that sin has its root in man's thought world is certainly a commonplace of biblical ethics (cf. 'You shall not covet,' Exo 20:17)."

^{xvi} Erich Sauer, *The Dawn of World Redemption: A Survey of the History of Salvation in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1951), 63-80.

^{xvii} This first attempt to find security and "get a name" will be mirrored in Israel later and finally dealt with in Rev. 18.

^{xviii} It is unique to the biblical message that its "heroes" do not come off as ideal characters, but as sinners in need of correction by such pagans as Pharaoh, Abimelech, Laban, etc.

^{xix} The recurring theme we cite here has recently been treated more or less exhaustively by James Hamilton, *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010).

^{xx} This is a harbinger of the mighty wisdom of Solomon, which gained him fame and wealth but which also led to the sense of enslavement among the people that split his kingdom after his death.

^{xxi} There is clearly an anticipation that in the best scenario for the future, the nations will come to Israel to learn about wise governance, the Queen of Sheba being a prime example. This theme continues at various intervals: the dedication of the Temple has an invitation to the nations to come and pray and seek deliverance from judgment on their sins just as Israel is to do (2 Chr 6:18-33); several Psalms, espec. 33, call on the nations to make YHWH their God and rule accordingly; and the prophets regularly anticipate "the Gentiles" coming to worship in Zion.

^{xxii} See Ex 18:13-26; Num 11:16-30; Deut 1:9-18.

^{xxiii} Ex 21:6; 22:8, 9; Num 25:5; Deut 16:18; 19:17, 18; 21:2.

^{xxiv} See Timothy S. Laniak, *Shepherds After My Own Heart: Pastoral Traditions and Leadership in the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 94ff., for further documentation. J. G. McConville in *Deuteronomy, Apollos Old Testament Commentaries*, ed. David W. Baker and Gordon J. Wenham (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002) 304-306, points out three principles arising from this passage: 1) the supremacy of Torah over all and its embodiment of justice/righteousness; 2) the people as the "appointers" of administrators ("judges") among them with God's appointed priests as supreme court; 3) the prophet as the one who calls all to faithfulness. Theoretically, this order does not require a king, but it is permitted and he is expected to have his own copy of authorized Torah to "read," "learn," "do," "keep"—1) that "his heart not be lifted up above his brothers," 2) "that he might not turn aside . . . to right or left," 3) "so that he may continue long in his kingdom, he and his children" (Deut 17:18-20). This system, in following upon the "descent into chaos both natural and political (in Gen and Exo.), . . . with its checks and balances, stand(s) in direct opposition to the monarchical power politics of Egypt and of its smaller clones in Canaan" (305-06).

^{xxv} The rise of the prophetic institution prior to kingship should be seen as subjecting the one to the other, thus putting Samuel in the place of applying the holy anointing oil to two kings. After the anointing of Solomon, it appears only Elijah carries out this function again (cf. 1 Kgs 19ff.).

^{xxvi} It is significant that during the conquest of Canaan in the days of Joshua, the leadership of Israel is taught about its own ability under the kingship of Yahweh to fight its own battles and demonstrate its own kingship over the "kings" of Canaan (Josh 10:22-27). This is done in the ongoing series of battles and is punctuated by a call to courage and trust in Yahweh to do the same thing to all the enemies of Israel.

^{xxvii} See also 2 Sam 12:12, where the motivation of fear at the sight of one more threat (Ammonites) seems to be primary.

^{xxviii} Even more telling is the NLT paraphrase: "you and your family are the focus of all Israel's hopes." The word for "desire" here is associated regularly with covetousness (and lust) and is the word that characterized Eve's attitude toward the forbidden fruit.

^{xxix} See Jdg 17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25.

xxx By contrast, it is notable that Yahweh's view of the service of David begins with his being "taken" from the "sheepcote" (2 Sam 7:8) to be "prince" or commander.

xxxi This is the earliest warning about how the politics of Israel will play out in the coming Exile, first alluded to by Moses on the plains of Moab.

xxxii For full discussion of this word group, see R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, and Bruce K. Waltke, eds., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, (Chicago: Moody, 1980), in *loc.*, #1675, (*asar*). This paper uses digital version.

xxxiii Heb., *nagiyd*, cf. 1 Sam 9:16; 10:1; 13:14, as is David, 2 Sam 6:21; 7:8.

xxxiv 1 Sam 13:13, 14—This act of public piety without corresponding private devotion is Saul's practice, as can be seen later in the situation with Amalek. By contrast, we see David's personal devotion and reverence at 1 Sam 30:6ff. and in the departure from Jerusalem during Absalom's rebellion.

xxxv See Joyce Baldwin, *1 & 2 Samuel, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries*, ed. D. J. Wiseman (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), commenting at 1 Sam. 13:15 (Libros digital version): "What Samuel is at pains to establish once and for all is the essential difference between Israel's monarchy and that of the nations. In Israel the Lord is King, and obedience to him must be paramount. It follows that any sign of a desire for independence of action becomes a disqualification: it is the equivalent of rebellion against the Lord. Already the Lord has selected Saul's successor, who will be *a man after his own heart*, prepared to let the Lord's will, as spoken by his prophet, be the guide of his life."

xxxvi See John H. Walton, Victor H. Mathews, and Mark W. Chavalas, *IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), in *loc.*, in the digital version for this opinion.

xxxvii See comments by C. F. Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *The Books of Samuel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1963), 149.

xxxviii Apparently the previous arrangement of periodic deliverance was popularly judged to be inadequate in light of an immediate Ammonite threat (1 Sam 12:12) and the ongoing Philistine aggression faced by Saul (1 Sam 14:52) and later David. This amounts to a rejection of Yahweh's kingship.

xxxix Longman has observed that covenant curses due to general apostasy (idolatry) are described elsewhere in the Old Testament in Lev 26:19-20 and Deut 28:22-24, 38-42. Tremper Longman III, "1 Samuel 12:16-19: Divine Omnipotence or Covenant Curse?" *Westminster Theological Journal* 45 (1983): 170-71.

xl See 1 Sam 9:16; 10:1; 13:14; 25:30; 2 Sam 6:21; 7:8; 1 Kgs 1:35; 14:7; 16:2; 2 Kgs 20:2; 2 Chr 11:22. But also note that Ezekiel uses another term (*nasiy*) to denote the personage envisioned in the era of the ideal temple.

xli See also that it is Yahweh who is the true "shepherd" of his people and the model for human leadership (Gen 48:15; 49:24; Pss 23; 74:1; 77:20; 78:52; 80:1; 95:7, etc.). Tragically, David's great sin is seen as the theft and slaughter of the "ewe lamb" of his "poor" neighbor (2 Sam 12:2-4).

xlii See Ps 89 for a reflection on the need for more than a temporal perspective on this promise.

xliii See the "covenant" established at the time of David's accession—2 Sam 5:3.

xliiv See Asa, Jehoshaphat, Jehoash (during the lifetime of Jehoiada), Hezekiah, Josiah.

xlv Derek Kidner, *Psalms 73-150, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries*, ed. D. J. Wiseman (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1975), 319. See also other Psalms for this conundrum.

xlvi 1 Chr 29:23; cf. 17:13, 14; 28:5; 2 Chr 9:8.

xlvii See Pss 2, 89, 110, *et al.*

xlviii Isa 1; 6:5; 37:16; 41:21; 43:15; 52:7; cf. 11:1-5; 9:1-7.

xlix Hos 13:9-11; cf. 9:9; 10:9; 11:5.

l Jer 31:31-34; 33:14-26; Eze 34:1-10; 36:22-38; 37:24-27; 44-46, where the "prince" (*nasiy*) of a new kind is anticipated. Ezekiel has previously pronounced the doom of David's current line (21:25-27) with anticipation of the fulfillment of Gen 49:10 as the hope for the future.

li Pss 2, 18, 20, 21, 45, 72, 101, 110, 144, etc.

lii See also the story of the Jehoiada/Joash period (2 Chr 23:1—24:22), which clearly shows the conspiracy of people and king in the treachery of shedding blood. This happened despite Joash's receiving his copy of the Torah as in Deut 17 (2 Chr 23:11) and the "covenant" to "be Yahweh's people" (2 Chr 23:16).

- ^{liii} See Dan 9 and continuing visions and explanations.
- ^{liiv} John Andrew Dearman, *Property Rights in the Eighth-Century Prophets* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1988), 133. See esp. the specific designation in Jer 22:1-5.
- ^{liiv} Daniel I Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 25-48*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 724.
- ^{livi} See McConville, *Deuteronomy*, on Deuteronomy 17. It means plainly that government is not authorized to take something from one entity and give it to another without justification provided in the fundamental law of Sinai.
- ^{liiii} This practice, and the perversion of the courts so that those who have been defrauded have no recourse, are repeatedly associated with covetousness and called "unjust gain" (Isa 57:15 with further examples at Gen 37:26; Ex 18:21; Jdg. 5:19; 1 Sam 8:3; Ps 119:36; Prov. 28:16; Mic 4:13; Eze 22:6, 27.). The attempts of many to associate this idea with the mere acquisition of an amount of wealth judged independently of any given standard of Scripture are ill-conceived and unsustainable.
- ^{liiii} The "prince" of Ezekiel 44 and following is another personage who is expected to judge lawfully, but scholarship is divided on whether this person is to be conflated in some way with Messiah.
- ^{lix} George Eldon Ladd, *The Presence of the Future: The Eschatology of Biblical Realism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974), 87-101. But see also Mark Adam Elliott, *The Survivors of Israel: A Reconsideration of the Theology of Pre-Christian Judaism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000) for a more nuanced understanding of the literature of the period. Elliott had the benefit of greater access than Ladd to the archaeological discoveries of the last century.
- ^{lix} Gal 4:4; Eph 1:9-11; cf. Rom 5:6.
- ^{lii} N.T. Wright, *Simply Jesus: A New Vision of Who He Was, What He Did, and Why He Matters* (New York: HarperOne, 2011). Wright uses this terminology throughout this book.
- ^{liii} See Mt 12:29; Lk 10:17; 11:22; Mk 6:7.
- ^{liiii} Notice that the "oppression" word-group is most often associated with demonic powers and suggests to the people that Satan, not Rome or rich people, is the primary oppressor of God's people.
- ^{liiv} Mt 6:9, 10; 13:43; 26:29.
- ^{liiv} Mk 8:38; Mt 10:32, 33; 25:34.
- ^{liiv} See Morna D. Hooker, *The Signs of a Prophet: The Prophetic Actions of Jesus* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1997), 41-42 for comment on this incident as a definitive moment in Jesus' demonstration of the nature of citizenship in the kingdom. According to Jesus, one must be "converted" to be a "little one," i.e., become "poor" (this last is our conclusion on the story). Further, it is the key to "greatness" in the kingdom, a mark of biblical heroism.
- ^{liiv} This is also the emphasis of Paul (1 Tim 5:9, 10) on "washing the saints' feet" and of John (2 John 10, 11) on "receiving" and "bidding God speed" to genuine brethren.
- ^{liiv} Ladd, *Presence*, 193.
- ^{liix} See Mt 5:20; Mk 10:15; Mt 25:34; Mt 5:4.
- ^{liix} Mt 6:33; 6:10; Lk 23:51.
- ^{liix} *Contra* Richard Stearns, *The Hole in our Gospel* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2009) and any number of theologians and writers.
- ^{liix} See Eph 1:22, 23; 5:23; Col 1:18.
- ^{liix} See Rom 8:18ff.; Eph 1:19-21.
- ^{liix} See 1 Cor 15:20-28; 2 Thess 1:5-10.
- ^{liix} Eph 3:15, 17ff.; Phi 2:9-11, 12ff.; Col 1:13; 3:1ff. and others.
- ^{liix} This declaration at the beginning of Romans (1:5) is tantamount to saying that Caesar is not Lord as he claimed to be. However, Paul's declaration does not lead him to set forth a political agenda. We will take this up later.
- ^{liix} Ladd, *Presence*, 264.
- ^{liix} See 1 Cor 1:7, 8; 16:22; Gal 3:20; 1 Thess 1:10; Tit 2:13.
- ^{liix} See 2 Tim 3:1-9; 4:3, 4; Tit 1:10-16.
- ^{liix} Note A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville, TN: Broadman, various dates), *in loc.*, on this translation of the word used here.
- ^{liix} Or Stearns's "social revolution."

^{lxxxii} See George Eldon Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972), 20, for this description.

^{lxxxiii} See 1:3; 22:7. 10, 18, 19 and the writer himself designated as "prophet," 22:9.

^{lxxxiv} Note that all the calls to "repent" and to "overcome" are addressed to a singular "you," implying either the "messenger" of each church or each member individually or both. "Overcomers" are individuals, not the collective.

^{lxxxv} This is basically Ladd's approach to the interpretation of the first six seals. Ladd, *Revelation*, 79-120.

^{lxxxvi} See Rev 3:10; 6:10; 8:13; 11:10; 13:8-14.

^{lxxxvii} This is surely the implication of the "cowardly" and "faithless" (ESV) being first into the fire in 21:8.

^{lxxxviii} The search for security through government is among the principles first articulated in the West by John Locke, and Thomas Jefferson followed in his train during the time of the American founding. See Peter Augustine Lawler, "Religion, Philosophy, and the American Founding," *Protestantism and the American Founding*, ed. Thomas S. Engerman and Michael P. Zuckert (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 2004), 166-67.

^{lxxxix} For compelling views of the state of the Roman central geographical region on the Italian peninsula, see Ronald Saller and Peter Garnsey, *The Roman Empire: Economy, Society and Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987) and J. Nelson Kraybill, *Apocalypse and Allegiance* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2010). The Italian peninsula and Rome itself were largely unproductive of the necessities to sustain the population. Consequently, the rest of the Empire fed the elite of government and their various patronage-generated relationships. The Roman strategy was not unlike the concept of the administrative state that has been the strategy of progressivism in the last 100 years.

^{xc} Raymond Van Dam, *Rome and Constantinople: Rewriting Roman History in Late Antiquity* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2010). Rome in this regard is like contemporary Washington, D.C., which boasts sixteen of the wealthiest ZIP codes in the U.S.

^{xcⁱ} See Isa 10:1, 2; Mic 2:2; 6:12 and many others.

^{xcⁱⁱ} The Constitution of the United States appears to be the culmination of a Christianized civilization that aspired to the rule of law rather than the rule of men. "Honor" is therefore due to the rule of law in the Constitution, not strictly to any man or men who have been sworn to uphold that law.

^{xcⁱⁱⁱ} This Greek term captures the uniqueness of the image of God in his Son Jesus.

^{xc^{iv}} Hancock & Lambert, 143.