Will History Repeat Itself?

...you shall know them by their fruit...

Examining the history of church and state.
The Founders of this Nation understood a deep and profound truth. They understood that in order for freedom to ring for all, there must be a wall of separation between church and state. Many of them were the direct descendants of those who had left behind the oppressive systems of government that were on the European soil. For many years now, freedom has rung true in this nation. However, can you see the wall of separation between church and state being subtly eroded? Will history repeat itself?

But what is the answer? Is it a government coup or a new military regime? Is it a bureaucracy with endless lists of laws and mountains of paperwork? We who write this paper are finding from our own experience that the age-old answer is love. Loving, caring, and helping our neighbor as ourselves is the foundation for a prospering society where freedom rings for all. Even James Madison understood that the Constitution was designed for a morally upright people. He was simply talking about a society where people are honest, hard working, and faithful to their covenants.

Thoughts precede actions. Being set free to love is true freedom of thought. When human beings fail to love, fail to care, and fail to help their neighbor as themselves, over time loving and caring become the responsibility of the state. Instead of having relationships to rely on in time of need, people turn to the support of the state and government aid. This is a sign of alienation between fellow human beings.

This alienation is what causes governments to grow into dehumanized institutions where the human voice can easily be silenced. We refer to this as a “beastly government.” A beastly government cannot love. So it seeks the caressing ability of the Christian church to help run its affairs. As in a marriage, both parties are willing participants. The church seeks the authority of the state to promote its own agenda and the state finds a stabilizing factor in its authority over the people. But as history tells us, the result of church and state joining together produces a pattern of bloodshed and injustice.

We are learning to love and care for one another as true friends, providing for one another’s needs on a daily basis. Maybe you’ve seen us at our Maté Factor Café in Manitou Springs. Or perhaps you have seen us on one of our building crews around town. We are bonded together in a life where the restoration of love is ruling our hearts, sharing all things in common and giving to one another as any has need. This is an actual life that we share. We warmly invite you to visit us anytime at our café or our home. Our hearts are open to you.

The Community in Manitou Springs
The Founding Fathers of America included deists like Thomas Jefferson, devout Christians like James Madison, and Freemasons like George Washington. This was perhaps the most revolutionary aspect of the American Revolution. Never before had men of such different beliefs joined together in a civil government to preserve not only their own rights and freedom, but the rights and freedom of all.

Thomas Jefferson gleaned from the writings of Roger Williams the term “wall of separation,” which he used to make his very famous declaration in 1802, acknowledging that through the First Amendment, "...the whole American people... declared that their legislature should “make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof,” thus building a wall of separation between Church and State.4

All of the colonies except Rhode Island, where Roger Williams had established in its charter a clear separation of church and state, were afflicted with conflicts between those two spheres of authority. It was to just such a conflict that James Madison returned after graduation from college, which he described in a letter to his college friend, Bradford, in January of 1774:

"...There are at this time in the adjacent country not less than five or six well-meaning men in close jail for publishing their religious sentiments, which, in the main, are very orthodox. I have neither patience to hear, talk or think of anything relative to this matter, for I have squabbled and scolded, abused and ridiculed, so long about it, to little purpose, that I am without common patience. So I must beg you to pity me, and pray for liberty of conscience to all."5

Madison came to understand that the real issue was greater than mere "toleration of religion" as espoused by John Locke. He saw the issue as "free exercise" of religion, or "full and equal rights of conscience" for the individual.6 He understood that government should protect every man’s freedom of conscience, and that this was the limit of the government’s role in religious matters. What James Madison, one of the principal authors of the Constitution, saw from the perspective of civil government, Roger Williams had understood spiritually 100 years before him.6

Dictates of Conscience

The importance of the freedom to follow the dictates of one’s conscience is clearly evident in the way the First Amendment of the Constitution, which guards this liberty, came to be written. The writing of the Constitution took place in the midst of great struggle and turmoil. Some colonies wanted a state religion; others wanted no part of any state-controlled religion. So at the Second Continental Congress, one
of the main issues was the degree of control the state should exercise over the practice of religion, and the degree to which any particular denomination could be established as a state religion. These conflicts were fierce and the issues were thoroughly debated among the delegates present. Ultimately a majority emerged who favored the spirit of religious liberty established in Rhode Island’s charter, thus it was incorporated into the Declaration of Independence and the Federal Constitution.10

The fact of this decision raises a troubling question: What is it about the nature and history of Christianity that caused these great statesmen to fear its grip on the reins of power? Their decisions expressed in the Constitution and the Bill of Rights sent a prophetic message to the whole world, calling for an end to the tyranny of the church-state liaison.

The “Myth” of Separation

Yet today there are Christians in America who claim it is a myth that the framers of the Constitution wanted a complete separation of church and state. They seek to tear down the wall of separation in order to bring the moral principles of Christianity to bear on the decisions of civil government. The spokesmen of this movement claim that America was established as a Christian nation and therefore the “separation of church and state” is a myth. They intend to make America into the theocracy which, they claim, the early colonists were seeking. They argue that the “wall” was originally introduced [by Jefferson] as, and understood to be, a one-directional wall protecting the church from the government.”10 Roger Williams, however, made it clear that the wall of separation must go both ways:  

On the other side, the Churches as Churches, have no power … of erecting or altering formes of Civil Government, electing of Civill officers, inflicting Civil punishments … as by deposing Magistrates from their Civill Authoritie…”

By calling for the abolishment of separation, these Christian activists cite numerous examples of leaders in the colonial era “never separating the struggle for freedom from Biblical principles … For Samuel Adams there was no separation between political service and spiritual activities.”12 But the proper context for public service being guided by right moral principles is the “dictates of [each individual’s] conscience” and not as legislated dictum that forces the beliefs and practices of a particular religion upon all citizens.

The last 200 years of American history illustrate this tension in the grappling of those on both sides of the wall as to where to draw the line between the legitimate spheres of authority of the state and the church. Where would we be as a nation without the foundation of the First Amendment that gives civil government the freedom to rule according to conscience for the good of all its citizens and gives individuals the freedom to believe and practice whatever their conscience dictates to them?

Since the days of Constantine, the state and the Christian religion have been continually jockeying for position to use one another for their own ends. It is no different today with movements like “Reclaiming America for Christ.” Christians are involved at every level of American government in the guise of seeking moral reforms. But in doing so, they are seeking not merely to bring this country’s rulers back to a standard of conscience, but to establish a broad-based and intimate merger of the interests of the state with the doctrines and political agendas of Christianity.

The stage is now set for the final drama of human history. As the world plummets into moral chaos and unpredictable outbreaks of terrorism, people are sacrificing their personal freedoms for the apparent security of increased governmental control over every facet of life. It will take a world government to restrain the global forces that threaten global destruction.

At the same time, the divided camps of Christianity are drawing together in a superficial unity that will culminate in a world religion bent on shaping the policy of the emerging world order. The wayward daughters will come diplomatically back under the wing of their mother, the Roman Catholic Church, and together they will mount the state once more and ride into temporal power.13 True to her nature, she will once again seek to silence every dissenting voice.

But in these last days the age-old story of religious oppression will have a new twist. For in the ranks of the ostracized and persecuted will be a people, a kingdom which the God of heaven will set up. Despite all opposition, their emerging culture based on self-sacrificing love will prove indestructible. Their life will be a demonstration of the righteous standard of God, by which He will judge the nations of the earth, bringing an end to both the political and ecclesiastical powers of wickedness, and ushering in a new age of peace.‌

---

You may think it absurd to suggest that the American Revolution was a Holy War. The term conjures up images of wild-eyed religious fanatics seeking the glory of martyrdom. However, in view of the historical revisionist tactics of the Christian Right, the question should be asked plainly: Was the American Revolution a holy war?

The most objective indication of the motivations of those early Americans in separating from England is the Declaration of Independence. This document states that all men are given certain rights by God that cannot be revoked, and it is only when a government becomes destructive of those rights that the people then have the right to oppose it.

The Declaration of Independence listed the “long train of abuses” that justified their revolt, for this was a decision they did not take lightly. It stated that the king “plundered [their] seas, ravaged [their] coasts, burned [their] towns, and destroyed the lives of [their] people.” It accused England of inciting violence between Americans, as well as stirring up the natives against them, along with many other acts of cruelty.

The American war for independence represented the struggle of men who had endured under great tyranny until their consciences would no longer permit them to remain passive. If ever there was a just war, they were persuaded that this was it. Certainly there were Christian zealots on both sides who pounded the pulpits claiming that God was on their side, but on America’s side it was a resistance to tyranny, not a war of conquest in the name of Christ.

Today there are those who claim that America was established as a “Christian Nation” founded on “Christian values” and are lobbying for its return to that foundation. Using carefully selected quotations apart from their historical and cultural context, they imply that those who fought the revolution were fighting for a Christian cause. However, the leading statesmen of that day declared explicitly the opposite. For example, the Treaty of Tripoli, drafted and signed under President Adams in 1797, put it quite bluntly: “The government of the United States is not in any sense founded on the Christian religion...” It was intended to assure the Muslims of Tripoli that they had no need to fear American aggression or prejudice due to religious conviction.

One of the foremost revisionists of the Christian Right, David Barton, was forced to admit the use of fraudulent quotations in his book, The Myth of Separation, to strengthen his case that the founding fathers of America never intended there to be a wall of separation between church and state. He asserts that what they really intended was a semi-permeable barrier that would keep the state from controlling the church, but allow the church to influence the state. His argument merely illustrates the fact that Christianity cannot be trusted to stay within the boundaries established by Christ Himself.

If it actually were a Christian cause that the early Americans were fighting for
— that is, a war compelled by the teachings of Christ — they would certainly not have been fighting with physical weapons, but rather spiritual. For Christ taught His followers to “love their enemies” and to “turn the other cheek.” If they were fighting for His cause they would have to remember that He said, “My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but my kingdom is not of this realm.”

Benedict Arnold was a famous traitor of the war whose action led to the king’s advantage. However if America was truly establishing itself as a holy nation, then Benedict Arnold should have been applauded for his service to the king. For the New Testament scriptures say, “Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority...not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh... if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God.”

Now obviously Benedict Arnold deserves no such honor. Clearly he was not motivated by such noble ideals. But the high standards of Messiah’s teachings are not binding upon natural men. The writings of the New Testament are addressed to the followers of the Messiah — those who have fully surrendered and devoted themselves to Him. Such men and women are fully persuaded that God will protect them from their enemies if they are doing His will; or if it pleases Him to allow their death, they are content to die rather than defend themselves.

But natural men are accountable to natural law — the instinctive law of the conscience. As the Apostle Paul said, “Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.”

The founding fathers of America were God-fearing “Gentiles” who understood the natural laws of conscience. Their heart-wrenching decision to fight for their independence from England was borne of their conviction in their conscience that their cause was just, not from a religious zeal that demonized their enemy. Whether they waged a “just war” in the eyes of God is not for us to say, but clearly it was not a “holy war” such as Christians had waged for nearly fifteen centuries. The founding fathers of America would have no part of that.

“During almost fifteen centuries has the legal establishment of Christianity been on trial. What have been its fruits? More or less in all places, pride and indolence in the Clergy, ignorance and servility in the laity, in both, superstition, bigotry and persecution.”

~James Madison, fourth President and father of the Constitution

1 2 Corinthians 10:4 2 Matthew 5:39,44 3 John 18:36 4 1 Peter 2:13,18,19 5 Romans 2:14-15 6 James Madison, A Biography in his Own Words, edited by Joseph Gardner, p. 93
Roger Williams
Father of Religious Freedom in America

Roger Williams came to the New World in 1631 with much the same hopes as the first Pilgrim Separatists. His heart’s desire was to see a pure church raised up, with no ties to the Church of England and its corruption, compromise, and oppression. Ironically that desire is what led to his banishment from the Massachusetts Bay Colony at the end of 1635. His outspoken zeal for “soul liberty” proved too radical for the Puritan leaders of the colony, who had brought with them the same spirit of religious intolerance from which they had fled.

Slipping away just before his arrest, Roger Williams fled into the wilderness and found refuge among the Indians. In later writings, Williams recalls how he was “denied the common air to breathe... and almost without mercy and human compassion, exposed to winter miseries in a howling wilderness [for fourteen weeks] not knowing what bread or bed did mean.” During this time, whatever shelter he found was in the dingy, smoky lodges of the Indians. Their hospitality to him in his time of need was something he sought to repay with kindness all the rest of his life.

In early 1636, Williams purchased land from the Indians and with a few friends founded a settlement they called Providence Plantations, which soon became a refuge for those “distressed of conscience.” Williams eventually obtained a royal charter for the colony, which later became the State of Rhode Island, based on this mandate:

No person within the said colony, at any time hereafter, shall be anywise molested, punished, disquieted, or called in question for any differences in opinion in matters of religion ... but that all persons may ... enjoy their own judgments and consciences in matters of religious concerns.

What is most significant about the royal charter is that it acknowledges at the foundation of Rhode Island’s government two important principles: republicanism (democratic governments made up of representatives elected by its citizens) and religious liberty. These principles characterize our American government and are later expressed in both the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States.

Neither republicanism nor religious liberty can be found in any of the charters of the other colonies in which the church and state were united. It is therefore easy to determine the original source of those principles which have protected our religious freedom and made America a refuge for the oppressed of every land. The nation’s debt to Roger Williams is a debt that can never be canceled.

The Bloudy Tenent

His bitter experience of the English Reformation, from the acrid stench of men burning at the stake in England to his banishment from Massachusetts, caused Roger Williams to write his famous Bloudy Tenent of Persecution for Cause of Conscience in which he argued his case for something hitherto unseen in the Western world — the complete separation of church and state. The Puritan society of Massachusetts, through the civil magistrates, attempted to force its religious conscience on all who lived there. This was consistent with the whole bloody history of Christendom since the reign of Constantine. Such persecution revealed to Williams “that religion cannot be true which needs such instruments of violence to uphold it.”

In the great struggle of his soul, Roger Williams finally came to the conclusion

1 Roger Williams, Bloudy Tenent of Persecution for Cause of Conscience (1644), p. 139
that the true church had long ago ceased to exist on the earth:

The Christian Church or Kingdom of the Saints, that Stone cut out of the mountain without human hands, (Daniel 2) now made all one with the mountain or Civil State, the Roman Empire, from whence it is cut or taken: Christ's lilies, garden and love, all one with the thorns, the daughters and wilderness of the World.2

Christianity fell asleep in the bosom of Constantine, and the laps and bosoms of those Emperors who professed the name of Christ.3

So, when did the church die? The trail of evidence that proved the death of the church led from the Puritan society of New England all the way back to Constantine's nationalization of Christianity in the fourth century. Since that time, Williams concluded, the world had been under the dominion of the “anti-Christian” Roman Catholic Church.4 Gone was the cultural and spiritual wall that had separated His garden, the church, from the wilderness of the world.5 As legal scholar Timothy Hall described it:

According to Roger Williams, there was no garden to be protected any longer. Weeds grew where cultivated flowers once bloomed. He did not advocate a wall between church and state; he mourned the wall's destruction and the destruction of the church. There was no church left to be separated from the state. The most that true believers could do was wait in expectation that God would one day send apostles who would replant the garden.6

There are some who credit Williams with founding the first Baptist church in America, and point to the fact of his baptism in Providence. It is true that Roger Williams and eleven friends formed the first Baptist church in America in Providence, Rhode Island. Ezekiel Holliman baptized Williams by immersion in March of 1639. He had followed Williams from the Salem church where Williams had briefly taught several years before. Williams then proceeded to baptize Holliman and ten friends. Shortly after this, however, he came to a most remarkable conclusion, as one of those friends describes.7

I [Richard Scott] walked with him in the Baptists' way about three or four months, in which time he brake from the society, and declared at large the ground and reasons of it; that their baptism could not be right because it was not administered by an apostle. After that he set upon a way of seeking (with two or three other men that had dissented with him) by way of preaching and praying; and there he continued a year or two, till two of the three had left him.8

Roger Williams' actions declared what his later words would make abundantly clear: all Christian baptisms were and are invalid, unless apostles, like those of the first-century church, administered them. Roger Williams expressed this in his radical statement regarding the conversion of the Indians of New England:

How readily I could have brought the whole Country to have observed one day in seven; ... to have received a Baptism ... to have come to a stated Church meeting, maintained priests and forms of prayer, and a whole form of Antichristian worship in life and death ... Why have I not brought them to such a conversion as I speak of?9 I answer, woe be to me, if I call light darkness, and darkness light ... woe be to me if I call that conversion unto God, which is indeed subversion of the souls of millions in Christendom, from one false worship to another, and the profanation of the holy name of God.10

In Roger Williams' eyes the church had died and would remain dead until God rekindled the spark of the early church through the love and authority of the apostles he would raise up at some point in the future. It did no good to try to convert people to a dead religion. Williams began to call himself a “waiter,” for he saw no alternative but to wait patiently until that restoration.11 Meanwhile, he and the rest of mankind must find a way to live in peace and practice their diverse and divided religions according to the persuasion of their own conscience.

The Separation of Church and State

This conclusion brought Roger Williams to his understanding of the proper role of the state. He realized that the affairs of the state ought to be purely secular. He rejected John Winthrop's “City on a Hill” vision of the Puritan colony in Massachusetts, in which the civil government had the power to enforce religious correctness. He believed that no nation had a mandate from God to bring His redemptive plan to the world,12 therefore the affairs of the state should be separate from the affairs of religion. Individual believers of all faiths should be protected from the tyranny that results when religion forms an alliance with secular government.

It was from this conviction that Roger Williams established the colony called Providence Plantations, which later became the state of Rhode Island. Nowhere in the colonies was there more personal freedom and acceptance of diverse religious expression. Williams believed that government in the nations was “merely human and civil.” He did not see civil government as redemptive. He recognized that the political skills and moral fortitude necessary to preserve civil peace might easily be found among Jews, or Turks, or Chinese as among people who professed Christianity.13 As Timothy Hall observed, “Although they had the wherewithal to dictate the terms of Providence orthodoxy and thus erect their own brand of religious establishment, they declined to do so.”14

One hundred years later, the foundation of secular government laid by Roger Williams in Rhode Island came together with the social and political views of John Locke, who lived in England in the mid-1600s. Locke proposed a radical view of

---

government that consciously separated the realms of church and state. Locke and others like him in England who promoted this new model of government were not so much concerned about the purity of true religion. Although they came from a completely different perspective than Roger Williams, Locke and others contributed powerfully to the ideals that triumphed in the American Constitution.14

In a letter written to the town of Providence in 1654 or 1655, Williams addressed in more general terms the relationship between civil duty and individual conscience. His analogy of the seagoing vessel has become perhaps the most famous excerpt of all his writings:

There goes many a ship to sea, with many a hundred souls in one ship, whose weal and woe is common; and is a true picture of a commonwealth, or a human combination, or society. It has fallen out sometimes, that both Papists and Protestants, Jews, and Turks, may be embarked into one ship. Upon which supposal, I do affirm, that all the liberty of conscience, that ever I pleaded for, turns upon these two hinges — that none of the Papists, Protestants, Jews, or Turks, be forced to come to the ship's prayers or worship; nor, secondly, compelled from their own particular prayers or worship, if they practice any. I further add, that I never denied, that notwithstanding this liberty, the commander of this ship ought to command the ship's course; yea, and also command to that justice, peace, and sobriety, be kept and practiced, both among the seamen and all the passengers. If any seamen refuse to perform their service, or passengers to pay their freight; — if any refuse to help in person or purse, towards the common charges, or defense; — if any refuse to obey the common laws and orders of the ship, concerning their common peace or preservation; — if any shall mutiny and rise up against their commanders, and officers; — if any shall preach or write, that there ought to be no commanders, nor officers, because all are equal in CHRIST, therefore no masters, nor officers, no laws, nor orders, no corrections nor punishments — I

say, I never denied, but in such cases, whatever is pretended, the commander or commanders may judge, resist, compel, and punish such transgressors, according to their deserts and merits.15

The civil government in the Providence Plantation had legitimate authority over religious conscience in certain areas basic to maintain civil order. However, Williams recognized that civil government’s authority over conscience was only within the specific scope of government’s ordained responsibilities. “He had confidence in the universal recognition of certain fundamental moral precepts whose violation could be punished as ‘incivilities’. He believed that there was ‘a moral virtue, a moral fidelity, ability and honesty’ that all individuals, Christian and non-Christian, could recognize.”16

Williams recognized that all men are accountable to the instinctive moral law that God has put in every man’s conscience, which is the basis upon which civil authorities can “praise those who do good and punish those who do evil.” His theory of government rested on both civil authorities and individuals of all religious persuasions respecting that covenant of conscience. He established in Providence the beginnings of a society in which the civil government could allow religious freedom of conscience, and individuals could respect the legitimate authority of the civil government. Without this mutual respect for the legitimate spheres of authority of each, democracy could not work.

These principles of government won the debate a century later in the drafting of the Constitution which established the legal foundations of the United States of America. In establishing the first truly secular17 state Roger Williams opened the door to the freedom necessary for the restoration of the true church — a land where every man’s right to grope for God would be protected.18

In that protected ground, and in the fullness of time, “Christ’s lilies, garden and love” could again be planted. But it would be another two hundred years before the fullness of time would come.19

14Roger Williams to the Town of Providence,” c. Jan 1654/55, in The Correspondence of Roger Williams, ed. LaFantasie, 2:423-24. For a similar use of the ship metaphor, see Williams, The Examiner Defended, p. 209 15Hall, p. 110; Bloudy Tenent Yet More Bloudy, p. 365
16Secular means not bound by religious rule; it does not mean Godless. 17Acts 17:26-27
The Inquisition
Legal and Historical Roots

The nightmare known as the Inquisition is many centuries older than its first use against heretics at the end of the twelfth century. It began with the degradation of the once noble system of Roman justice in the first three centuries of the Christian era. Its corruption proceeded from one source above all others – the accumulation of power in the hands of the emperor. Once it began and the ancient rights and privileges of Romans began to disappear, there was no stopping the process until Roman law, Roman religion, and Roman government spoke with one voice – the emperor’s.

And in the end, the entire concept of individual rights that government and law must respect had been obliterated. Edward Peters, a historian of the Inquisition, put it this way:

With the transformation of the Roman Republic into the Roman Empire during the reign of Augustus (31 BC – 14 AD), an enormous number of powers came into the hands of the emperor, and the structure of the Republic was transformed… it is clear that the emperor and his servants assumed more and more direct control of legal procedure, at first paralleling surviving courts and procedures, but eventually superseding them. Gradually the sources of law were narrowed down to one – the edict of the emperor.¹

Nor was this process limited to the legal sphere. Ancient Rome became the world’s first totalitarian state whose high taxes and pervasive control of human life were upheld by brute, often sadistically cruel force. When this process ended, a new legal officer with extraordinary powers had emerged, the inquisitor. In his hands lay the entire judicial process from beginning to end: investigation, accusation, and conviction. He was policeman, prosecutor, judge, jury, and executioner rolled into one. To assist him the inquisitor had an army of informers and the power to torture those accused on even the flimsiest of evidence. The effective chains of this totalitarian society grew tighter with every increase of the inquisitor’s power.

This was the characteristic of Roman criminal law when the Empire converted to Christianity in the fourth century, and this was the law that Christian emperors applied to heretics.²

This “conversion” did not change the barbaric and unjust Roman system of justice. Indeed, even the destruction of the Empire did not, although her conquerors replaced Roman justice with their own, often superior systems based on the natural law. The Church did what the shattered Empire could not do — carefully preserve the detailed regulations of the Inquisition and keep its memory alive. When she decided to rule over men’s thoughts and beliefs, there was no greater weapon in her arsenal than the Inquisition.³ It was greater even than the internal crusades she launched against European “heretics” like the Cathars in southern France.

Papal supremacy, corresponding exactly in its effects to the accumulation of imperial power, required the destruction (or submission) of all other spiritual powers. The process to elevate the bishop of one city, Rome, over all other bishops and Christians, was relentless.

Indeed, it has continued to this present day until the Catholic Church, an organization of over one billion souls, speaks through the voice of one man. Starting in the late twelfth century, and continuing for six centuries, that power was guarded by the Inquisition, whose denial of rights, oppression, use of torture and terror exceeds its dark reputation.
The greatest pope of the Dark Ages, Pope Innocent III, articulated with earthshaking clarity the nature of that power when he took the throne in AD 1198. Papal supremacy reached out from the church to encompass the world in a bid for power undreamed of by the Roman emperors the papacy was modeled after.

It is to me that applies the word of the Prophet: I have appointed you this day over the nations and over the kingdoms, that you may uproot and destroy, and that you may build up and plant…

God has established us above peoples and kingdoms. Nothing of what occurs in the Universe must escape the Pope's notice and control…

He has instituted two high dignities in the world: the papacy which reigns over the souls, and the royalty which dominates the bodies. But the former is very superior to the latter.

As the moon receives its light from the sun, which shines much brighter than the moon, so the royal power draws all its splendour and prestige from the power of the Pope. Christ has not only given Peter ruling power over the Universal Church, but over the whole age. The princes have been given power on earth; the priesthood has been assigned the power on earth as well as in heaven.1

Nor was this a mere empty word, the bombast of a deluded religious leader. This was policy, which the Catholic Encyclopedia approvingly notes that he consistently sought to carry out. "There was scarcely a country in Europe over which Innocent III did not in some way or other assert the supremacy which he claimed for the papacy."

And this was the Europe of the Inquisition — the Pope's Europe.2

In the early 200s Christians were faced with state-mandated worship of gods they did not believe in. Thomas Jefferson, one of America's founding fathers, could have spoken Tertullian's stirring words about the rights of man in response to this persecution:

However, it is a fundamental human right, a privilege of nature, that every man should worship according to his own convictions: one man's religion neither harms nor helps another man. It is assuredly no part of religion to compel religion – to which free-will and not force should lead us – the sacrificial victims even being required of a willing mind. You will render no real service to your gods by compelling us to sacrifice.3

Indeed, the Catholic Encyclopedia notes in its article about the Inquisition that religious liberty was orthodox Christian teaching for its first three centuries; the time closest to the pattern and example of the apostolic church:

The Christian teachers of the first three centuries insisted, as was natural for them, on complete religious liberty; furthermore, they … urged the principle that religion could not be forced on others…4

Oh, that such had been the teaching of the Church for the following seventeen centuries! How much peace the world would have known instead of bloodshed, religious war, and strife. Most of all, the Inquisition would not have darkened the name of Christ and would not still inspire shock and shame in both non-Christians and Christians to this day.

Coercion: the Pollution of Religion

More than a few historians have noted that the persecuted, when the tables are turned, often become the persecutors. It is objective evidence of the fallen human desire for revenge that burns within them while suffering persecution. The greatest and most unfortunate example of this, in terms of the suffering that came to others, is early Christianity. From the gracious

---

1 Edward Peters, The Inquisition, The Free Press, New York, 1988, p. 14-15 2 Peters, p. 16-17 3 A very good case could be made that George Orwell's “thought police” in his famous novel, 1984, is based on the structure and tactics of the Inquisition, whose records of investigation, trial, and punishment were excellent. 4 DOCUMENTS ET CIVILISATION, de la Préhistoire à nos jours, classiques Hachette, p. 37 5 "Innocent III" (newadvent.org)
soul liberty she spoke of while powerless; once in power she turned into a greater oppressor than Rome had ever been. Another example is the Puritans fleeing England, seeking liberty in New England. Once established there, they harshly imposed their own views of church and state on all within their reach.

Some of the most eloquent defenses of liberty then, have come from those not yet ascended to earthly power and its corrupting influence. Christianity had such a moment in the year AD 308. The Emperor’s persecutions of Christians had ended only three years before, when Lactantius, an apologist for the Christian faith, wrote this impassioned appeal for religious liberty:

For religion is to be defended, not by putting to death, but by dying; not by cruelty, but by patient endurance; not by guilt, but by good faith... it is necessary for that which is good to have place in religion, and not that which is evil. For if you wish to defend religion by bloodshed, and by tortures, and by guilt, it will no longer be defended, but will be polluted and profaned. For nothing is so much a matter of free-will as religion; in which, if the mind of the worshipper is disinclined to it, religion is at once taken away, and ceases to exist.3

If only the popes and inquisitors had learned this lesson by heart! But as it was, both the Church Fathers and Scripture itself were set aside in the urgent hunt for heresy that would dominate Europe for centuries, polluting and profaning everything it touched. For Lactantius echoed the famous words of the rabbi Gamaliel that were recorded in the New Testament, in Acts 5, when he admonished his fellow Jewish leaders to leave the disciples alone. For, he reasoned, if they were mere men, their movement would fail, and if they were of God, nothing could stop them.4 Time would tell; violence and persecution were unnecessary.

Nightfall

Even with the prospect of imperial support in the fourth century, many Christian leaders continued to oppose punishment for heresy. They argued that the mild and gentle laws of Christ annulled the severe degrees of the Old Testament. His penalty for heresy was exclusion from the social life of the faith: “treat them as a tax-collector.”5 But the fact that the church was now joined with the state, which was led by men like Constantine who viewed themselves as spiritual leaders, meant that the bishops would now take their lead not from Scripture, nor from the early church fathers, but from the Emperor himself.

This irrevocably changed the church. It would make possible the embrace by the Church of many other powerful leaders down through history. It was the cost the earthly power demanded for its protection of the spiritual power of the Church. When the Bishop of Seville in Spain was executed in AD 385 for heresy, Ambrose, one of the greatest of the Church Fathers, called it a crime. But this could not stem the tide. Soon, the torture and execution of heretics were being justified by appeals to the Old Testament, as though the Empire had become the Israel of God.6 It was as though, practically speaking, the New Testament had evaporated.

Dominican Friars were the Inquisitors

The first believers had taken the types of the Old Testament spiritually—as spiritual lessons—seeing, for instance, their warfare now as spiritual, and no longer against flesh and blood.7 The New Testament was profoundly ill-suited to be the religion of state or empire. Its moral demands were too many, its contempt for the motivating factors of wealth and power too great, its determination to obey God too high for mean, small-minded men to build their kingdoms with. It had to go.

When No Man Can Work

His disciples asked Him, saying, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”

Jesus answered, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him. I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” (John 9:2-5)

Night fell—the Dark Ages came—and all those who sought to actually live by the words of the New Testament could not do so. They were forcibly stopped, driven from society, and killed. They were denied “the common air in which to breathe”8 by bishop, emperor, and inquisitor. And even when the Protestant Church broke away from the Roman Church, it was not the dawning of a new day. On the contrary, it continued with ill-will and violence to fulfill this prophecy, thinking all the while they, like their counterparts, the Catholics, were doing God a favor.9

---

1 Tertullian, To Scapula, Ch. 2, Anti-Nicene Fathers, Vol. 3 2 Article “Inquisition,” Catholic Encyclopedia (newadvent.org) 3Lactantius, Divine Institutes, V:20 4 Acts 5:33-39 5 Matthew 18:17 6 "But, say you, the State cannot punish in the name of God. Yet was it not in the name of God that Moses and Phineas consigned to death the worshippers of the Golden calf and those who despised the true religion?” – Optatus of Mileve (De Schismate Donntistarum, III, cc. 6-7) 7 Ephesians 6:12 8 So spoke Roger Williams when driven from Massachusetts into the New England winter by the Puritans of Boston. 9 John 16:1-3


The Crusades
The Reward of Imperishable Glory?

The Crusades were such an evil witness of Christ. It has been centuries since the Crusades, but even today Muslims hate Christ because of them. Can the blood ever be washed off the Church that called for them? The same Church and the same pope that forgave the Crusaders for their sins in advance, assured them “of the reward of imperishable glory.” Yet the horror of the Crusades far exceeds what happened to the “infidels” in the Middle East, as unbelievable as that may be. Steven Runciman, modern historian of the Crusades, writes “The harm done by the Crusades to Islam was small in comparison with that done by them [the Crusaders] to Eastern Christendom.”

The Fourth Crusade made it as far as the capture and looting of the Eastern Capital of Constantinople, whose church and people, although Christians, were not under the authority of the Pope. The Byzantine Empire would never recover from this blow, which further alienated the Eastern and Western divisions of Christianity.

Max Dimont, writing in his history of the Jews, The Indestructible Jews, says the Christians suffered at their brother’s hands far worse than the Jews:

Jews who had the bad luck to reside in the paths of Crusaders en route to the Holy Land were the first to feel the lethal effects of their mobilized zeal. Their stores were ransacked, their women violated, their communities burned. But though they suffered grievously, the devastation which befell the Jews does not compare in total horror to what befell Christians also in those same paths.

Dimont goes on to list in numbing detail the trails of blood the Crusaders left within Europe itself as they marched across their own continent, fighting, plundering, and dying at the hands of their fellow Christians.

Among “the most reprehensible Crusades” he writes, was the Albigensian Crusade of the early thirteenth century, where more than 99% of the sect was eliminated — close to a million people — in “a holocaust more devastating to the Albigensians than the Nazi holocaust to the Jews.”

So, the historian Runciman writes the Crusades were “a tragic and destructive episode” where:

There was so much courage and so little honor, so much devotion and so little understanding. High ideals were besmirched by cruelty and greed, enterprise and endurance by a blind and narrow self-righteousness; and the Holy War itself was nothing more than a long act of intolerance in the name of God, which in itself is a sin against the Holy Ghost.

So, were the Crusades the will of God or the will of the devil? Can you know a tree by its fruit? The evidence demands the verdict of the Epistle of James about these wars, the Crusades.

Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members?

You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask.

You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures. (James 4:1-3)

How many others of the many, many wars of Christendom does this apply to as well? All? Know for sure that where James 4:1-3 applies, so does verse 4:

Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.
Like the “black box” of a crashed airplane, the Bible tells the startling story of the rise and fall of the first century church.

The following articles are written from the Word of God, revealing the truth of the Dark Ages and bringing new light to today.
The Son of God spoke these words to His disciples, prophesying of a time that was still in the future. After the light of the world was no longer in the world, a time called “night” would come when no one would be able to do the work of God. What was He talking about? What was the light of the world? According to the Master’s own words, He was the light of the world. But He also said in Matthew 5:14 that His disciples were the light of the world. So, according to His prophecy, “night” would come when neither He nor His disciples were in the world. At that time, no one would be able to do the work of God. But when would this happen? Has there ever been a time when Yahshua was not on the earth and also had no disciples on the earth? Will there be in the future? When Yahshua finished His mission on earth and ascended to His Father, the work of God was left in the hands of His disciples. They were His Body on earth, the dwelling place of His Spirit, carrying out the deeds prepared for them. Their primary task was to serve each other and build each other up until they all became like their Teacher in every way. They were a witness of the coming Kingdom. Their life together showed what it will be like when Messiah returns and the whole earth obeys His commands.

Once every nation has seen this demonstration, the end will come. At that time, according to Revelation 19:7-8, the Church, the Bride of Messiah, will be ready for Him. She will be clothed in righteous deeds, the works that He prepared for her.

So, if the Church did the works of God in the beginning, and will be doing them at the end, what did the Master mean by “night, when no man can work”? Could there have been a time in between that the light went out? Surely this prophecy must have a fulfillment. The Son of God Himself spoke it. Did the works of God ever stop being done? Could this be what Revelation 2:4-5 was talking about?

I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember then from what you have fallen, repent and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent.

What was going on at the end of the first century when this was written? If the churches had “abandoned love,” and God is love, did this mean that they had abandoned God? If they weren’t doing the works of love they did at first, does that mean they weren’t doing the works of God? If God “removes your lampstand,” does that mean you are no longer the light of the world, as far as He is concerned? Is it possible that the people this was written to disregarded it? Did they not have ears to hear this warning that the Spirit spoke to the churches?

What if the light of all the churches actually went out at some point in history, between the bright beginning recorded in Acts and the glorious end prophesied in Revelation? Could such a thing be possible? In John 8:31, Yahshua said, “You are truly My disciples if you keep obeying My teachings.” Did He mean that if the churches stopped obeying His teachings, then they wouldn’t be His true disciples anymore? It was His true disciples who were the light of the world. If there were no more true disciples, would the light of the world cease? What does it take to be His disciple?

We know that He said, “None of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions.” We also know that the twelve apostles left everything to follow Him and that they taught others to do the same. The first church in Jerusalem lived this way in obedience to His commands:

All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all. There were no needy persons among them. For all who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need.

(Acts 4:32-35)
This sharing did not come from mere external obedience, out of a sense of obligation. Obviously, they had a deep concern about each other's pressing needs. It was greater than their consideration for their own future security. This was the result of God's love being poured out in their hearts by the Holy Spirit. These deeds of care were the "works of God" that had been prepared for the "light of the world" to do in the sight of the watching world.

So if the light of the world ceased, as the Master predicted, how would we know? Would there be no more true disciples on the earth? How could we tell? Would it be that they didn't obey His commands? Would they no longer give up their own possessions? Would they stop sharing everything they had and start becoming rich? Would they start to have poor and needy people in the churches? How disobedient would they have to get before God no longer considered them the light of the world?

If the churches stopped being the light of the world, what would they be like? If they no longer had God's love in them, would they start loving the things of the world? Would they get involved in the world's politics? Would they fight in the world's wars? Would they persecute people who disagreed with them? Would they claim to have God's light in them, when really it was darkness?

If all the lampstands of the first century churches went out, as Revelation 2:4-5 warned, it would explain a lot of things in history. It would explain Christianity becoming the state religion under Constantine. It would explain the atrocities of the Crusades, the horrible tortures of the Inquisition, the flagrant corruption of the Popes, the religious wars of the Reformation, and the splintering of Christianity into over 36,000 current denominations. It would explain why the Christian Church, supposed to be the dwelling place of God in the Spirit, has for nearly 2000 years been filled with what Galatians 5:19-21 calls the obvious deeds of the flesh.

Is it possible that humanity has been dwelling for centuries in the "night" that the Son of God prophesied? And if so, would the loving God who sent His Son to die for us be so gracious as to give the world another chance? Would He consent to light new lampstands, after such a long time? Could the same life that the first disciples had be restored to the earth again? And if the light of the world were once again on the earth, what would it look like? Would they do the works that the disciples did at first, like Revelation 3:4-5 talks about? Would they obey the Master's teachings to love each other, like the first Church in Acts 4:32-35? Would they leave everything to follow Him? And if the light were once again on the earth, how would people respond to it?

How would you respond?

While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light... I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness. As for the person who hears my words but does not keep them, I do not judge him. For I did not come to judge the world, but to save it. There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; that very word which I spoke will condemn him at the last day.

(John 12:36,46-48)
The Unshakable Kingdom

This mystery has not been revealed to me for any wisdom residing in me more than in any other living man, but for the purpose of making the interpretation known to the king, and that you may understand the thoughts of your mind.

~Daniel 2:30

Some people scoff at the intense interest given to end-time prophecies. When the year 2000 rolled around, many people were on edge. And maybe they’ve got a point. The times we live in could make a person fearful. Think about the social, moral, and economic problems that face people today. Over 65 million people have contracted the AIDS virus (about 25 million having died from it), and about 5 million are being added yearly to the total. That’s one issue that makes the world a little tense. Terrorism is another. And people feel insecure when they hear about tampering with the genetic makeup of plants and animals, or violating the structure of atoms. And since roughly half of all marriages end in divorce and growing numbers of couples don’t even bother making a commitment to stay together, people tend to worry about the future of society.

The reality is, there never has been a time like this. Even when a nation or empire was in decline, or verging on moral collapse, there was always another society standing by, ready to take over when it fell. This is the only time in over 4000 years that a global civilization and a global culture have been within man’s reach. Within a generation, the whole earth could very likely be united in a federation of governments, much like the European Union is today. And many people fear that when this coming civilization falls, it’s going to take everything down with it.

So there are good reasons why men are looking to Bible prophecies for direction. People want to have something secure and unchanging to put their confidence in. The world is mutating much too fast for them to keep up, and they have no assurance that most of the changes are for the better. They want to know how it’s all going to turn out, and they’ve heard that the prophets in the Bible have been right. Haven’t many of their predictions already come true?

The Fall of the Statue

The prophet Daniel is a good example of a man whose words are trustworthy. 2,600 years ago, he interpreted a dream for a Babylonian king. The focus of the dream was a huge statue with a gold head, a chest and arms of silver, a bronze belly, iron legs, and feet and toes of iron mixed with clay. From this dream he predicted a succession of empires which would dominate the earth. And history has proven him right. The Babylonian, Persian, Greek, and Roman Empires followed one another, corresponding exactly to the statue, especially the legs of iron, which depicted the eastern and western halves of the Roman Empire.1

As for the feet and toes of iron mixed with clay, many scholars have imagined that this would be a revival of the Roman Empire in a modified form. Their speculations carry weight, because Roman law and culture under-gird all of Western civilization. The essence of Rome is like a seed waiting to sprout. The West is obsessed with a united world because they still remember the peace and prosperity that the Roman Empire enjoyed in its heyday – the “Roman Peace.”

It is easy to see how the current movement toward world unity will bring about the feet of iron mixed with clay, ending with ten iron-and-clay toes.2 Even now, forces are at work to unify all the organized religions for the purpose of making them a dominant political force in the world. When the Ecumenical Movement succeeds, the governments of all nations will see a need to incorporate the influence of religion as a stabilizing force in society. This mixture of the iron of government and the clay of religion will resolve itself into a federation of ten world leaders. Many people, even within Christianity, see this much about Daniel’s predictions. What they do not understand, however, is the end of this vision.

The Mystery of the Stone

In the dream, a stone was mysteriously being hewn out of a huge mountain. Without human hands it was chipped away, little by little, until it broke free and plummeted toward the statue, striking it on the feet. The iron and clay mixture shattered, and the entire statue fell and
disintegrated. Then a mighty wind came up, blowing away the dust, until no trace was left of the once-mighty statue. Only the stone remained. Then, amazingly, that stone grew into a huge mountain that filled the earth.

The fifth-century theologian Augustine claimed that this stone was the Roman Catholic Church, and that it had already become the mountain that filled the whole earth. What Augustine failed to consider, however, was that the Catholic Church had not removed every trace of the Roman Empire, but was instead preserving it. In fact, the Roman Church was the beginning of the clay mixing with the iron, which will become the one-world empire of the last days.

Daniel made it clear that the stone is not merely a religion, but a kingdom. And it is not just any kingdom, but the Kingdom which the God of heaven will set up in the days of “those kings” — the ten kings of the world federation represented by the toes of the statue. This can only happen at one time in history — the last days of this age. Obviously so, because when the Stone Kingdom falls on the toes, it brings this age to an end.

The relentless progress toward religious and political unity that is now driving the Western world shows that we are clearly in the beginning stages of that federation of kings. Once again, Daniel’s interpretation of the dream is proving trustworthy. So we must also be living at the time when God is beginning to cut the stone out of the mountain of the world.

Not Subversive

Daniel said that this Stone Kingdom will not be left for another people. It will endure forever because it is completely separate from the society of the end times. This is the meaning of the stone being cut out of the mountain. Those who make up this kingdom are hewn out of the world, not by human effort, but by a divine act.

Many groups are forming today, taking their cues from such prophecies as Daniel and the book of Revelation. They are taking steps to isolate themselves from the corruption they see in society, and even to arm themselves for a conflict with the emerging one-world order. The FBI estimates that there are hundreds of such private armies in the United States alone. These survivalist groups think that by stockpiling weapons and supplies, they can make it through the collapse of the present society and take over. But what they do not see is that, contrary to prophecy, they are trying to cut themselves out of the mountain with human hands.

“And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever.” ~ Daniel 2:44

Such alternative societies are based on reactions to the current culture, hatred of other races or religions, and even insane plans to force a confrontation with the “antichrist government.” But their efforts will prove to be futile. Those who are subversive will be surrounded and disarmed, or perhaps even destroyed. And others will be assimilated back into society — as many have been already. A movement based on mere reactions to moral decline will not stand. Subversive or reactionary groups cannot overthrow the current order because they are still connected to its source. They are still controlled by the same spirits that control the society that they are reacting to. The whole world lies in the power of the evil one. So the only society that will be able to endure is one that comes out from under the control of the evil spiritual forces that work in the unseen realm.

This is how the Stone Kingdom will bring an end to the kingdoms of this world — not through subversive activity against those kingdoms, but through overcoming the evil spiritual forces that control them. Those in the Stone Kingdom have been given power over the unclean spirits that stir up fear and hatred and greed and pride and every kind of selfish desire and self-centered thought.

The Radical Solution to Sin

The Stone Kingdom does something truly radical. It lays the axe to the root that has caused the downfall of every civilization since the beginning. That root is self-life. Self-life is the true meaning of the often-misunderstood word sin. Those who choose to follow the King of this kingdom choose to put self to death. This is called repenting. When they repent, their King lavishes on them a costly gift called forgiveness. Forgiveness causes something supernatural to spring up in their souls — love. This love is not just a good feeling, it is a good motive. This supernatural love causes them to do good things — kind things — that shine brightly to those around them. And those who see what they are doing start to appreciate the God who made them. They start to believe that the Creator is good and kind and wants to help them out of the predicament they are in.

The prophet Isaiah predicted that this kingdom would take the form of the restored tribes of Jacob. He said it would be a light to the nations, and would carry God’s salvation to the end of the earth. This is what Messiah was
referring to when He predicted that the good news of the kingdom would be proclaimed to set the evidence before all the nations, and then the end would be able to come. He also said that when this nation produced the fruit of the coming age, then the government of that age would be turned over to them. Then He added, “...on whomever this stone falls it will scatter him like dust.” This is a clear reference to the Stone Kingdom in Daniel’s prophecy.

These tribes of Jacob will be standing on an unshakable foundation. The God of heaven will give them a way of life that does not pass away, a way of life that can be passed on from generation to generation. This is what eternal life is. It is not just a religious belief about going to heaven after you die. Eternal life is the life that will fill the earth like a mountain in the next age. It will be raised up in this age like a stone cut out of the world.

As the restored tribes of Jacob live in obedience to the commands of the Messiah, they will demonstrate the life that Israel was always meant to live. They will exhibit a culture that does not come from the world around them and is not a reaction to it. Their way of doing business, their art and music, and the festivals that celebrate their dependence on their Creator will be given to them from above and will have a radically different quality from the culture that surrounds them. Every part of their life will be focused toward the goal of being worthy to be that Stone Kingdom.

Even their obedience to the divine command that Israel should let their land rest one year out of every seven – a command which Israel of old never obeyed11 – will prepare them to live a life that does not depend on buying, selling, planting, or harvesting. And they will be able thus to endure in the wilderness for the 1260 days until the Jubilee, when Messiah returns and the whole earth is delivered back to its rightful Owner.14

This then is the message of the prophets for the end times. Daniel, Isaiah, and our Master Yahshua all point to the one life, the one culture, the one kingdom that will survive. If men derive any other message from the prophets and use it as an excuse for pursuing a course of their own invention, their plans will perish. It does not matter if they react militantly against the governments of this world or try to influence and dominate those governments, their agenda will perish. Only those whose life is based on love, who live the demonstration of the coming age, will endure. Whoever is truly looking to the prophets for direction — for a way out of the destruction and corruption of today — will only find it in this unshakable kingdom.15

“It is too small a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also give you as a light to the Gentiles, that you should be my salvation to the ends of the earth.” ~ Isaiah 49:6
This question looms in the minds of many Christians, and the classic answer, at least from the Calvinist camp, makes God out to be a vindictive monster: all men are born totally depraved, worthy of eternal damnation regardless of how they live their lives or whether they have ever heard of Jesus Christ.

We utterly reject this misrepresentation of God's justice and would like to set the record straight from the Holy Scriptures. While it is not possible for a man to work his way to heaven, it is also not true that he is doomed to eternal death regardless of how he lives his life. What is the truth about man's eternal destiny?

First of all, it is true that when Adam and Eve disobeyed God's command in the Garden of Eden and ate the forbidden fruit, they incurred the sentence of death:

And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, “Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”

(Genesis 2:16-17)

Their physical death was not immediate, but their spiritual death was, and their fallen condition was passed on to their offspring, as the record shows, “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Therefore, since “the wages of sin is death,” then “it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment.”

(Hebrews 9:27)

This much is clear to most Christians, but what happens after the judgment? This is the part that is widely misunderstood. But remember, the Bible says “it is appointed for men to die once...” It doesn't say twice. Yet there is a second death:

But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.

(Revelation 21:8)

This verse identifies a certain character of people whose destiny will be a second and unending death in the lake of fire. But what about those who are not of that character? That is why there must be a judgment:

Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.

(Revelation 20:11-15)

Let's be clear: this is not the judgment of believers in Christ, for their eternal destiny does not depend on their works. This is the judgment of all those who died without Christ. They are raised from the dead.
the first death to be judged as to whether they are worthy of the second death, based on how they lived their lives.

Now some will say this judgment is merely a formality — not a judgment at all, but a sentencing. They will say that no one’s name was found written in the Book of Life because they didn’t believe in Jesus, so all were cast into the lake of fire. They fail to distinguish between this “Book of Life” for the nations and the “Lamb’s Book of Life” for the holy nation. They suppose that God raises men from the first death to stand before Him so that He can gloat at them while He pretends to look up their name in the Book of Life, knowing it will not be there. Then He callously casts them into the lake of fire. But this is not God’s character.

Abraham, the father of our faith, when he appealed to God to spare the few righteous in Sodom, knew something about the character of God that escapes many Christians today:

Far be it from You to do such a thing as this, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous should be as the wicked; far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right? (Genesis 18:25)

Of course Abraham was especially thinking of his nephew Lot, and God heard his plea and rescued Lot and his daughters. Although he was not included in the covenant with Abraham, Lot is described as being righteous. And while this passage does not speak of Lot’s eternal destiny, but merely his temporal deliverance from the destruction of Sodom, yet it speaks of God’s character as understood by Abraham, the friend of God.

We stand with Abraham, knowing that God will righteously judge all people according to their works, and not just throw them all willy-nilly into the lake of fire. Those who are not worthy of the second death will be granted a second life, and it is over them that Messiah and His Bride (those who have truly believed in Him) will rule throughout eternity.

Now let’s take a closer look at the basis of this judgment:

Then the Lord God said, “Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil…” (Gen. 3:22)

After Adam ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, he would have to live by that knowledge, choosing to do the good and not to do the evil. Even though fallen man could not do this perfectly, God still held him accountable to exercise his will to overcome the temptation to do evil, just as He told Cain:

If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it. (Genesis 4:7)

Of course, Cain did not master it, but all are not like Cain. All do not murder. All are not immoral. Many strive to do the good they know in their conscience, and are grieved when they fail, and do everything possible to make restitution when they do wrong. These have a natural righteousness of their own, a natural faith or persuasion that God is good and that He will judge all men justly. They value the dignity of life. They recognize the image of the Creator in His creation. They work hard and are faithful in their marriages. They labor to put their values into their children. They bear suffering without growing bitter. They try to keep a good conscience. And God does not despise their efforts.

6 The “cowardly and unbelieving” in Revelation 21:8 are those who rejected the gospel as John 3:18,36 describes, not those who never heard the gospel. But some will say there is no excuse, because if anyone were really sincere, God would send a missionary to him, even in the remotest corner of China. Rightly did our Master say of such self-righteous judges: “Woe to you, for you travel over land and sea to win one convert, and when he is won, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves!” (Matthew 23:15) 7 2 Peter 2:7-8 8 2 Chronicles 20:7; Isaiah 41:8; James 2:23 9 Revelation 22:3-5 10 Genesis 3:16-19
True, all men sin and fall short of the glory of God, but not all fall utterly short. Glory means weight or value. Adam, before he fell, had great value, having been made in God’s image. When he fell, God’s image in him was marred, but not obliterated. This is very clear from what God said after Adam’s fall, and in fact even after the Flood:

*Whoever sheds man’s blood, by man his blood shall be shed; for in the image of God He made man. And you, be fruitful and multiply; abound on the earth and multiply in it.*

*(Genesis 9:6-7)*

Man still bears God’s image and has great value in God’s eyes, as He requires capital punishment for any who would fail to respect His image in his fellow man to the point of committing murder. But beyond that, God commissioned Noah and his sons after the flood to be fruitful and multiply abundantly on the earth. If man was now worthless and totally depraved, why would a loving Creator want to fill the earth with such creatures?

So fallen man still bears the image of his Creator and retains intrinsic inherent worth to the degree that he lives by the knowledge of good and evil, inherent in his conscience. Even though he has an inborn inclination to sin, he is able and accountable to do the good that he knows in his conscience and to keep himself from the kinds of sins that would make him worthy of the second death.

Yet regardless of how careful a man is to live by his conscience, he will not do so perfectly, for he is a fallen creature. He will sin, and his sin must be paid for, as it is an inviolable law that the wages of sin is death. A man’s good deeds cannot save him from the consequences of his sin — the first death. His natural righteousness cannot restore him to fellowship with God, nor make him worthy of ruling and reigning with Christ. All of his good deeds are of no more value than filthy rags for obtaining the righteousness of God, which can only be imputed to a man on the basis of faith, which comes from hearing the word of Christ from someone sent to preach the Good News.

So whoever dies without Christ must go to the first death to pay the wages of his own sin, since he does not have a sacrifice for his sins. How then does he pay these wages? It is according to how much worth remains in him, how much integrity and courage he has to face the truth about himself. For in death he is finally alone with his conscience, forced to face his sin, with nowhere to hide and nothing to distract his mind from the awareness of his own guilt. Every evil deed, every base thought, every selfish motive comes out of hiding to torture him. Like a worm burrowing into the recesses of his memory, eating away at his every excuse, so is the path of his thoughts as his conscience fully awakens. The unquenchable fire of his self-inquisition leaves him either weeping in remorse or gnashing his teeth as he resists the truth about himself.

Those who resist the truth, reasoning...
away their guilt even in death, prove themselves unable to pay sin’s wages. They are the same in death as they were in life — set in their ways, their hearts fully hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. A second death awaits them, where they will gnash their teeth eternally. There is a mystery here. King David wrote, 

From heaven the Lord looks down and sees all mankind; from His dwelling place He watches all who live on earth — He who forms the hearts of all, who considers everything they do. (Psalm 33:13-15)

The Creator of man forms, fashioning, or molds each man’s heart according to what he does or gives himself to. Eventually the heart, like clay, becomes “set” in its way, and so that person’s character will remain eternally — some bent towards evil, and some towards good.

The latter, in death, will weep in remorse, accepting the full responsibility for their sins rather than blaming them on others. They are the ones who are able to pay sin’s wages. When they are resurrected to stand judgment, they will have fully received the discipline of death and will find mercy and not condemnation. This mercy and comfort will come at the hands of the bride of Messiah, who, according to the Apostle Paul, will be judging the nations on God’s behalf. They will wipe away the tears of those who were judged not worthy of the second death:

Then I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.” (Revelation 21:2-4)

The “tabernacle” or “dwelling place” of God is the bride or wife of Messiah, who will dwell with men — the resurrected righteous people of the nations. That is how God Himself will be with them — through the wife of Messiah. Redeemed Man will rule with Messiah over Restored Man, and the original commission given to Adam will be restored to him, once sin and death and the evil one himself are no more:

Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth. (Genesis 1:28)

Amazingly, in Psalm 8, King David prophesied that man (both the redeemed and restored man) would rule over all the works of God’s hands, including all the galaxies of planets. Surely without death, restored man will quickly fill up the earth and go on to colonize the universe with restored humanity, under the ever-increasing government of God — the redeemed corporate man, which is the wife of Messiah.

So we hope that you can see that there is a lot more in God’s heart towards His highest creation, mankind, than to throw countless millions into the lake of fire for the crime of not having been born in the right place and time to hear the true gospel. If you are interested in reading more about man’s eternal destiny, please visit our web site, www.commonwealthofisrael.org, and look for the section about The Three Eternal Destinies of Man. Or better yet, just come and visit one of our communities and we will be more than happy to talk with you.

EDAH — The word for community in Hebrew is edah, which also means beehive. This word portrays the way a group of people or hive of bees live and work together with a common identity. Bees live a selfless life of devotion to the bee kingdom. They have no concern for themselves but only for the hive and the constant production of honey. So it is with those who are in the communities of God.

Like a Swarm

Have you ever watched a beehive? It is fascinating seeing thousands of little bees working together to produce honey. As you come near the hive, you can hear an exciting buzz as they go about the many tasks necessary to keep the hive alive. The workers are responsible to collect nectar and guard the hive. The young bees keep the hive in good condition, feed the larvae, and support in other household chores. There is never a dull moment in the busy life of a little bee.

This is much like the life that we have. No matter what we do, we love to do it together. Daily we gather to thank our Master for His salvation, and to hear Him speak to us through one another. This gathering keeps alive a genuine love and care for each other. As we work, we take advantage of the daily situations, guarding ourselves from the selfishness and pride that would come in to separate us and take away our love. Our children are a vital part of our life. We not only educate them, but we work with them to accomplish the simple tasks necessary to maintain a family life. Our life is not a dull routine of chores, but is full of the warmth that comes from the sweet fellowship of friends speaking their hearts to one another, celebrating the Sabbath every week, and participating in weddings and festivals.

But there are a few things that differ in our life from that of a beehive. One is that we are not driven by instinct or controlled by something separate from our own will. Each of us is here because we chose to leave behind our own separate lives to increase the life of this hive. Our life is not enclosed like the hive of a bee, nor do we have a stinger to harm any uninvited guests. We welcome anyone to experience our life with us. Please come and see what it is like to be a part of a beehive of people expressing the warmth and love of our Creator.

A Few of Our Homes & Farms

AND SOME OF OUR PEOPLE IN SOME OF OUR COMMUNITIES AROUND THE WORLD.

UNITED STATES (1-888-893-5838)

Community in Manitou Springs
53 Lincoln Ave, Manitou Springs, CO 80829 (719) 573-1907

Community in Colorado Springs
1825 Pine Grove Ave., Colorado Springs, CO 80906 (719) 635-5773

Community on the Lake of the Ozarks
1140 Lay Ave, Warsaw, MO 65355 (860) 221-5203

Stepping Stone Farm, Rt. 2, Box 55, Weaubleau, MO 65774 (417) 428-3251

Community in Vista, 2683 Foothill Drive, Vista, CA 92084 (760) 295-3852

Morning Star Ranch, 12458 Keys Creek Rd, Valley Center, CA 92082 (760) 742-8953

Community in Island Pond, P. O. Box 449, Island Pond, VT 05846 (802) 723-9768

Bassin Farm, P. O. Box 108, Bellows Falls, VT 05101 (802) 463-9264

Community in Rutland, 115 Lincoln Avenue, Rutland, VT 05701 (802) 773-3764

Community in Boston, 92 Melville Ave, Dorchester, MA 02124 (617) 282-9876

Community in Plymouth, 35 Warren Ave, Plymouth, MA 02360 (508) 747-5338

Community in Lancaster, 12 High Street, Lancaster, NH 03584 (603) 788-4376

Community in Cossackie, 5 Mansion St., Cossackie, NY 12061 (518) 731-7711

Oak Hill Plantation, 8137 State Route 81, Oak Hill, NY 12460 (518) 239-8148

Common Sense Farm, 41 N. Union Street, Cambridge, NY 12816 (518) 677-5880

Community in Ithaca, 119 Third Street, Ithaca, NY 14850 (607) 272-6915

Community in Hamburg, 2051 North Creek Rd, Lakeview, NY 14085 (716) 627-2532

Community in Brunswick, 815 Albany Street, Brunswick, GA 31520 (912) 267-4700

Community in Savannah, 107 East 35 Street, Savannah, GA 31401 (912) 232-1165

Community in Chattanooga, 316 N. Seminole, Chattanooga, TN 37401 (423) 698-6591

Community in Arcadia, 601 W. Oak Street, Arcadia, FL 34266 (863) 496-3305

Community in Hillsboro (Washington, DC area), 15255 Ashbury Church Rd, Purcellville, VA 20132 (540) 668-7123

CANADA (1-888-893-5838)

Community in Nelson, 202 Vernon Street, Nelson, British Columbia V1L 4E2, Canada (250) 352-0325

GERMANY

Gemeinschaft in Klosterzimmern, Klosterzimmern 1, 86738 Deiningen, Germany (49) 9081-2901062

ENGLAND (0800-0743267)

Stentwood Farm, Dunkeswell, Honiton, Devon EX14 4RW, England (44) 1825-681155

SPAIN

Comunidad de San Sebastián, Paseo de Uria 375, 20014 San Sebastián, Spain (34) 943-58-00-29

FRANCE

Communauté de Sus, 11, route du Haut Béarn, 64190 Sus/Navarrenx, France (33) 5-59-66-14-28

ARGENTINA

Comunidad de Buenos Aires, Batallón Norte y Mansilla 120, 1748 General Rodriguez, Buenos Aires, Argentina (54) 237-484-3409

BRAZIL

Comunidade de Londrina, Rua Jayme Americano 420, Jardim California, 86040-030 Londrina, Paraná, Brazil (55) 43-3025-2066

AUSTRALIA

Peppercorn Creek Farm, 1375 Old Hume Highway, Picton, NSW 2571, Australia (61) 2-46-772-668

For more information, or to request more literature or a complete list of our community addresses, please call:

1-888-TWELVE-T
1-888-893-5838
or visit our web site at: www.twelvetribes.org