

More on Verse 40b: Does Babylon Rise or Fall During the Time of the End?

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Introduction

In Dan 11:40b spiritual Babylon rises to meet a challenge from the king of the South. This resurgence of the king of the North corresponds to the healing of the deadly wound in Rev 13:3.¹ It also corresponds to the fall of Babylon in Rev 18:1-3.² So the question is whether Babylon rises (Dan 11:40b) or falls (Rev 13:3) during the time of the end. What is the relationship between these two events? Or are they two events?

If the Babylon that revives from the deadly wound is the same as the power on which it was inflicted in the first place, as seems reasonable, then one looks for a revival of Catholicism in the end time. But Catholicism is not moribund. One might limit one's attention to the papacy alone, and it is certainly true that John Paul II (1978-) has been more active than any other modern pope. But does this warrant speaking of the great, prophetic mortal wound being healed? According to George McCready Price it does not.

The wound means much more than the temporary interruption of some of the functions of the Catholic Church. To revert to the symbols given in [Revelation] chapter 17, it was *not the woman* that received the wound, but the *beast*. . . . In chapter 18, meaning a later period, the woman congratulates herself that she is no longer a widow; but it is plain that no part of the prophecy ever represents the Catholic Church as having been wounded or even hurt at all. Her paramour is the one who suffers the wound, and he is completely out of action.³

Price is here saying that what made the church in Western Europe beastlike initially was not the fact that it was ruled from Rome, but that it actively and violently persecuted dissent. Taking this ability away inflicted the mortal wound because without it the church could no longer be beastlike. Nor can the church be rendered beastlike again--thus healing the wound in the sense of Rev 13:3--without getting back the same ability to persecute that it lost some two centuries ago.⁴

Granting now that the ability to use civil force will be restored to the church at all, how widely will it be restored and to whom? More specifically, will Protestants once again be the victims of such coercion, as they were during an earlier age, or will they join in perpetrating it on others? This question is explored in the present paper.

The New Protestant Militancy

More than any other one factor, the Supreme Court's 1973 decision in *Roe v. Wade*, which legalized abortion, marks the beginning of militant Protestant political action in the United States.⁵ Since that time the issue of how the church should and should not seek to establish its

social agenda has become a matter of widespread interest. Below I discuss two recent books which address this question.

Charles Colson

One author who deals at length with the problem of church in relation to state is Charles Colson. In an early chapter of his book, *Kingdoms in Conflict*, Colson tells the story of William Wilberforce, who, soon after his conversion in 1785, started a lonely crusade in Parliament to abolish the very lucrative British slave trade. After a seemingly endless series of setbacks the legislation he had championed passed its second reading in the House of Commons (by a vote of 283 to 16) on February 22, 1807 and was enacted into law. This much assured that no new slaves would be brought over to the New World. But what should be done with those who were already there? From 1807 until his death in 1833 Wilberforce crusaded to abolish slavery altogether. On July 26, 1833 his bill was voted into law. Three days later he died.

The story of William Wilberforce is a dramatic one and Colson is no amateur when it comes to putting his point across. One can only disagree by suggesting that slavery was good or that Wilberforce should not have spoken out against it. In other words it is impossible to disagree. Elsewhere he goes on to give what amounts to a history of World War II in Europe and its aftermath in Eastern Europe from the church's perspective.⁶ He discusses the impact that individual Christians have had in the Philippines and in Northern Ireland.⁷

Throughout it is clear that Colson wants Christians to bring Christ to society. If they do not, who will? And yet he is able to distinguish between this and the effort of some churches to assert themselves politically. He cautions against taking the shortcut of simply electing Christians to public office.⁸ "The church is not and must never allow itself to become just another special-interest group lined up at the public trough. For in doing so, as one contemporary scholar observes, it would 'sacrifice its claim to objective ethical concern which [is the church's] chief political as well as moral resource.'"⁹ Colson's book raises a full range of issues and attempts to deal with them fairly. As Billy Graham is quoted as saying on the back cover, it is "definitely worth reading."

Harold Lindsell

A much more strident call for political involvement comes from Harold Lindsell, former editor of the popular Evangelical magazine, *Christianity Today*. In his book, *The New Paganism*,¹⁰ Lindsell inveighs against the prevailing secularity and openly laments the fact that the church no longer dominates society.

This discussion by no means exhausts the subject at hand. It simply makes clear that the New Paganism with its anti-Christian Weltanschauung has led to the defeat of the church in the West. It has furthered the decline of the church as a force in society and culture and made it a minority in a post-Christian and pagan world.¹¹

Realignments of religion in society. Only 73% of all Harvard and Stanford graduates included in a recent survey profess belief in a supreme Being as opposed to 94% nationally. And of this same group only 24% state that religion is an important part of their lives as opposed to 63% nationally.¹² Lindsell uses these facts to illustrate that our best universities are making pagans of our young people. But the problem is even larger than he indicates.

According to Wade Clark Roof, writing in the *Wall Street Journal*, Ezra Stiles' concept of religious pluralism in 1783 was that American denominational affiliations would one day be shared equally by Congregationalists and Presbyterians as well as Episcopalians.¹³ This was a liberal view at the time. The assumption that America was completely Protestant has of course never been true.¹⁴ But by 1952 the proportion of Protestants had shrunk from whatever it was before to two-thirds (67%). In 1987 it was moving down towards half (57%). During this same period the Catholic minority increased from 25% in 1952 to 28% in 1987, largely due to an influx of Hispanics coming up from Central America, Cuba, and elsewhere (17% of all Catholics in the United States are Hispanic).¹⁵ But certain time honored distinctions are becoming obsolete. It is mainline Protestant churches that are declining; conservative Protestant organizations are still either holding their own or growing.¹⁶ So there is a difference between the two major categories of Protestants as well as between Protestants more generally and Catholics.

Other religions such as Islam, Buddhism, and various forms of Eastern mysticism, which have a long history elsewhere, and groups such as Scientology, Santeria, New Age, and Goddess worship which do not, represent 4% of the population by now. But the fastest growing single category is the nonaffiliated--2% in 1952, 9% in 1987. At the present time America is about half Protestant, one fourth Catholic, increasingly pluralistic, and increasingly nonaffiliated.¹⁷ People are leaving especially the mainline Protestant churches to take up uncommon religions and they are also leaving with no particular destination in view. It is going to be very difficult for Lindsell or anyone else to reverse these trends.

Freedom of expression within the church. But more is at issue for Lindsell than the skepticism taught in our elite educational institutions or the permissiveness found elsewhere in society. Within even the growing churches he regrets some of the freedoms that we have come to take for granted.

Once the Protestant churches claimed their freedom to dissent and freedom to believe other than what was taught by Rome, they opened the doors to wider dissent and to irreligion as well. If the Protestant churches had the right to disagree with Rome, then the people of those communities also had the right to dissent from the Protestant teachings. . . . Moreover the very notion of religious freedom of necessity included the right to disseminate and to propagate religious ideas of every sort, whether they were in accord with community standards or not. This dangerous precedent had its roots in the Reformation and was to bring forth its own fruit in the years ahead. Since religious freedom has implications in the fields of economics, politics, and social life and behavior, there was no church that could render compelling decisions to determine what the civilization of a people should or would be.¹⁸

Should any church have this ability? Would that really be desirable? Lindsell states that "the right to disseminate and to propagate religious ideas of every sort, whether they were in accord with community standards or not" is a "dangerous precedent." He stops short of saying that the "idea of religious freedom" is also dangerous. But he leaves an uncomfortable impression by not clarifying himself on this point.

Another clarification that would be helpful is what Lindsell means by his term "the church." Everything he says could be accounted for by assuming that he has the Catholic church in mind. I do not think he does. Lindsell is not a closet Catholic; he is every bit a Protestant. But he is a Protestant whose views on the church's role in society are similar to those traditionally held by Catholics. His "church" is Protestant and Evangelical but it enjoys Catholic-style political influence and control over social institutions and political affairs generally.

Some lessons from history

Is the assertiveness we are beginning to see among conservative Protestants the promise of a second Reformation? Will history repeat itself? I believe it will. But which period are we about to reenter? Is the new religious Right taking us back 450 years (a time of spiritual growth for the church) or 1450 years (a time of political growth)? And should all Protestants welcome these changes? There is a way to tell. When a religious revival leads to greater self control, that is a good revival. When it leads to greater social control--over the lives and consciences of others--something is wrong and it is a revival to fear. We would do well to consider Colson's warning that, "When the church isn't being persecuted, it is being corrupted."²⁰ Thus, the mere fact that the church does not dominate society as it once did is not self-evidently a bad thing, as Lindsell supposes.

It is one thing for a political leader to allow his decisions and conduct to be informed by Christian principle. But for the church of Christ to embrace the secular power of the state in any more corporate sense is and has always been adultery. To rise in this way (see Dan 11:40b) is in and of itself a fall (see Rev 18:1-3).

Protestants should be asking themselves what the relationship is between the role they now aspire to occupy in the social and political arena and their luxuriant spiritual growth during and after the Reformation and especially after the American and French Revolutions, i.e., in the afterglow of the Enlightenment. Lindsell speaks of "charges that have been accepted by multitudes and that must be assessed and answered if the Christian faith is to recoup the ground it has lost in the past two centuries."²⁰ But what ground has been lost and who has lost it? It will be useful to get specific answers to these questions.

Curiously enough, going back in American history two centuries prior to 1987, when Lindsell's book was published, brings us to 1787--eleven years after the American Declaration of Independence. The ratification debates for the new United States Constitution got under way that very year (1787) and extended into the next. The Bill of Rights was accepted three years after that in 1791. And in 1798 Pope Pius VI (1775-99) was taken prisoner by Napoleon's general Berthier.

These were years when the United States was on its way up and the papacy was on its way down. American Protestants were just breaking away from the idea of receiving civil support for their churches and freeing themselves from the civil supervision that must inevitably accompany such aid.²² Bible societies were being formed. Protestant missionaries were being sent everywhere. These last two facts are not unrelated. The Bible societies were motivated by an intense missionary zeal.²³ Within a few decades the second coming of Christ would be preached all over the world as an international and broadly cross-denominational movement. These developments are not ones that any Protestant should regret. Catholics lost much during these years, but Protestants did not. Over the past two hundred years Protestantism has flourished and grown as never before.²⁴ And yet not all is well.

The Sabbath

There is a deep irony in the fact that conservative Protestants should take so strong a stand against evolution, forcing textbook publishers to acknowledge their point of view, and yet oppose the biblical sign and seal of creation. The seventh-day Sabbath of the fourth

commandment is a weekly reminder of the very point they want so much to make, i.e., that God created both us and the world we live on. More specifically, He created Adam and Eve on the sixth day, which means that their first full day of life on the newly created planet was the seventh day. On that first Sabbath God laid aside all His work and spent the time with them. And so now He invites us to lay aside all our work on the seventh day and spend that time with Him.

Those hours can be the high point of the week--something that the whole family looks forward to with anticipation. My four-year-old daughter does. On the Sabbath we have special treats and do things together that everyone is too busy for any other day. If the Sabbath is a burden, on the other hand, it can only be because spending time in communion with God is a burden, and in that event how will we ever get along in heaven? If twenty-four hours in God's presence are too much, what shall we say about eternity?

And why should conservative Christians, of all people, not be happy to celebrate God's creatorship in this way? Did Christ cease to be our Creator on the cross? Is that the significance of what He accomplished there? On the contrary, He placed us even more profoundly in His debt. In this way we are twice His. He was always our Maker (see John 1:1-3) and has now also become our Savior--"the Alpha and the Omega" (Rev 1:8), "the First and the Last" (Rev 1:17), "the author and perfecter of our faith" (Heb 12:2).

Jesus did not undergo death on our behalf for the purpose of allowing us, at last, to be free from the onerous duty of obeying Him. Instead, by that act obedience finally becomes possible, because it frees us from the ulterior motive of earning God's favor. In Christ such favor is already ours and so we are now at perfect liberty to respond to Him from our hearts--hearts on which He has written His law (Heb 8:10; 10:16). There is nothing foreign or artificial about such obedience. It is an outward expression of our inner love for Jesus--if in fact we do love Him. If we are still running away, then it is true that His cords of love will appear to bind or restrict us. But this need not be. We must keep in mind what He has done for us in the past. We must remember His completed work. And so the commandment tells us:

(8) "Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. (9) Six days you shall labor and do all your work, (10) but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. (11) For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy. (Exod 20:8-11)

The Sabbath is the birthday of the world, celebrated on a weekly rather than a yearly cycle. Because all races of mankind participate in the benefits of creation, it is reasonable that all races of mankind should participate in the memorial of creation. God commands us to do so. And how is His command unreasonable? Who on our planet is so disabled by the accumulated results of human sin that he or she has lost the ability to rest? Where is the old man in his wheelchair, the girl in her iron lung, the youth dying because of AIDS who is rendered unable by his or her condition to comply with this simple and eminently reasonable request, given the desire to do so? The Sabbath has been portrayed as a harsh requirement, a symbol of hard spiritual labor. By what logic does this follow? It is an acknowledgement of rest from spiritual labor. Physical rest symbolizes spiritual rest. How much more simple could this be? And how would it be possible to convey to mankind the promise of rest in and oneness with God any better than the Sabbath conveys it?

Coercion in religious matters flies in the face of everything God stands for. Under coercion people are forced to do certain things whether their hearts are willing or not. When dealing with human laws in society generally, this level of obedience is good enough. But if spiritual obedience has to be forced, it is not spiritual. And therefore it is not obedience. If the church urges or allows the state to coerce anyone to perform a religious act unwillingly, the one who rejects such motivations becomes guilty of a crime against the state. But whoever initiates them is guilty of a crime against heaven.

Christ secures obedience by loving us so unmistakably and so profoundly that we are led to respond in a similar manner toward Him. We rest in His love, as the Scripture says: "anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his" (Heb 4:10). Satan, on the other hand, secures obedience without bothering with the heart's affections by using force or the threat of force. There is no rest in this. One or the other set of principles will eventually become established in every individual's life. We will obey God or we will obey men, having an intelligent knowledge of what our choice implies.

Discussion

Christ addresses all mankind and says, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Matt 11:28-30). The rest spoken of here is not an absence of activity, but an absence of conflict. Christ's rest could not be an absence of activity because one enters it by putting on His yoke. Here is the broader context for such passages as Matt 12:1-14 (Mark 2:23-28; Luke 6:1-11); Luke 13:10-17; 14:1-6; and John 5:1-15.

In doing precisely what Christ asks us to do there is a sense of oneness with Him that is impossible for anyone to experience who actively resists His will. Thus, it is when they stop hardening their hearts that God's people enter His rest, not when they enter Canaan (see Heb 4:1-8). The rest Christ offers is a state of harmony with Himself that in every age has had the effect of causing His people to carry out His wishes (see Heb 11:1-40). Note that the author of Hebrews, finding no adequate word to describe the spiritual nature of this kind of rest, coins one from the word "Sabbath":

There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest [*sabbatismos*] for the people of God; (10) for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his. (Heb 4:9-10)

There is profound significance in the above passage. Because of His own complete unity of purpose with the Father, and because He has provided an atonement (at-one-ment) that brings heaven and earth together once again in a way that begins and ends with the heart's affections, Christ may be said to personify especially the fourth of the ten commandments. And if this is so, it is especially the fourth or Sabbath commandment that has the most potential for directing the attention of people in society once more back to Christ (see Gal 3:24). Christ and the Sabbath are not antithetical; they are synonymous.

Conclusion

The church will yet again embrace the state in an adulterous union. Once more those who oppose the church will find themselves in opposition to the state and will be visited with civil penalties for holding unpopular religious positions. The church and the state will again speak with one voice--and it will be the voice of a dragon (see Rev 13:1-18). When it speaks, it does so for the purpose of enforcing a token observance of Sunday.²⁵

It seems incredible to suppose that these things would ever happen in America, but they will. When they do, everyone will be surprised--perhaps none more than the religious leaders responsible for causing this condition. It does not bring the beneficial result they had in mind, but one thing leads to another. Before Christ returns Protestants will have gained as much power over the state in the New World as Catholics ever had in the Old World during an earlier age. The mortal wound of Rev 13:3 will be healed, just as the prophecy declares, and Protestants will participate fully in its healing. Having done so, the church uses its power to force others to ignore an explicit command of God. This is its ultimate fall.

Note: All Scripture quotations in this paper, except when noted otherwise, are from the Holy Bible, New International Version. Copyright (c) 1973, 1978, 1984 International Bible Society.

See Hardy, "Toward a Typological Interpretation of Dan 11:40-45," *Historicism* No. 22/Apr 90, pp. 25-26.

²Rev 14:8 is closely parallel to Rev 18:1-3 but applies to events in the nineteenth century. The present paper raises certain issues but does not complete the discussion. At issue is what it means to fall.

³George McCready Price, *The Time of the End* (Nashville: Southern Publishing Association, 1967), pp. 74, 76.

⁴The Inquisition was abolished in Spain by Napoleon (1808), reestablished in 1814, abolished in 1820, reestablished in 1823, and finally confined to its crypt on July 15, 1834, by Queen Christina (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1964 ed., s.v. Inquisition). The authority to use torture was removed in 1816 by Pope Pius VII (1800-23). Religious liberty was introduced in principle on May 8, 1869 (*ibid.*).

⁵"*Roe v. Wade* triggered a counterreaction, sending tremors from another direction. Determined to preserve moral values in the public sphere, conservative church members who had long disdained politics began organizing furiously; the Pro-Life Movement spread quickly across the country. By 1976 evangelicals were flexing their muscles behind a 'born-again' presidential candidate. In 1979 a group of conservative Christian leaders met privately in Washington; the result was the Moral Majority and the Christian New Right. Within only six years this movement became one of the most formidable forces in American politics, registering millions of voters, raising vast war chests for select candidates, and crusading for its 'moral agenda' with the fervor of old-time, circuit-riding preachers" (Charles Colson with Ellen Santilli Vaughn, *Kingdoms in Conflict* [(Grand Rapids): Zondervan, 1987], p. 45).

⁶See chaps. 10-13.

⁷See chaps. 23, 25.

⁸But in recent years many Christians have urged a more direct approach for bringing needed social change: simply elect Christians to political office. One spokesman has even suggested a religious version of affirmative action; if, for example, 24 percent of the people are born again, then at least 24 percent of the officeholders should be born again. Others have argued that Christians should 'take dominion' over government, with those in public office

speaking 'for God as well as for the American people.' On the surface this shortcut might seem to some an appealing answer to America's declining morality. It is, however, simplistic and dangerous triumphalism. To suggest that electing Christians to public office will solve all public ills is not only presumptuous and theologically questionable, it is also untrue" (ibid., p. 303).

⁹Ibid., p. 310.

¹⁰San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987.

¹¹Lindsell, *New Paganism*, pp. 141-42.

¹²See ibid., p. 137.

¹³Roof, "The Episcopalian Goes the Way of the Dodo," *Wall Street Journal*, July 20, 1990, p. A12).

¹⁴There was a strong Catholic presence in Maryland in colonial times, although never a strong majority (see Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990], pp. 51-55). There were French Catholics to the North and Spanish Catholics to the South. And the American Southwest, which would not be completely joined to the United States until 1914, was solidly Catholic for four hundred years.

The first synagogue in America was built in 1685 in New Amsterdam. The Shearith Israel congregation soon followed in 1700. Other early congregations include Mikveh Israel (Philadelphia, 1740), one in Newport, Rhode Island (1760), and at about the same time another, known as Beth Elohim, in Charleston, South Carolina. Ezra Stiles, incidentally, studied Hebrew with the Rabbi in Newport. For these and other interesting facts about Jews in Colonial America see Solomon Grayzel, *A History of the Jews*, rev. ed. (New York: Mentor, 1968), pp. 473-85.

¹⁵Many Catholics are Hispanics, but not all Hispanics are Catholic. Some 18% of all Hispanics in the United States are now members of Protestant churches (ibid.).

¹⁶"Not all Protestant denominations are declining equally fast. Since the middle-1960s, Methodists have declined to 9% from 14%, Lutherans to 6% from 7%, Presbyterians to 3% from 6% and Episcopalians to 2% from 3%. Mainline Protestant losses have been largely among the young who have either turned to other faiths, or simply dropped out of religious institutions entirely. . . . Along with Southern Baptists, other conservative Protestant groups, such as the Assemblies of God, the Seventh-Day Adventists and various Pentecostal and holiness groups, continue to flourish. Three in 10 Americans are evangelicals, or born-again Christians. Enthusiasm, certainty of belief, moral passion, and institutional commitment--all are attributes that engender evangelical growth and vitality" (ibid.).

¹⁷For further discussion see Jerome Nathanson, "Sixty-six Million Americans Do Not Belong to Any Church: What Do They Believe?" in Leo Rosten, ed., *Religions in America*, rev. ed. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1963), pp. 212-18.

¹⁸Lindsell, *New Paganism*, pp. 42.

¹⁹*Foreign Policy* 78 (Spring 1990): 27.

²⁰Lindsell, *New Paganism*, p. 45.

²¹Colson, *Kingdoms in Conflict*, p. 113.

²²The transition away from favoring single established churches was a gradual one. As a liberalizing gesture there were attempts to secure multiple establishment in South Carolina (1778), Georgia (1782, 1784, 1785), and Maryland (1785). They were defeated in 1790, 1789, and 1810 respectively, each by amendment of the state constitution. "Only Connecticut and Massachusetts sustained multiple establishments after independence, though their byzantine complexity increasingly drained away the grandeur that state support for Christianity was designed to provide. in both states complicated certificate systems that relieved dissenting Presbyterians, Baptists, Quakers, and Episcopalians from parish church rates stimulated mistakes, misunderstandings, and arguments. Congregations vied for tax support or tax exemptions, then sued adherents who did not pay their promised dues. . . . Connecticut voters approved a new constitution in 1818 that finally abolished the multiple establishment altogether. Massachusetts voters did not amend their constitution to do so until 1833 and then only after a

bitter contest that saw supporters of establishment decry the thorough collapse of morality and public order in an increasingly tendentious republic" (Butler, *Sea of Faith*, pp. 267-68).

²³The British and Foreign Bible Society (1804) was the first major organization of its kind. "The step taken in London was quickly imitated elsewhere. Soon each Protestant state in Germany, each Protestant canton of Switzerland had its own local bible society, just as each main city of England and Wales had its auxiliary to the B.F.B.S. The movement also spread rapidly to Scotland, Scandinavia, the Netherlands, France, several of the states in the U.S., Canada, the main cities of India, Freetown in Sierra Leone, Belize in British Honduras, Cape Town, Mauritius and later Australia and New Zealand. In 1816 most of the local societies of the U.S. joined to form the American Bible society. . . . By the 1820s, before the coming of the first evangelical missionaries, colporteurs related to those societies were working throughout Latin America. In the following decade systematic colportage started in France, spreading to other countries in Europe and to the other continents. By 1900 nearly 2,000 colporteurs were at work on behalf of those Bible societies in almost all countries of the world" (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1964 ed., s.v. Bible Societies). Other notable organizations include the Gideons International (1899), Wycliffe Bible Translators, Inc. (1935), and the United Bible Societies (1946). Since World War II national Bible societies have been chartered in Japan, Korea, China, Indonesia, India, Belgium, and Brazil. "Between 1950 and 1960 the average annual world circulation of Holy Scriptures by the Bible societies amounted to 3,037,898 Bibles, 3,223,986 New Testaments and 18,417,989 portions" (ibid.).

²⁴In *Democracy in America*, Alexis de Tocqueville provided an enduring description of religion in the antebellum era: "There is no country in the whole world in which the Christian religion retains a greater influence over the souls of men than in America" (ibid., p. 289). This should not be translated into a numerical claim. It is not the case that a numerical majority were Christian by personal conviction, but it does mean that religion was held in high esteem during this time.

²⁵The significance of the day and the manner of its enforcement closely correspond to each other. The word "Sunday" commemorates the sun, which is the most dazzlingly brilliant example of God's creative power anywhere within the scope of human experience. In view of Isa 14:12 and Rev 12:7-9 there may be symbolism in this fact. Lucifer was not always dark and malevolent. He was the highest of all the angels--the pinnacle of God's creative power. But his heart became proud. In the third wilderness temptation his pride passes all bounds: "Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. 'All this I will give you,' he said, 'if you will bow down and worship me'" (Matt 4:8-9). And in resisting this temptation Christ struck at the root of all idolatry, which in its varied forms must always involve worshiping the creature rather than the Creator. So here is a creature who claims the planet as his own and whose primary object is to distract attention away from the Creator by diverting it to himself. He does this in part by offering a substitute for the sign and seal of God's creative work--i.e., the Sabbath--and seeks to enforce the observance of that substitute by coercive means if necessary. In these facts all the issues in the conflict before us come together. Theologically we are trained to ask whether obedience is possible. It is a misleading question. In confronting us with Himself Christ makes obedience not only possible but inevitable. At issue is not the theological distraction about whether we can ever obey but the more practical question of who will receive our obedience (see 1 Kgs 18:21).