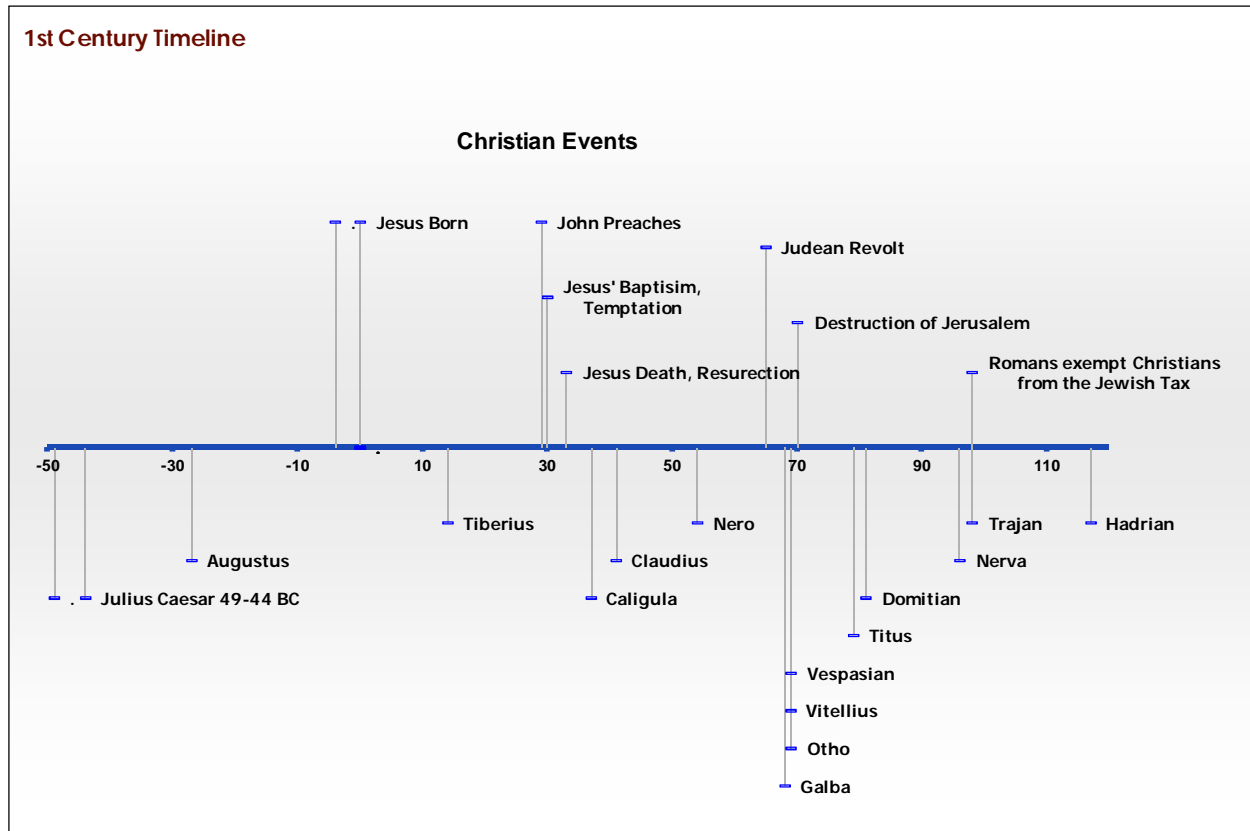


Distinct People of God



What happened in the 1st Century?

Judaism became extinct.

And with their extinction, Christians became distinct.

God has always intended that his people be distinct.

From the dawn of the Ages he has called them to that purpose.

He created Adam; distinct from the animals, in God's own image.

He called Noah to be distinct and swept away all others; and left a sign of his promise.

He called Abraham and made him a promise that would distinct him from all others. He gave him circumcision as a distinguishing mark.

He called Jacob and made his descendants distinct by causing them to be slaves, a separate people in Egypt.

He called Moses, and made his people wander for a generation, until they had been purified by trial to be a people distinct, a Holy People devoted to his purpose.

Through Moses, he gave them the Law.

With the Law he gave them a blessing if they kept it from their hearts (Lev 26:3-13, Deut 28:1-14), and a curse if they did not (Lev 26:14-33, Deut 28:15-68).

Leviticus 26:3-33 ³If you walk in My statutes and keep My commandments so as to carry them out, ⁴then I shall give you rains in their season, so that the land will yield its produce and the trees of the field will bear their fruit. ⁵Indeed, your threshing will last for you until grape gathering, and grape gathering will last until sowing time. You will thus eat your food to the full and live securely in your land. ⁶I shall also grant peace in the land, so that you may lie down with no one making *you* tremble. I shall also eliminate harmful beasts from the land, and no sword will pass through your land. ⁷But you will chase your enemies and they will fall before you by the sword; ⁸five of you will chase a hundred, and a hundred of you will chase ten thousand, and your enemies will fall before you by the sword. ⁹So I will turn toward you and make you fruitful and multiply you, and I will confirm My covenant with you. ¹⁰You will eat the old supply and clear out the old because of the new. ¹¹Moreover, I will make My dwelling among you, and My soul will not reject you. ¹²I will also walk among you and be your God, and you shall be My people. ¹³I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt so that *you* would not be their slaves, and I broke the bars of your yoke and made you walk erect.

¹⁴But if you do not obey Me and do not carry out all these commandments, ¹⁵if, instead, you reject My statutes, and if your soul abhors My ordinances so as not to carry out all My commandments, *and* so break My covenant, ¹⁶I, in turn, will do this to you: I will appoint over you a sudden terror, consumption and fever that will waste away the eyes and cause the soul to pine away; also, you will sow your seed uselessly, for your enemies will eat it up. ¹⁷I will set My face against you so that you will be struck down before your enemies; and those who hate you will rule over you, and you will flee when no one is pursuing you. ¹⁸If also after these things you do not obey Me, then I will punish you seven times more for your sins. ¹⁹I will also break down your pride of power; I will also make your sky like iron and your earth like bronze. ²⁰Your strength will be spent uselessly, for your land will not yield its produce and the trees of the land will not yield their fruit. ²¹If then, you act with hostility against Me and are unwilling to obey Me, I will increase the plague on you seven times according to your sins. ²²I will let loose among you the beasts of the field, which will bereave you of your children and destroy your cattle and reduce your number so that your roads lie deserted. ²³And if by these things you are not turned to Me, but act with hostility against Me, ²⁴then I will act with hostility against you; and I, even I, will strike you seven times for your sins. ²⁵I will also bring upon you a sword which will execute vengeance for the covenant; and when you gather together into your cities, I will send pestilence among you, so that you shall be delivered into enemy hands. ²⁶When I break your staff of bread, ten women will bake your bread in one oven, and they will bring back your bread in rationed amounts, so that you will eat and not be satisfied. ²⁷Yet if in spite of this you do not obey Me, but act with hostility against Me, ²⁸then I will act with wrathful hostility against you, and I, even I, will punish you seven times for your sins. ²⁹Further, you will eat the flesh of your sons and the flesh of your daughters you will eat. ³⁰I then will destroy your high places, and cut

down your incense altars, and heap your remains on the remains of your idols, for My soul shall abhor you. ³¹I will lay waste your cities as well and will make your sanctuaries desolate, and I will not smell your soothing aromas. ³²I will make the land desolate so that your enemies who settle in it will be appalled over it. ³³You, however, I will scatter among the nations and will draw out a sword after you, as your land becomes desolate and your cities become waste.

In spite of this promise of blessing for faithfulness and curse for unfaithfulness, God's chosen people rejected him.

They wanted to be a people great of themselves.

They wanted the greatness of men, like the Nations around them. So they asked for a King.

1 Samuel 8:4-8 ⁴Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah; ⁵and they said to him, "Behold, you have grown old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now appoint a king for us to judge us like all the nations." ⁶But the thing was displeasing in the sight of Samuel when they said, "Give us a king to judge us." And Samuel prayed to the LORD. ⁷The LORD said to Samuel, "Listen to the voice of the people in regard to all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me from being king over them. ⁸"Like all the deeds which they have done since the day that I brought them up from Egypt even to this day—in that they have forsaken Me and served other gods—so they are doing to you also.

God first gave them Saul, a man after their own hearts. Saul did not obey God. God removed him. God called David to be a man after his own heart, but even David counted the fighting men he could call into his Army and made plans to build a Temple like the Nations around him had done for their gods.

They were scourged by Civil War. The King of the Northern Tribes saw the religion of God's people as a threat that would someday re-unite what he had torn away.

So he created a new Religion. It was convenient, it was practical, and above all it served his purpose to strengthen the control his government held over its people.

God told them he would be their protector, but they sought protection by forming an alliance with Babylon. God used Babylon to purify and cleanse them by means of captivity.

Those who flourished in captivity were the ones who were distinct in their devotion to God.

In those days, God through the prophet Daniel (Dan 2:36-45) told them about the governments that were to come and what the meaning of each was.

The Babylonians were pure like gold.

The Persians would follow, less pure,

and then the Greeks still less pure, but still one strong metal,

and finally the Romans – a Kingdom that was Iron and Clay – signifying that it would be an Empire and not a Nation. An Empire where Citizens would enjoy the wealth of the territory they held by the rule of Iron, and in which the subject peoples would be the clay that filled in the rest of the body.

In the days of this last Government, God would establish his Kingdom, a Kingdom that would be above all others and would reign forever.

The Persians sent home the ones who appeared to be a distinct people.
Surely they would stay distinct people, devoted to God from their hearts.
But they did not.

The Greeks came, conquering first with the sword, but then with their culture.
God's people became less and less a distinct people devoted to God and more and more a people who strove to be like the powerful Nations who had mastered them.

They wanted glorious temples like the ones they saw in Greece, so they began an impressive Temple.
They wanted to be wise like Socrates, so they appointed Wise Men.
They wanted to be Academic Scholars like Plato, so they appointed Rabbis and set up academies.
They wanted to be known as intelligent and logical like Plato, so they appointed Lawyers.
They wanted to Rule the World like Alexander had done, so they longed for the Promised Messiah to be such a political and military leader.

When Jesus came, he did not find a people distinct in devotion to God.
He found the man made religion of Judaism
He found a Temple so grand that it had been under construction 46 years when he taught in it. (John 2:20) He found a Temple where merchants sold goods. Twice he drove them out.
He found Wise Men who missed the principle that Socrates himself died for. Socrates was killed because he exposed man made religion for what it was – phony to core.
He found teachers and schools that taught Lawyers how to get around the Law rather than follow it.
The Religious Leaders hated him and conspired against him because he openly rebuked them for the sin of Judaism.

Zechariah 7:12-14 ¹²“They made their hearts *like* flint so that they could not hear the law and the words which the LORD of hosts had sent by His Spirit through the former prophets; therefore great wrath came from the LORD of hosts. ¹³“And just as He called and they would not listen, so they called and I would not listen,” says the LORD of hosts; ¹⁴“but I scattered them with a storm wind among all the nations whom they have not known. Thus the land is desolated behind them so that no one went back and forth, for they made the pleasant land desolate.”

Micah 3:9-12 ⁹ Now hear this, heads of the house of Jacob And rulers of the house of Israel, Who abhor justice And twist everything that is straight, ¹⁰ Who build Zion with bloodshed And Jerusalem with violent injustice. ¹¹ Her leaders pronounce judgment for a bribe, Her priests instruct for a price And her prophets divine for money. Yet they lean on the LORD saying, “Is not the LORD in our midst? Calamity will not come upon us.” ¹² Therefore, on account of you Zion will be plowed as a field, Jerusalem will become a heap of ruins, And the mountain of the temple *will become* high places of a forest.

He came to them as King and they rejected him because he was not the king who would make them powerful.

Jesus came to find God's distinct people and found Judaism, instead.

Luke 19:41-44 ⁴¹When He approached *Jerusalem*, He saw the city and wept over it, ⁴²saying, "If you had known in this day, even you, the things which make for peace! But now they have been hidden from your eyes. ⁴³"For the days will come upon you when your enemies will throw up a barricade against you, and surround you and hem you in on every side, ⁴⁴and they will level you to the ground and your children within you, and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not recognize the time of your visitation."

Matthew 24:1-2 ¹Jesus came out from the temple and was going away when His disciples came up to point out the temple buildings to Him. ²And He said to them, "Do you not see all these things? Truly I say to you, not one stone here will be left upon another, which will not be torn down."

Matthew 24:15-19 ¹⁵"Therefore when you see the abomination of desolation which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), ¹⁶then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains; ¹⁷Whoever is on the housetop must not go down to get the things out that are in his house. ¹⁸Whoever is in the field must not turn back to get his cloak. ¹⁹"But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days!

The Jews rejected their promised King and manipulated the Romans to execute him. The Romans convicted him of the only thing he was guilty of – being their King. The charge against him was written on his cross in Hebrew, Latin, and Greek, "Jesus the Nazarene, King of the Jews." The Jews objected but Pilate simply told them " I have written what I have written."

As he promised, he was raised on the third day. He ascended on the fortieth day, and the Church was revealed on the Day of Pentecost.

I think that most of us have a vague idea that Christians were being systematically persecuted by the Roman Empire – but I think that is a myth. Read your Bible. It was the Jews who hunted them down and killed them. The Romans punished Christians to restore the peace when the Jews stirred up riots against them. Look in your Bible at the events like this against Paul and others.

The only Roman Emperor on the 1st Century who was known for persecuting Christians was Nero. When he lost support of the Romans themselves after a fire mysteriously destroyed the part of Rome where he wanted to build a new palace blamed and punished Christians to take the heat off himself.

You don't need an Encyclopedia to know who was persecuting Christians.

Read the accounts found in the Acts of the Apostles and in the Epistles.

Christians were attacked by religious leaders.

In a few cases, these leaders were followers of some pagan god (e.g. Acts 19:24 ff).

The persecutors who followed them from place to place were followers of Judaism. These demanded either that the Christians denounce Christ or that they become a sect of Judaism.

Over and over again you read in your Bibles that the persecutors of the Church were Jews.

Paul started out as one of them, and when Jesus called him, he became their first enemy.

How many places did they follow him and stir up the local citizens against him.

2 Corinthians 11:24-25 ²⁴Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine *lashes*. ²⁵Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep.

Philippians 3:2 ²Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision;

Stephen laid it on the line for them

Acts 7:51-53 ⁵¹“You men who are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit; you are doing just as your fathers did. ⁵²“Which one of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? They killed those who had previously announced the coming of the Righteous One, whose betrayers and murderers you have now become; ⁵³you who received the law as ordained by angels, and *yet* did not keep it.”

Judaism rejected Jesus Christ, tried to exterminate the Church, and persecuted any Christian who did not become first a follower of Judaism.

Christians were persecuted because they Jews followed them everywhere, accusing them.

Christians observed the Lord's Supper. Christ told them to remember him in the emblems that represented his flesh and blood.

Christians rescued orphans and widows.

The Jews spread rumors that Christians were cannibals.

Christians held fast to their faith. The Jews used every opportunity to expose them as rejecting each and every pagan god. The Jews were accusers – devils.

So what happened in the 1st Century?

Exactly as Jesus told them, the Prophecy from Daniel was fulfilled.

Daniel 9:26-27 ²⁶“Then after the sixty-two weeks the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing, and the people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. And its end *will come* with a flood; even to the end there will be war; desolations are determined. ²⁷“And he will make a firm covenant with the many for one week, but in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering; and on the wing of abominations *will come* one who makes desolate, even until a complete destruction, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who makes desolate.”

The Apostle John writes about the event in this way:

Revelation 16:4-6

⁴Then the third *angel* poured out his bowl into the rivers and the springs of waters; and they became blood. ⁵And I heard the angel of the waters saying, “Righteous are You, who are and

who were, O Holy One, because You judged these things; ⁶for they poured out the blood of saints and prophets, and You have given them blood to drink. They deserve it.”

Revelation 17:3-7

³And he carried me away ^ain the Spirit into a wilderness; and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast, full of blasphemous names, having seven heads and ten horns. ⁴The woman was clothed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a gold cup full of abominations and of the unclean things of her immorality, ⁵and on her forehead a name *was* written, a mystery, “BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.” ⁶And I saw the woman drunk with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the witnesses of Jesus. When I saw her, I wondered greatly. ⁷And the angel said to me, “Why do you wonder? I will tell you the mystery of the woman and of the beast that carries her, which has the seven heads and the ten horns.

Revelation 17:8-11 ⁸“The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to come up out of the abyss and ^ago to destruction. And those who dwell on the earth, whose name has not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, will wonder when they see the beast, that he was and is not and will come. ⁹“Here is the mind which has wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits, ¹⁰and they are seven kings; five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; and when he comes, he must remain a little while. ¹¹“The beast which was and is not, is himself also an eighth and is *one* of the seven, and he goes to destruction.

Many have gone into great debates about the meaning of this text. They debate various theories of Millennialism.

Some will tell you that it was written before the destruction of Jerusalem and spoke only of things that were completed before the end of the 1st Century.

Others claim that it speaks of events in an end time when Jesus will return to establish an Earthly Kingdom.

Others claim that it is purely rhetorical language speaking of the battle of Good versus Evil.

Others cite this passage to identify religions they oppose.

Still others claim that it was fake prophesy; written after an event and passed off as prophesy written before.

These debates engage in endless wrangling about dates of writing and what these things might mean for the past, present, and future. The churches of Christ in America were greatly divided by these teachings in the middle of the last century.

But I tell you that all the logical debating points are nothing but silliness.

It matters not in the least if the Revelation was written prior to 70 AD to warn Christians or after 70 AD to explain what had happened and why. We know the Christians were warned and they fled. What does matter is the story of the Harlot.

Who was the Harlot who consorted with the kings of the Earth, with wealth, and who was drunk on the blood of the Prophets and of the Saints? Of course this passage speaks of Judaism.

Revelation 18:1-8 ¹After these things I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was illumined with his glory. ²And he cried out with a mighty voice, saying, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! She has become a dwelling place of demons and a prison of every unclean spirit, and a prison of every unclean and hateful bird. ³"For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the passion of her immorality, and the kings of the earth have committed *acts of immorality* with her, and the merchants of the earth have become rich by the wealth of her sensuality." ⁴I heard another voice from heaven, saying, "Come out of her, my people, so that you will not participate in her sins and receive of her plagues; ⁵for her sins have piled up as high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities. ⁶"Pay her back even as she has paid, and give back *to her* double according to her deeds; in the cup which she has mixed, mix twice as much for her. ⁷"To the degree that she glorified herself and lived sensuously, to the same degree give her torment and mourning; for she says in her heart, 'I sit as a queen and I am not a widow, and will never see mourning.' ⁸"For this reason in one day her plagues will come, pestilence and mourning and famine, and she will be burned up with fire; for the Lord God who judges her is strong.

We know that the Christians "came out of her" and verse 4 tells them to do.

Christians must be distinct from those who follow in the path Judaism went down.

The Jews culminated their unfaithfulness to God when they killed his Son.

As a consequence God used the Romans to bring the promised sudden destruction upon them.

In 66 AD Judaism tried to call in a favor from the Romans to side with them in a dispute with the Greeks. The Romans refused. The Jews in Judea mounted a rebellion.

The Emperor Nero responded by sending 4 Legions under the command of Vespasian and his son Titus to erase them.

When Nero was denounced by the Senate in 68 AD he committed suicide. Rome went into turmoil.

Three different men tried to claim his place within the space of 1 year. Each in turn was rejected and killed. Finally Vespasian himself returned to Rome to become Caesar.

He left his son Titus to finish with the Jews.

Whether it was because of the warning Jesus gave, or the warning John gave in Revelation, or even if it was because the churches in Judea had prophets who warned them, we know that the Christians knew not to flee when the Roman Legions approached the city.

The Jews withdrew behind their city walls and the Christians fled. Once the siege began, anyone caught

trying to escape Jerusalem was crucified on the earthen wall the Romans erected around the city. Only the Christians escaped because they heeded the warning.

When the city was taken, Titus destroyed everything exactly as Jesus had said. Everyone was killed. Not one stone upon another was left.

Judaism in Judea was wiped out so completely that the sacrifice has not been restored, even to this day. Judaism suddenly and violently became extinct. Jerusalem itself was destroyed in 70 AD and the last hold outs were slaughtered in 73 AD at Masada.

The Jews who lived in the dispersion, outside of Judea, did not rise up in the 66 revolt, but Vespasian forced them to pay a special tax if they continued to live as Jews. It was literally a "Jew Tax." The revenue was used to finance a Temple in Rome to the Roman god Jupiter. These Jews would eventually rebel also. The Roman-Jewish wars of 115 and 132 would finish them off and would turn the once powerful Jews into an even more dispersed and persecuted minority.

The Romans did not try to wipe out Christians, they did wipe out Jews.

Christians who lived according to Jewish customs and practices were treated as Jews.

What had once been an academic debate was no longer. Christians had a strong reason to stand apart from the Jews.

But God had intended his people to stand apart all along. The Jews rejected God. God visited upon them the extinction that he had promised from the very beginning. Their extinction made certain that Christians would become distinct from Judaism.

Acts 20:28; Eph. 1:14; Titus 2:14 each speak of us as being God's own possession; purchased by blood.

God meant for us to be distinctly his !

But the harlotry practiced by Judaism did not end with their extinction. The Harlot of the Revelation may have spoken directly of Judaism, but the sins of Judaism have been repeated many times within Christianity. When you hear someone citing Revelation and fitting the Kings from Rev 17 to some political or military leader who is or was in power when a Religion they oppose was organized, don't buy it. But do believe that anytime someone or a group gets together and organizes a Religion they are repeating the sin of Judaism that is described there.

Israel was given a gift by a loving Father. He rescued them from bondage in Egypt. He gave them a home. He gave them laws to live by to protect them and help them to live in harmony with each other. He gave them Judges to help them interpret the law and lead them in times of trouble. He kept them safe so long as they followed him. In return he asked them to be faithful to him.

But what he gave was not what they wanted. They wanted a King – a human government they could control. They organized the Religion Judaism, which let them make up their own rules and make excuses not to be faithful to the ones God gave them. They made alliances between the King, the Wealthy, and

the Religious Leaders. When more powerful Political and Military Rulers appeared, these three groups made alliances with them too. – Read the account of the arrest, trial, and execution of Jesus if you doubt this charge. Those events illustrate how the Jews tried to use the Roman Government. Pilate did not want to kill Jesus. He tried to maneuver the Jews to let him go. But he was using Judaism to control the people and Judaism was using him. He gave in to their demand, but he washed his hands signifying his contempt for what he was forced to do.

Men organize Religions to get what they want instead of the gift God gave them.

Governments use Religions to influence public opinion and control people.

Religions try to use governments.

When they do so they prostitute themselves – just as Judaism did, just as the image given in the Revelation.

Governments ask the man-made Religions to do more of what those Religions were organized for in the first place – turn their backs on the commandments of God.

Religions sell themselves by asking for payments in return

- They want financial benefits such as land-money-exemption from taxes,
- they want the government to enact laws allowing them and forcing others to live by their rules,
- they want to stand up and be seen at important events,
- they want a seat at the table when decisions are made,
- they want to be able to call in favors when they want something they should not have.

Governments make the deal to further their own ends, but they see the Religions for what they are when they do it; people who have sold themselves to get something in return.

They see a Harlot.

And when they have what they want from the Harlot, they despise her.

The Harlot is ignored. If she complains she is mistreated. If she rebels, she is made eliminated.

How many times in the last few years have you heard Religious Leaders lament the fact that the government no longer cares what they think?

Here is the point of telling this story. Such a complaint is a sign that those same Religious Leaders have sold themselves and are now un-happy with being treated as a discarded Harlot.

If you are wondering if I think the nominally Christian Religions in America have sold themselves, let me be clear. I think so.

I think this is why the government showed special favor in times past.

Now the Harlot is being ignored and mistreated. How many generations have been taught one thing in Sunday School and are then told to set what they learned aside when the government tells them to.

Is it any wonder that so many have walked away from the churches they grew up in?

Is it any wonder government now panders to others who have more influence?

We know from scripture that government is ordained by God. He gave them authority so they would be able to protect the weak and innocent and restrain evildoers.

We as Christians are clearly commanded to be subject to the government. We are forbidden to rebel against the authority that God ordained, even when they don't do it to suit us, even when they themselves do not follow God's commands.

We are not bound to help them do what we know is wrong. In fact we are bound to not do so. Being subject may mean that we accept punishment from the government for doing what is right. So be it.

1 Peter 4:14-16 ¹⁴If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. ¹⁵Make sure that none of you suffers as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler; ¹⁶but if *anyone suffers* as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name.

I know this will seem an odd aside, but I also think that Religion hampers the ability of government to restrain evildoers. Religion should not be trying to impose restrictions on the government such that they are rendered in-effective at doing this duty God assigned them.

God called us to be his distinct people. That is what we must be no matter what the price.

I pray that if ever I am ever arrested and prosecuted as a Christian, there will be enough evidence to convict me.

If you are not Gods own possession, purchased by the blood of Christ, wont you come and become his tonight.

If you were once purchased but find yourself serving men rather than God, repent. Come and let us help you.

If you need the support and prayers of the Church for any reason, come and claim the comfort hand help that God placed us here to share.

Please come.