

The Nature of the State (Part 1)

by John Cobin, Ph.D. for *The Times Examiner*
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This column is the first segment of a three-part series dealing with a biblical perspective on the nature of the state.

Is the state run by Satan? What do we know about the nature of the state? According to the Bible, the state's power comes from Satan through the "spirits of demons". In Revelation 13:1-4,¹ "a beast rising up out of the sea" with "a blasphemous name" on his heads emerges to rule civil society. This ruler is empowered by "the dragon", also "called the Devil and Satan" (Revelation 12:9, cf. 20:2), who gives him "his power, his throne, and great authority". At the time of the writing of the book of Revelation, Domitian was likely Caesar, noted for the band of gold he wore on his head containing the blasphemous inscription "Dominus et Deus" (i.e., "Lord and God").² Satan empowered this ruler "beast", as he does all the "kings of the earth".

Revelation 16:14 (cf. 19:19) says that the "spirits of demons" emerging from this beast and Satan "go out to the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty." And the devil presently uses the state to do his bidding, including casting Christians into prison (Revelation 2:10)—as was the case when Peter and John were condemned for preaching the Gospel (Acts 5:17-29). Plainly, the nature of the state is satanic.

Accordingly, when tempting Christ, the devil was probably not lying, and his claims were not exaggerated, when he said that he controls the state. "Then the devil, taking Him up on a high mountain, showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said to Him, 'All this authority I will give You, and their glory; for this has been delivered to me, and I give it to whomever I wish. Therefore, if You will worship before me, all will be Yours.' And Jesus answered and said to him, 'Get behind Me, Satan! For it is written, "You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve"' (Luke 4:5-7).³ In Revelation 17:11-14 the connection between great states and the figurative beast is made plain, where the beast is identified as the eighth successive king. These beasts stand against the kingdom of God and will be cast into hell (Revelation 19:20-21). Therefore, the state can be generally viewed as an agent of the kingdom of Satan and empowered by the devil—even if it is ultimately ordained by God (in the sense of Romans 13:1).

How then can the Bible say that states are "ordained" or "appointed" by God to be his "ministers" (Romans 13:1-2, 4, 6)? Briefly, divine appointment to God's service does not imply that the person or institution appointed is holy or godly. After all, Satan himself is ordained by God, and his actions are bounded by Providence (e.g., as the Bible describes in Job's trials and the protecting of Peter from being sifted "as wheat" by the devil in Luke 22:31).⁴ The state is ordained by God but the Bible indicates that its most intimate relationship is with the devil (Revelation 18:9), and the state has generally served Satan's evil designs throughout history, even if God ultimately directs the state and disposes of it as He wills.

The satanic nexus with the state is also described or implied in Daniel 10:13, Ezekiel 28:12-19, and Revelation 17:1-7. In these passages, Satan is called "the prince of kingdom of Persia" and the "King of Tyre". Plus, the "kings of the earth" are described as having an intimate and illicit relationship with Sa-

¹ Good Protestant hermeneutics mandates that doctrine should primarily be derived from didactical parts of Scripture such as the law, the parables of Christ, and the epistles or decrees of the Apostles. Other revelation should be either supportive or secondary in forming doctrine, having its best purpose to clarify, enhance, or bolster principles. The book of Revelation is an inspired portion of the Scriptures, and therefore "profitable for doctrine" (2 Timothy 3:16), with this kind of supportive role. It contains many passages that relate to the state, and thus is helpful in forming a biblical understanding of public policy.

² See Herman Hoeksema (1969), *Behold He Cometh: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, Reformed Free Publishing Association: Grand Rapids, Michigan, pp. 451ff.

³ The parallel passage in Matthew 4:8-11 states: "Again, the devil took Him up on an exceedingly high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to Him, 'All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me.' Then Jesus said to him, 'Away with you, Satan! For it is written, "You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve."' Then the devil left Him, and behold, angels came and ministered to Him."

⁴ The Bible is replete with examples of this fact. Ungodly Old Testament era kings were God's controlled servants, including Pharaoh (Exodus 4:21), the Assyrian king (Ezra 6:22), Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon (Jeremiah 43:10), and Cyrus king of Persia (Isaiah 44:28; 45:1; 2 Chronicles 36:22; Ezra 1:1). The demons had to ask Christ's permission to be cast into the swine (Matthew 8:31) instead of the "dry places" (Matthew 12:43; Luke 11:24). Satan is said to be "bound for a thousand years" by God's angel (Revelation 20:2). God used Michael the archangel to withstand the devil in his wiles (Daniel 10:13; Jude 1:9).

tan by way of his “scarlet beast” and the “woman” who is carried by it. So once again we find a direct link between Satan and the earthly rulers that God ordains. The devil certainly controlled these kings, assuming they were historical figures. Perhaps he even possessed them. Hence, we have more evidence to suggest that the state may credibly be considered part of the kingdom of Satan, and only ordained by God in the sense that the devil himself is ordained by God—to fulfill His purposes and to glorify Him.

The Scriptures indicate that the state is often a “minister” of judgment ordained by God (cf. Isaiah 3:4-5, 12-15). To varying degrees, in each judgment situation, the state becomes “the rod” of God’s “anger” and “the staff” of His “indignation” (Isaiah 10:5). It receives a “charge” from God to punish the people who are objects of His terrestrial “wrath” (Isaiah 10:6). The Bible says that Lord himself brings “calamity” on people (Isaiah 45:7). The state is often a judgment against the people over which it rules (particularly outside of the theocracy of Judah), although God has also used the state to judge foreigners during the Old Testament theocratic kingdom.⁵ Yet the states that serve God in this way are often at least as wicked as the ones they judge, showing that not all of God’s ordained servants (cf. Romans 13:4) are upright in character. Casting aside popular myths to the contrary, the state’s evil nature and bad character are realities to be expected.

The Nature of the State (Part 2)

by John Cobin, Ph.D. for *The Times Examiner*
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This column is the second segment of a three-part series dealing with a biblical perspective on the nature of the state.

The state has been a vile nuisance for civilized men, and the Bible gives us no reason to believe its evil nature can be changed. The psalmist recognized that states legislate evil policies when he wrote: “Shall the throne of iniquity, which devises evil by law, have fellowship with You?” (Psalm 94:20). Historically, the state usually reigns by iniquity, stimulating and fomenting evil schemes. And, in the end, God will destroy the evil and “twisted” state, the beast from the sea (akin to the one mentioned in Revelation 13:1). As He says in Isaiah 27:1: “In that day the Lord with His severe sword, great and strong, will punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent, Leviathan that twisted serpent; and He will slay the reptile that is in the sea.” Indeed, the Bible teaches that hell (Tophet) was “prepared” for the king (Isaiah 30:33), and designates the lake of fire as the ultimate end of earthly kings who defy God (Revelation 19:20).

With conviction, the Bible indicates that the state is always created according to God’s permissive will: “The king’s heart is in the hand of the Lord, like the rivers of water; He turns it wherever He wishes” (Proverbs 21:1). By God’s wisdom, “kings reign, and rulers decree justice” (Proverbs 8:15). Indeed, “All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; He does according to His will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth” (Daniel 4:34-37). Thus, even the most vicious and evil rulers are subject to God’s decree, even though their lust for greed and power fosters conscription, taxation, power brokering, and oppression—just as Samuel prophesied (1 Samuel 8:11-18).⁶

⁵ Sometimes a state is more evil than the people it afflicts (Isaiah 10:10, Habakkuk 1:4-11) but God uses it for judgment nonetheless.

⁶ 1 Samuel 8:4-22: Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah, and said to him, “Look, you are old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now make us a king to judge us like all the nations.” But the thing displeased Samuel when they said, “Give us a king to judge us.” So Samuel prayed to the Lord. And the Lord said to Samuel, “Heed the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them. According to all the works which they have done since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt, even to this day—with which they have forsaken Me and served other gods—so they are doing to you also. Now therefore, heed their voice. However, you shall solemnly forewarn them, and show them the behavior of the king who will reign over them.” So Samuel told all the words of the Lord to the people who asked him for a king. And he said, “This will be the behavior of the king who will reign over you: He will take your sons and appoint them for his own chariots and to be his horsemen, and some will run before his chariots. He will appoint captains over his thousands and captains over his fifties, will set some to plow his ground and reap his harvest, and some to make his weapons of war and equipment for his chariots. He will take your daughters to be perfumers, cooks, and bakers. And he will take the best of your fields, your vineyards, and your olive groves, and give them to his servants. He will take a tenth of your grain and your vintage, and give it to his officers and servants. And he will take your male servants, your female servants, your finest young men, and your donkeys, and put them to his work. He will take a tenth of your sheep. And you will be his servants. And you will cry out in that day because of your king whom you have chosen for yourselves, and the Lord will not hear you in that day.” Nevertheless the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel; and they said, “No, but we will have a king over us, that we also may be like all the nations, and that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles.” And Samuel heard all the words of the people, and he repeated them in the hearing of the Lord. So the Lord said to Samuel, “Heed their voice, and make them a king.” And Samuel said to the men of Israel, “Every man go to his city.”

Biblical accounts of public policy clearly indicate that state actions in the Bible were mostly evil, concurring with other historical manifestations over the last few thousand years. As I show in *Bible and Government: Public Policy from a Christian Perspective*, over 90% of the recorded acts of states (outside of the theocracy) were clearly evil. That is to say, public policies recorded in Scripture are usually perverse or opposed to God’s law and righteousness, or are directed against God’s people. “Summarizing the biblical data, we can conclude that non-theocratic state policy actions were evil 90.2% of the time. Theocratic ones were evil 60.3% of the time. Overall, state acts were evil 78.4% of the time.”⁷

The Bible does not support the popular notion that the state is generally a benign—if not benevolent—upholder of social order. The state has not generally been the guardian of God’s law or even an arbitrary selection of it. Moreover, the Bible hardly supports the notion that men have learned to govern themselves better over time—such that the evils of the past are less likely to be repeated in the future. On the contrary, the Bible teaches that the heart of man is the same in all ages, resulting in social decay.

Does history confirm the Bible’s doctrine regarding the nature of the state? Indeed, it does so emphatically! Throughout history, rulers have typically been malevolent and often cruel. Some have been hedonistic, while others have been sadistic. Some have been ideologues or masterful demagogues; others have been rapacious conquerors. These are the standout traits of power and authority throughout history.

Renowned economist Ludwig von Mises notes that interventionist public policy by states “has caused wars and civil wars, ruthless oppression of the masses by clusters of self-appointed dictators, economic depressions, mass unemployment, capital consumption, [and] famines.”⁸ For Mises, “collectivism is a doctrine of war, intolerance, and persecution” where the people “become mere soulless pawns in the hands of a monster.”⁹

The Bible substantiates this observation. “If you see the oppression of the poor, and the violent perversion of justice and righteousness in a province, do not marvel at the matter; for high official watches over high official, and higher officials are over them” (Ecclesiastes 5:8). Jesus Christ confirmed the vicious behavior of rulers too: “You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them” (Mark 10:42; cf. Matthew 20:25).

The record of state abuses indicates that social learning has hardly improved the state—from the Roman Empire to the Dark Ages down to the present. The state remains the foremost enemy of humanity and, along with false religion, the foremost ally of Satan. Thus, the permanent satanic nature of the state presented in the Bible implies the futility of trying to “transform” it into a godly institution (under the dominion mandate of Genesis 1:26-27). Christians should not expect that a leopard will change its spots or that a poisoned spring will produce fresh water.

The Nature of the State (Part 3)

by John Cobin, Ph.D. for *The Times Examiner*
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This column is the third segment of a three-part series dealing with a biblical perspective on the nature of the state.

The evil nature of the state is clearly manifested by the carnage of totalitarian and communist regimes during the twentieth century. Professor Rudolph Rummel has demonstrated in his book *Death By Government* that, in the twentieth century alone, states around the world were responsible for the killings of an estimated 350 million of their own civilian, non-combatant populations. This figure does not count the more than one billion slain by state-sanctioned abortion worldwide, or the 40 million military personnel slain through state-sponsored aggression, during the same period. The state has been the most lethal

⁷ John Cobin (2003), *Bible and Government: Public Policy from a Christian Perspective*, Greenville, SC: Alertness Books, p. 98.

⁸ See Ludwig von Mises (1996 [1966/1949]), *Human Action: A Treatise On Economics*, fourth revised edition, Irvington-on-Hudson, New York: The Foundation for Economic Education, p. 855.

⁹ Ludwig von Mises, (1985/1957), *Theory and History: An Interpretation of Social and Economic Evolution*, Auburn, Alabama: The Ludwig von Mises Institute, p. 61.

institution in human history. And history illustrates the fact that twentieth century states have been the most evil of all time in terms of (1) loss of life and property and (2) the persecution of the church.

Clearly, the state has been more lethal than any infectious disease, plague, or religious inquisition in the history of mankind. In a July 1997 interview with *Ideas on Liberty*, Rummel stated: “Concentrated political power is the most dangerous thing on earth. During the twentieth century, 14 regimes murdered over a million people” each. “So much for the notion of state benevolence. Powerful states can be like gangs, stealing, raping, torturing, and killing on a whim.”

Many Christians have been murdered by states, including Jesus Christ and nearly all of the Apostles. Yet the relatively peaceful, anomalous American experience has stymied American Christians from appreciating this fact. The truth of the matter is that states have proven to be destructive to property and a great nuisance to the church and gospel preaching. Christian leaders would do well to be better apprised of history (especially as it relates to states and public policy) and basic economics. When it comes to facing unmitigated state power, ignorance is not bliss.

State evil is likewise evident from the poisoned and baneful redistributive policies of modern welfare states, the confiscatory taxation used to accomplish proactive policy, and much moral blight—such as the condoning of manic abortion or the excesses of the Clinton administration in America. Moreover, the imperialistic, unjust, and unconstitutional wars in Iraq and Afghanistan conducted by Bush family presidencies prove that there has been no end to the bloodthirsty quest for power and economic benefit by American rulers.

Even in America, civil liberties and constitutional rights are frequently eroded by all branches of the state, through court cases undermining private property and the right to life, legislation curtailing the Bill of Rights—under the guise of “fighting terrorism” or warring against vices like drug trafficking, and executive orders that encourage police state brutality and barbarism. Thus, the United States of America is fast devolving to the equilibrium point of interventionism and “security” that humans have coddled for centuries. In doing so, citizen-subjects fail to realize the deadly outcome of centralized and unrestricted state power.

Those Christians who errantly view the modern state as God’s colleague, upholding part of His law, must face a double dilemma.¹⁰ First, the Bible indicates that the state is generally evil, having a satanic origin, and often serves God by bringing terrestrial judgment upon people. Second, it is very rare (if not impossible) to find historical examples of states that have ever come close to upholding God’s law in the world. Given that the earthly institutions of God designed to expand His kingdom must at least resemble His ways and serve His cause, the state—which is eminently wayward—cannot fall into this category.

Consequently, Christian leaders are leading people astray who promote the modern state, in America or elsewhere, as a companion of the church. On the contrary, they should warn Christians about the evil nature of the state, about the statist schemes of Satan, and tell them to be on their guard against the state—one of the church’s most lethal enemies in history. Lamentably, only a few Christian leaders have been dutiful to proclaim this sort of warning.

Christian leaders must also be about the business of proclaiming God’s way of caring for the poor and needy, for promoting peace, and for defending ourselves against the intrusions of the state. Regrettably, rather than being active agents in transforming their culture, ignorant Christian leaders have been willing to abandon it to the mischief and folly of statist.

¹⁰ I refer specifically to the adherents of the revitalized or reshaped divine right of kings perspective. Theonomists would never attribute such confidence to the modern state; even if they hope that one day it will become such an attendant of righteousness. Likewise, those pacifists who hold that the state is a competing kingdom against God’s kingdom would also cast a vote of no confidence in the modern state—for good reason. Regrettably, there are relatively few Christian leaders today who reject the divine right perspective. A discussion of these different perspectives may be found in my article “Christian Views on Rebellion.”