

Beauties of the Truth

A Forum for the Publication of Scriptural Viewpoints
Thought to be Harmonious with God's Plan of the Ages
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Five Special Occasions

Two Ages of Redemption (Leviticus 23)

“Speak unto the children of Israel ... concerning the feasts of Jehovah, which ye shall proclaim to be holy convocations, even these are my feasts” (Leviticus 23:1).

Leviticus chapter 23 provides a summary list of special occasions contained in the Law of Moses. Most of these are given in greater detail in other places, but in this chapter they are consolidated, in some respects in an abbreviated form. Appearing together in one place, this chapter allows a convenient, sequential listing of Israel's special occasions. This, in turn, allows us to compare the antitypical meaning of these occasions, and see a progression in the Divine Plan foreshadowed in them.

There are five special occasions opening the list in verses 3 through 23. The list begins with the Sabbath Day observance. The remaining four of the first five occasions all are observed in the spring of the year, and seem to apply to the Gospel Age, the first age of redemption in God's Plan.

These are followed by four more special occasions in Leviticus 23 that begin in the autumn of the year, which apply chiefly to the Kingdom, the second age of redemption in God's Plan. Later, in Leviticus 25, we have one more special occasion, the Jubilee Year, whose description consumes an entire chapter. This also pertains primarily to the Kingdom.

PARALLEL OCCASIONS

Thus we have two groups of five occasions. The first five pertain primarily to the Church and the Gospel Age, and the second five pertain primarily to the World and the Kingdom. There is an engaging parallel between these two series of special occasions (see box, top of next column).

This comparison seems intentional. These two series of Five Special Occasions give us symbolic connections to each of the two ages of redemption that are involved in God's plan of 7000 years. We next examine the specifics of these special occasions.

Spring — Gospel Age

- Sabbath — 7th day
- Passover — 10th day
- Unleavened — 15th day, 7 days
- Firstfruit — 8th day
- Pentecost — 50th day

Autumn — Kingdom

- Trumpets — 7th month
- Atonement — 10th day
- Tabernacles — 15th day, 7 days
- Following Tabernacles — 8th day
- Jubilee — 50th year

SPRING 1 — SABBATH REST

The Sabbath was established as law in the springtime of the year, even though it operated through every season. “Six days shall work be done: but the seventh day is the Sabbath of rest, an holy convocation; ye shall do no work therein: it is the Sabbath of Jehovah in all your dwellings” (Leviticus 23:4). Brethren often connect this day of rest to the Kingdom when mankind, after laboring under sin and death for six thousand-year days, will rest from that burden, and be restored to life. There is a good meaning here, and this is reflected in Ezekiel 46:1, where for six days the gates of access for mankind to God are closed, but opened wide on the Sabbath.

However, when the Apostle Paul considers the Sabbath of rest, he has a different time in mind. Paul applies the Sabbath to our rest by faith in Christ, during the Gospel Age. During this time Christians cease from the path of sin, represented by the number six, and rest in the finished work of Jesus Christ, the holy one, consistent with the number seven.

IN THIS ISSUE

- Five Special Occasions* 1
- Financial Report* 6
- 666, False Donation of Constantine* 7

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Paul speaks of our rest in Christ in Hebrews 3:17 through 4:11. In this passage Paul remembers that when Joshua brought Israel into the land of promise, Israel failed to secure lasting rest because Israel drifted into disobedience.

Paul noted that in Psalms 95:10, 11, God is recorded as saying, “Forty years long was I grieved with this generation, and said, It is a people that do err in their heart, and they have not known my ways: (11) Unto whom I swear in my wrath that they should not enter into my rest.”

Therefore, if Israel did not enter God's rest, then Paul reasons, “There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God,” and that “he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his” (Hebrews 4:9, 10). Writing to Hebrew brethren, Paul's point is that they could rest from the works of the Law. But Gentile believers also can rest in the redemptive work of Jesus, entering a blessed faith relationship with God. “We which have believed do enter into rest” (Hebrews 4:3).

Jesus offered rest to all who would accept the sweet message of Godliness that he brought. “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). From this text, in which Jesus offered rest to all who came to him, it seems that this rest in Christ was open from the time of Jesus' ministry forward.

SPRINGTIME 2 — PASSOVER

“In the fourteenth day of the first month at even is Jehovah's Passover” (Leviticus 23:6). This of course is prophetic of Jesus who died on Calvary's cross for our redemption. Consistent with the time of the Passover sacrifice, Jesus also died on day 14 of month one — long ago called Abib, but after the Babylonian captivity called Nisan. “Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us” (1 Corinthians 5:7). This is sequential, because Jesus offered rest to the weary ones during his ministry, and died as our ransom at the close of his ministry.

SPRINGTIME 3 — FEAST OF UNLEAVENED BREAD

“On the fifteenth day of the same month is the feast of unleavened bread unto Jehovah: seven days ye must eat unleavened bread. (7) In the first day ye shall have an holy convocation: ye shall do no servile work therein ... (8) In the seventh day is an holy convocation: ye shall do no servile work therein” (Leviticus 23:6-8).

These seven days are a picture of the Gospel Age, during which the saints remember the death of Jesus, and appreciate his sacrifice for sin. By that sacrifice we receive legal atonement. However, we still have sin within, and



Barley was the firstfruit offering.

this we desire to eliminate as much as possible. Eating unleavened bread during the seven days of this feast suggests our efforts to remove sin from us. “Let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth” (1 Corinthians 5:8).

The first day of this seven-day feast was special — and the first stage of the Gospel Age is special for the saints, for that is when the privilege of remembering what Christ has done for us, commenced. The seventh day was also a special day — and the seventh stage of the Gospel Age is special for the saints, for that is when they are gathered home. Those who died long ago were raised at the opening of the Harvest, and those who live into the

Harvest join them, one by one, as they complete their course here below.

SPRINGTIME 4 — FIRSTFRUITS OFFERING

“When ye be come into the land which I give unto you, and shall reap the harvest thereof, then ye shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest unto the priest: (11) And he shall wave the sheaf before Jehovah, to be accepted for you: on the morrow after the sabbath the priest shall wave it.”

When Jesus died as our Passover lamb, it was on a Friday, he was in the tomb on Saturday, and he was raised Sunday, “on the morrow after the sabbath.” Jesus was the first person ever raised from death to perfect, unending life. Jesus had raised others — Lazarus, Jairus' daughter, a grieving widow's son — but these were raised to the temporary life they had before. Thus Jesus was the “firstfruits” from the dead of all persons, as respects everlasting life. “Now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept” (1 Corinthians 15:20).

Leviticus 23 does not mention the kind of crop waved on this day, but it was barley. Deuteronomy 8:8 speaks of the fruits of the land of promise, “A land of wheat, and barley, and vines, and fig trees, and pomegranates; a land of oil olive, and honey.” Of the crops listed here, barley was the first ripe crop, and wheat was the second. Thus when we find barley listed in the scriptures, where symbolism may be involved, think of Jesus, and see whether that application may apply.

In feeding the five thousand, the first large feeding miracle that Jesus did, the five loaves that were increased to feed the multitude were barley, and represented Jesus, our bread of life (John 6:9). Gideon, who in some respects was a picture of Jesus, is represented in Judges 7:13 as “a cake of barley bread [that] tumbled into the host

of Midian.” So it is consistent that the resurrection of Jesus is represented by waving a sheaf of fresh barley in thanksgiving to God. Being an unbaked sheaf means that it did not contain leaven, as Jesus was presented sinless to God.

On the day of this firstfruits offering, Israel was also to “offer that day ... an he lamb without blemish of the first year for a burnt offering unto Jehovah” (Leviticus 23:12). This apparently was a remembrance of the lamb offered in death two days earlier, Jesus as our Ransom sacrifice for sin. When Jesus was raised on the third day, he had with him the value of the sacrifice he had rendered, to be used for redeeming the saints first, and later the world. The lamb “without blemish” again showed the perfection of Jesus.

SPRINGTIME 5 — PENTECOST

The word Pentecost is of Greek derivation, so it does not appear in the Old Testament. It means the 50th day, and appears in Acts 2:1, 20:16, and 1 Corinthians 16:8. In Acts 2:1 and forward it is famously the day when the saints received the holy Spirit, thus formally inaugurating the heavenly calling of the Gospel Age. The Old Testament law respecting Pentecost begins in Leviticus 23:15. “Ye shall count unto you from the morrow after the Sabbath, from the day that ye brought the sheaf of the wave offering; seven Sabbaths shall be complete: (16) Even unto the morrow after the seventh Sabbath shall ye number fifty days; and ye shall offer a new meat offering unto Jehovah.”

This count of 50 days began from the day of the firstfruits offering, which was fulfilled the day Jesus rose from the dead, Sunday, Nisan 16. That Sunday was day “one” of the 50. Thus subsequent Sabbaths fell on days 7, 14, 21, 28, 35, 42, and 49. Which means that Pentecost, day 50, fell on a Sunday.

That Jesus rose on a Sunday, first appeared to the disciples on a Sunday, appeared a week later on a Sunday, and Pentecost also fell on a Sunday, evidently disposed the Church to remember Sunday in a special way, leading to the custom of Christian worship on Sunday. This was also the first day of a new week, which is fitting. For the calling of saints during the Gospel Age is a new program in the Divine Plan, fitting to begin on day “one” of a new week.



The holy Spirit came to the Church at Pentecost.

In addition, 50 is the product of 5 x 10. Five is a number that pertains to the New Creation, for it is the sum of 2 (the holy Spirit) and 3 (redemption), the two factors represented in the water and blood from the side of Jesus after his death. Thus the five posts at the outset of the Holy are a good picture of the beginning of the Gospel Age calling of saints. Ten is an earthly number, and the Church class is drawn out of the world, developed by the holy Spirit of God, and the redemptive blood of Jesus.

On this day also there were to be two loaves waved before the Lord. “Ye shall bring out of your habitations two wave loaves of two tenth deals: they shall be of fine flour; they shall be baked with leaven; they are the firstfruits unto Jehovah” (Leviticus 23:17). It seems counter intuitive that these loaves would be baked with leaven, for leaven is customarily recognized as a symbol of sin.

However, it is true that the saints do have sin within, as children of Adam. They are atoned for, thus not under condemnation with the world. But nevertheless, sin is present. We resist sin and seek to put it out from us. However, “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1:8). This presence of leaven helps to identify the loaves as representing those presented as entering the race of the high calling. That there were two loaves, perhaps represents that those called are from two groups — Jews and Gentiles.¹

Jesus was the firstfruits from the dead. But the saints are the firstfruits from among mankind to receive redemption, and begin walking in a unique calling. “Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures” (James 1:18).

The crop presented in this case also, is not specified in Leviticus 23. But it was wheat. Exodus 34:22 says, “Thou shalt observe the feast of weeks, of the firstfruits of wheat harvest.” That this offering represents the church is consistent with the parable of the wheat and tares, where the wheat are saints developed through the Gospel Age.

A SECOND SET OF SPECIAL OCCASIONS

Pentecost was the last of the spring observances. Leviticus 23:23 then moves forward to the autumn of the year, and begins to summarize four special occasions that began in the autumn. A fifth special occasion, also beginning in the autumn, the Jubilees of Israel, is given in Leviticus 25. We begin our count again with these autumn occasions.

AUTUMN 1 — BLOWING OF TRUMPETS

“In the seventh month, in the first day of the month, shall ye have a Sabbath, a memorial of blowing of trumpets, an holy convocation.” It was the practice in Israel to announce the opening of a new lunar month by blowing two silver trumpets. These trumpets are described in Numbers 10:2, and their use is described in the following

verses. They were used to call an assembly of Israelites to the tabernacle (verse 3). If only one trumpet was blown, it would draw the princes and heads of Israel. If both trumpets were used, then it was for calling a general assembly of Israel (verse 4).

These trumpets were also used when it was time for Israel to move on their journey. When they were first blown, Israelites on the east would move forward, and when blown a second time, Israelites on the west would move forward (verses 5, 6). For a gathering, rather than for travelling, “ye shall blow, but ye shall not sound an alarm” (verse 7).²

These trumpets were to be blown by priests (verse 8). If used as an alarm for warfare against an enemy of Israel, “then ye shall blow an alarm with the trumpets” and God would provide a victory (verse 9).

Verse 10 says that these two silver trumpets were also used to announce solemn days of special meaning, and to introduce new months. “In the beginnings of your months, ye shall blow with the trumpets over your burnt offerings, and over the sacrifices of your peace offerings; that they may be to you for a memorial before your God” (Numbers 10:10). Psalms 81:3 seems to also reflect this. “Blow up the trumpet in the new moon, in the time appointed, on our solemn feast day.”

However, the seventh month's introduction was special. The seventh month of the Jewish year is today called Tishri. On Jewish calendars this is the beginning of a new year, Rosh Hashanah, as it was for Israel during most of their ancient history, beginning some time after they settled in the land of promise. This seems odd, for month “one” is Nisan, in the spring, but month “seven” is Tishri, and also marks the opening of a new year.

In this way, there were two different year beginnings. Symbolically, in the divine plan, these represent the beginning of two distinct ages of redemption — the Gospel Age (spring) and the Kingdom (autumn).

The seven trumpet introductions from Nisan to Tishri, inclusive, reminds us that Revelation chapters 8-11 also presents a series of seven trumpets. Those seven trumpets represent God's judgments through the seven time periods of the Gospel Age. In this respect, the opening of the Seventh Trumpet period is a time of special celebration. For it means not only the gathering of the Lord's saints to glory, but a work of transition from the kingdom of this world, to the Kingdom of Christ.

The seventh trumpet period in Revelation is described in Revelation 11:15-19. In verse 18, it is a time to “give reward unto thy servants the prophets, and to the saints.” These terms are used elsewhere in Revelation to describe the Lord's people of the Gospel Age. For example, in Revelation 18:24, in great Babylon “was found the blood of prophets, and of saints.” These New Testament prophets are those who spoke for God, representing the Gospel and its principles of godliness through the age. The term



Two silver trumpets announced the new months.

“saints” refers to the church as the holy ones of God through the age.

This seventh trumpet period also introduces a new kingly authority, which through the harvest displaces old rulerships, and introduces the kingdom of Christ. Thus in verse 15 the announcement opening the harvest says, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ” (NASB). The closing verse describing the seventh trumpet period takes us to the close of harvest and its judgments. “There were lightnings, and voices, and thunders, and an earthquake, and great hail” (Revelation 11:19).

Thus the seventh trumpet period in Revelation, and the special celebration of the seventh month in Leviticus 23, pictures a time of transition. During this transition the saints are gathered to glory, and present kingdoms are brought low. In both respects, this is a time of preparation for the establishment of the Kingdom on earth.

AUTUMN 2 — DAY OF ATONEMENT

“On the tenth day of this seventh month there shall be a day of atonement: it shall be an holy convocation unto you; and he shall afflict your souls, and offer an offering made by fire unto Jehovah. (28) And ye shall do no work in that same day: for it is a day of atonement, to make an atonement for you before Jehovah your God” (Leviticus 23:27).

The Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur, is the holiest day of the Jewish calendar. It is true that the offerings of this day go back to the time of Jesus, when our Lord began his sacrificial service at Jordan. The first ones atoned for on the Day of Atonement were the priests, representing the saints atoned for during the Gospel Age. However, these points were preliminary and preparatory for the real purpose of the day — namely, the atonement of all Israel. In this sense, this very special day represents the time of the Kingdom when mankind in general will receive the blessing of atonement.

Notice that this day was chosen for giving the prophet Ezekiel his vision of the Kingdom, when mankind will approach to God. That vision covers the last nine chapters of Ezekiel, and begins with Ezekiel 40:1. “In the five and twentieth year of our captivity, in the beginning of the

year [month seven, Tishri], in the tenth day of the month, in the fourteenth year after that the city was smitten, in the selfsame day the hand of Jehovah was upon me, and brought me thither.” What an appropriate date for receiving this vision of Christ's kingdom: the 10th day of month seven, the Day of Atonement.

AUTUMN 3 — FEAST OF TABERNACLES

“The fifteenth day of this seventh month shall be the feast of tabernacles for seven days unto Jehovah” (Leviticus 23:34). This feast of seven days in the autumn parallels the seven-day feast of unleavened bread in the spring. But in this case, in the seventh month, it is symbolic of the Kingdom, rather than the Gospel Age.

This is apparent from the mention of this feast in Zechariah 14:16. “Every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, Jehovah of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles.” The context of Zechariah 14 is clear. “In that day living waters shall go out from Jerusalem ... Jehovah shall be king over all the earth” (verses 8, 9).

This week of celebration was termed the feast of “tabernacles” because during this time the Israelites were to construct temporary dwellings, and live in them for the seven days. “Ye shall dwell in booths seven days; all that are Israelites born shall dwell in booths: (43) That your generations may know that I made the children of Israel to dwell in booths, when I brought them out of the land of Egypt” (Leviticus 23:42, 43). In this respect it was a time of remembering how God cared for them during their 40 years in the wilderness. Those 40 years are a picture of the Gospel Age, and God's leading of spiritual Israel, the Church. When it comes time for the Kingdom, mankind will then appreciate God's care for the Church during a challenging period, preparing the saints to be the leaders from above, for mankind here below.

This “Feast of Tabernacles” was also called the “Feast of Ingathering” in Exodus 23:16, “And the feast of ingathering, which is in the end of the year, when thou hast gathered in thy labours out of the field.” Deuteronomy 16:13 specifies two of the crops for which special thanks was given during this feast, namely “after that thou hast gathered in thy corn and thy wine.” Deuteronomy 11:14 adds a third, oil, “gather in thy corn, and thy wine, and thine oil.” When the church has been completed, the wine of redemption will be made available for mankind, and the oil of the holy Spirit will have completed the work of sanctifying the saints, then the Kingdom will be ready to bless mankind.



The Jubilee was announced by a ram's horn on the 10th of Tishri, in year 50.

As with the earlier feast of unleavened bread, day one of the feast of tabernacles was also a special day. As this was a feast of remembrance, celebrating the completion of the seven periods of the Gospel Age, as a preparation for the Kingdom, perhaps the special observance of day one is to remember the time when the ransom price was provided by Jesus, to be used later for blessing mankind.

AUTUMN 4 — THE EIGHTH DAY

Unlike the seven-day feast of the spring, the special day closing this feast was not on day seven, but on day eight. “On the eighth day shall be an holy convocation unto you ... it is a solemn assembly, and ye shall do no servile work therein” (Leviticus 23:36). If the seven days were a remembrance of the Gospel Age of seven periods, then Day Eight takes us into the Kingdom proper. That will be the special day of mankind's celebration.³

Micah 5:5 is a text frequently applied to the introduction of the kingdom, when Israel is saved from their last enemies by divine intervention. In this case God intervenes by raising against the enemy “seven shepherds, and eight principal men.” Following this, “the remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many people as a dew from Jehovah, as the showers upon the grass” (Micah 5:7).

The term shepherds in this text is an idiom that means seven kings. As a shepherd rules his flock, so a king rules his people. The seven kings that intervene for Israel represent the Church class from above, complete after seven periods of the Gospel Age. The eight “princes” (margin) remind us of the Ancient Worthies, who will be “princes in all the earth” (Psalms 45:16). Notice the number eight assigned to them in symbol. The Ancient Worthies are raised after the seven stages of the church are complete. The period thus introduced would be period “eight.” In this way, day “eight” of Leviticus 23:36 connects symbolically with the Kingdom.

AUTUMN 5 — JUBILEE

In the five special occasions of the spring, the last one was Pentecost, day fifty. In the five special occasions of the autumn, the last one is Jubilee, year fifty. However, the law of Jubilee is lengthy with many specifics, taking its own chapter, Leviticus 25.

The year of Jubilee was introduced by a Jubilee Trump sounded on year fifty on “the tenth day of the seventh month, in the day of atonement” (Leviticus 25:9). As the atonement day is primarily connected to the Kingdom, so the Jubilee year is primarily connected to the Kingdom. This was when Israelites who had lost their land had it restored free of cost. This is a picture of mankind,

having lost the privilege of everlasting life on earth, being restored to that privilege in the Kingdom.

When Jesus was born, Herod commanded to slay “all the children that were in Bethlehem” and nearby areas, from two years old and under (Matthew 2:16). Matthew cites a portion of Jeremiah that was prophetic of this. “Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying ... (18) Rachel weeping for her children ... because they are not” (Matthew 2:17, 18).

However, when we turn to the passage quoted from Jeremiah, the subject is a little different. The passage is in Jeremiah 31:15-17. But the context is about the captivity of Israel, removed from the land, taken into Babylon. Verses 16 and 17 gives hope for a later restoration. “They shall come again from the land of the enemy ... (17) thy children shall come again to their own border.”

In other words, the loss by Israel of the land of promise in Jeremiah 31, is applied to the loss of life by the innocents in Matthew 2. Land in one case connects with life in the other. This is compatible with the Jubilee picture, where a restoration of land in the type, connects with a restoration of life in the antitype.

Land and life are connected also in Jeremiah 32:6-15. Here Jeremiah was told by God to purchase a field, and preserve the deed for that parcel, as a testimony to Israel that God would bring Israel back to their land at a later time. The price of the land was “seventeen shekels of silver,” given in the margin as “seven shekels and ten pieces of silver” (Jeremiah 32:9). The seven reminds us of the perfect one, Jesus, and ten is a symbol of earthly things.

This is a symbolic reference to Jesus' life given for mankind, to ensure a restoration to life. But in the time of Jeremiah, the 17 shekels were to represent God's assurance that Israel would return to their land. Again in this case, as in the Jubilee picture, restoration to land pictures restoration to life.

THE WORLD MAINLY — BUT ALSO THE CHURCH

Recall that on the Day of Atonement, though it referred chiefly to atonement for the entire nation, representing all mankind, the first offering on that day pertained to the priests. In other words, the Church is also referred to in that type, though the main point of the picture is about blessing mankind. So in the Jubilee picture also. The main point of the picture is about restoring mankind. But there is a smaller portion that also refers to the church. This smaller part has to do with the Levites.

The Levites did not have large parcels of land distributed to their families, but they did have houses in the various cities apportioned to the Levites. Thus the Levites did not have land restored to them in the Jubilee year — but they did have homes restored. If they had lost or sold their



Land is a symbol of life.

homes in previous years, they would be restored in the year of Jubilee. “If a man purchase of the Levites, then the house that was sold, and the city of his possession, shall go out in the year of jubilee: for the houses of the cities of the Levites are their possession among the children of Israel” (Leviticus 25:33).

The “house” of those called to a heavenly inheritance is not here on earth, but in heaven above. Paul refers to this in 2 Corinthians 5:1-2. “If our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. (2) For in this we grown, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with your house which is from heaven.” The Levites securing their destined home during the Jubilee seems to be a picture of the heavenly classes securing their heavenly home in the resurrection.

The saints secure their resurrection glory beginning with the harvest. In this sense the Jubilee does pertain to the present Harvest period. However, the world receives back their lost inheritance in the Kingdom. In this sense the Jubilee is mainly about the restoration of mankind in the Kingdom.

Thus these two series of Five Special Occasions give us symbolic connections to each of the two ages of redemption that are involved in God's plan of 7000 years.

— *Br. David Rice*

(1) An editor adds — Another common view is that it may indicate the two groups justified during the Gospel Age, the Church and Great Company.

(2) An editor adds — Unlike the solid blast used when signaling a move, an alarm was likely a broken or quivering sound.

(3) An editor adds — Another possible application to the 8th day may be that as a new beginning it represents the time after the millennium has completed its work. As stated above, its connection to the Feast of Tabernacles recalls Israel's 40 years of wandering in the wilderness. However, the seven day feast may also represent a remembrance of the 7000 years of mankind's own wilderness experience from sin to human perfection at the end of the millennium. This memory will be vital as the world grows and develops. The sequence of the feast is significant. As the 8th day completed Israel's annual observances, so the close of the millennium will see the end of the atonement work and a new beginning for a perfected race in the ages to come (Br. Tom Ruggirello).

Financial Report

26,041.72	Balance January 1, 2023
532.16	Donations
-2,637.27	Expenses
23,936.61	Balance January 1, 2024
573	Subscribers, Email subscribers 344

666, the False Donation of Constantine, and the Renaissance

“Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number is 666” (Revelation 13:18).

Pastor Charles T. Russell, Question Book (1911), page 37. “What about the number of the beast, 666?”

ANSWER. — “There are various interpretations given to this. I am not specially prepared to say all about my view of the matter, except that I believe it would represent the title of papacy. There are three Latin words inscribed on the Pope’s crown, *Vicarius Filii Dei*, the Vicarious Son of God. This title attached to the Pope would seem to be an illegitimate one. He is not the vicarious Son of God; he is not the vicar of Christ; he is not reigning instead of Christ; and therefore every intimation to the effect that he is the substitute or representative of Christ in reigning power would seem to be that much of a blasphemy. Not that the Pope and the Catholics understand that they are blaspheming. I presume they feel fully confident that this is all very true of him. But to our understanding it is untrue, and he is in a false position, and is really anti-Christ, or the counterfeit Christ, as the Bible would express the matter.”

THE LATIN PAPAL TITLE VICARIUS FELII DEI

The origins of this Latin title for the Pope, *Vicarius Filii Dei*, which translates to the “Vicarious (or Substitute) Son of God” may be traced to the fabricated document called the Donation of Constantine. Historians have declared this document, “the most famous forgery in European history” (Coleman).

Continuing to quote from Coleman; “The Donation of Constantine, written ... in the Pseudo-Isidorian Decretals (about 847-853). Parts of it were included in most of the medieval collections of canon law; Anselm’s, Deusdedit’s, and Gratian’s great work (the *Decretum*, or *Concordia discordantium canonum*). It purports to reproduce a legal document in which the Emperor Constantine the Great, reciting his baptism and the cure of his leprosy at the hands of Sylvester, Bishop of Rome 314-336, confirmed the privilege of that pontiff as head of all the clergy and supreme over the other four patriarchates; conferred upon him extensive imperial property in various parts of the world, especially the imperial Lateran palace, and the imperial diadem and tiara, and other imperial insignia; granted the Roman clergy the rank of the highest Roman orders and their privileges; gave Sylvester and his successors freedom in consecrating men for certain orders of the clergy; it tells how he, Constantine, recognized the superior dignity of the Pope by holding the bridle of his horse; grants Sylvester Rome, all of Italy, and the western

provinces, to remain forever under the control of the Roman See; and states his own determination to retire to Byzantium in order that the presence of an earthly emperor may not embarrass ecclesiastical authority. *This remarkable document was almost universally accepted as genuine from the ninth to the fifteenth century.*”

Finally, even Catholic scholarship from the early 20th century admitted to the fabrication (U.B., *Catholic Historical Review*).

THE FALSE DECRETAL

Recognizing that few of our readership have fluency in Latin, the opening lines of the decretal in Latin appear in the References (Coleman). The English translation is:

“THE Emperor Constantine the fourth day after his baptism conferred this privilege on the Pontiff of the Roman church, that in the whole Roman world priests should regard him as their head, as judges do the king. In this privilege, among other things, is this: “We — together with all our satraps, and the whole senate and my nobles, and also all the people subject to the government of glorious Rome — considered it advisable, that as the Blessed Peter is seen to have been constituted **vicar of the Son of God** on the earth, so the Pontiffs who are the representatives of that same chief of the apostles, should obtain from us and our empire the power of a supremacy greater than the clemency of our earthly imperial serenity is seen to have conceded to it, choosing that same chief of the apostles and his vicars to be our constant intercessors with God.”

Such is the inflated language of delusion. The most significant and comprehensive passage of the entire document reads as follows (Camporeale):

“In order that the supreme pontificate may not deteriorate, but may rather be adorned with glory and power even greater than the dignity of earthly rule, behold, we give over and relinquish to the aforesaid our most blessed Pontiff, Sylvester, the universal Pope, our palace, as has been said, and also the city of Rome, and all the provinces,



Emperor Constantine kneels before Pope Sylvester and presents him with his crown.

places and cities of Italy and the western regions, and we decree by this our godlike and pragmatic sanction that they are to be controlled by him and by his successors, and we grant that they shall remain under the law of the Holy Roman Church.”

THE FALSE DECRETAL AND THE RENAISSANCE

In the 15th century, the Papacy and the Spanish king Alfonso of Aragon contested the rule of the Kingdom of Naples. Such political bickering was not at all unusual. What was unusual was that Alfonso tasked Lorenzo Valla, a scholar of high ability, to examine the claims of the *Donation of Constantine*. Valla did not disappoint Alfonso.

In 1440 Valla authored a document that examined the *Donation* line by line and word by word, declaring all of it false. Writing to the Cardinal and defending himself against the certain fatal charge of heresy:

“Why did I write about the Donation of Constantine? ... Bear one thing in mind. I was not moved by hatred of the Pope, but acted for the sake of the truth, of religion, and also of a certain renown-to show that I alone knew what no one else knew” (Valla to Cardinal Trevisan, 1443, Camporeale).

The shock to the scholarly community from Lorenzo Valla’s work, the *Oration on the Falsely-Believed and Forged Donation of Constantine*, is believed to be an event of great importance that awoke Europe from its one-thousand year sleep and launched the *Renaissance*, or *Rebirth*.

666

By itself, it is clear that the imperfect number “6” is repeated three times in 666. The Greek word for “Six” is “Hex” which when used in English retains the sense of “cursed.” In this case, a full “threefold” curse!

Gematria, or summing up the numerical value of the letters in a word, was well established both among Jews and other peoples of the world at the time John wrote Revelation. One incontrovertible example of gematria in the New Testament is found in the opening of the Gospel of Matthew 1:17 (written originally in the Aramaic language of Jesus and the Apostles). Here a full “threefold” blessing of “14” is referenced. Any Jew would have recognized “14” as the number of David: $\gamma\iota\delta = 4 + 6 + 4 = 14!$

Hence, the full “threefold” curse clearly is significant, but there appears to be a more direct application. Since Revelation was originally authored in Greek, searches for titles that summed to 666 went on in earnest from early in the Gospel Age. Many solu-

tions were proposed. For example, the early Christian author Irenaeus’ solution in Greek (ca. AD 180) noted that the original spelling of the name for Rome was Lateinos (Λατεινος) — letter numbers 30, 1, 300, 5, 10, 50, 70, 200 — which sum to 666 (Randolph Elwood Streeter, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, Volume 2, PBI, 1924, page 143).

Why should *Vicarius Filii Dei* be considered the answer to Revelation 13:18, when many proposed titles in both Latin and Greek have a numerical value of 666?

There are two answers. The *Donation of Constantine* giving the Pope the title *Vicarius Filii Dei* had great power for six centuries during the height of Papal power (~840-1440 AD). As noted, “This remarkable document was almost universally accepted as genuine from the ninth to the fifteenth century.”

Secondly, Lorenzo Valla, discrediting the *Donation*, changed the course of Western Civilization and ushered in the Renaissance, an unbridled exuberance to expand the intellect and develop the arts. It seems not to be coincidence that this date 1440 AD happens to be the common date given for the invention of the printing press which made it possible to disseminate information widely at an unprecedented low cost. It would seem that this year 1440 AD saw two enormous factors that began the weakening of papacy!

Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man.

— Br. Richard Doctor

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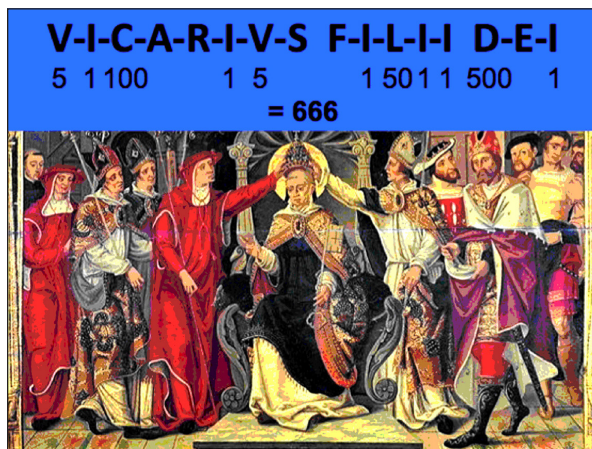
Coleman, Christopher B., *Discourse on the Forgery of the Alleged Donation of Constantine* by Lorenzo Valla, New Haven, Connecticut, Yale University Press (1922). Latin decretal text from Gratian:

CONSTANTINUS imperator quarta die sui baptismi privilegium Romanae ecclesiae Pontifici contulit, ut in toto orbe Romano sacerdotes ita hunc caput habeant, sicut iudices regem. In eo privilegio ita inter cetera legitur: “Utile iudicavimus una cum omnibus satrapis nostris, et universo senatu optimatibusque meis, etiam et cuncto populo Romanae gloriae imperio subiacenti, ut sicut B. Petrus in terris **Vicarius Filii Dei** esse videtur constitutus, ita et Pontifices, qui ipsius principis apostolorum gerunt vices, principatus potestatem amplius quam terrena imperialis nostrae serenitatis mansuetudo habere videtur, concessam a nobis nostroque imperio obtineant, eligentes nobis ipsum principem apostolorum vel eius vicarios firmos apud Deum esse patronos.

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How *Vicarius Filii Dei*, in Roman numerals, adds up to 666.