

The Origins of Human Government & Hierarchy

by Frank Viola

This article is a supplement to my book [Insurgence: Reclaiming the Gospel of the Kingdom](#). Therefore, it's important that you first read the book to fully comprehend this essay. The essay assumes the reader is familiar with points already established in *Insurgence*.

If you read this article on its own, many questions will arise from it. Some of those questions are answered in the footnotes below. Others are found in the book, *Insurgence*.

So where did human government come from? And as a related matter, where did human hierarchy originate?

The answer to both questions may surprise you.

Misapplied Texts

Some Christians believe that God instituted human government, and they point to two “proof texts” to defend this idea. The first is Genesis 9. Specifically, this passage:

And for your lifeblood I will surely demand an accounting. I will demand an accounting from every animal. And from each human being, too, I will demand an accounting for the life of another human being.

“Whoever sheds human blood,
by humans shall their blood be shed;
for in the image of God
has God made mankind.” (Genesis 9:5-6 NIV)

There's a problem, however. There's not one word about “government” in this passage. Instead, the text is invoking a God-given rule for humanity. And there's no specific entity mentioned that's supposed to enforce it.

Genesis 9, therefore, cannot be used as a basis for human government, a political system, a natural law code, or a blueprint for the state.¹

¹ John Nugent points out that Genesis 9 is God's attempt to limit violence among fallen humans. The law is a restraint upon human bloodshed by limiting retaliation to one life for one life. John Nugent, *Polis Bible Commentary*, Vol. 1, *Genesis 1–11* (Skyforest, CA: Urban Loft Publishing, forthcoming), Genesis 9:1-7.

The other “proof text” is in Romans 13.

Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted. (Romans 13:1-2 NIV)

In *Insurgence*, I quote John Howard Yoder’s interpretation of Romans 13:1-5, which is at odds with the way that many Christians interpret the text today. (The traditional view is that God created human government and approves it.)

Yoder makes clear that the words in Romans 13:1-2 that are translated “established” and “instituted” in the NIV do not mean that God creates or ordains “the powers that be.” Instead, God *orders* and *arranges* them.²

According to Yoder,

The text does not affirm, as tradition has it, a divine act of institution or ordination of a particular government.³

Just because God orders and arranges the governing powers doesn’t suggest that they always carry out His desires. But just like He did with Herod and Pilate – the men responsible for crucifying Jesus – God providentially shapes and uses the governing powers to reach His ultimate ends.

Context is also important here. In Romans 12, Paul cautions the Christians in Rome against taking vengeance into their own hands, which includes revolutionary violence against the state. And that’s where Romans 13 begins.

² *Tassō* in verse 1 means “arranges” and so does *diatagē* in verse 2 (John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994], 201-202). Ernst Käsemann argued that the term used in Romans 13:2 deals only with the sovereign action of God by which He makes arrangements in creation (Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980], 356). In his commentary on Romans, Karl Barth held to this interpretation also, suggesting that the powers that be have no overtones of recognizing their legitimacy or being worthy of our allegiance. Yoder added this additional insight: “The medieval and the classic Protestant idea of government as being specifically instituted by an act of the divine will always assumes that if it were not for this creative act ‘anarchy’ would reign. But in real history there is no such thing as anarchy. Where one power does not rule, another does” (*The Politics of Jesus*, 202). It should also be noted that the language in Romans 13:4 about the governing authorities being “God’s servant” doesn’t mean that they love and obey God consciously. It just means they are agents of God’s use. God used the bloodthirsty Assyrians to accomplish His will, and they are called God’s “warriors” for that reason (Isaiah 10:5-7, 12-13; 13:3-5). In the same way, Scripture calls the pagan king Cyrus God’s “anointed” (Isaiah 45:1, 4, 13).

³ *The Politics of Jesus*, 199.

According to Romans 13:2, nothing in the present world can be given any power unless God allows it. If God is all powerful, this stands to reason. Even Satan's actions are permitted by God, but God clearly doesn't endorse them (see Job chapters 1 and 2).

Government Defined

In this essay, I'm defining "government" as the governing institution of a nation-state.

According to Scripture, the nation-state began with the scattering at Babel. As I pointed out in *Insurgence*, the first use of the term "kingdom" in the Bible occurs in the city of Babel in Genesis 10:10.⁴

Speaking of the enterprise at Babel, one scholar rightly said, "Here the whole city-building tower-erecting project is one that God condemns."⁵

Essentially, the people of Babel desired to create a centralized government, a concept that ran contrary to God's will.⁶

Of course, those who build empires rarely perceive themselves to be wicked. They often begin with good motives, the chief one being to promise humans a better life. This is why Jesus said the rulers of the Gentiles were seen as "benefactors" (Luke 22:25).

But what we have at Babel is the beginning of the nation-state, the origin of the kingdoms of this world. Put another way, at Babel we have fallen man's endeavor to centralize domination and

⁴ Interestingly, the first mention of the term "king" is found in Genesis 14:1. The city of Babel represents the beginning of high civilization. The tower was merely one feature of the city of Babel, which is also known as Babylon later in the Bible. The Babel account anticipates Egypt and its slavery of the people of God. (The terms "come let us" along with building with bricks are found in both accounts – Exodus 1:10, 14 with Genesis 11:3-4.) The negative account of the city sketched out in Genesis 4 is simply the institutionalization of fallen man's estrangement from God.

⁵ Victor P. Hamilton, *Genesis*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 238. On page 239 of the same work, Hamilton adds, "Genesis is making the point that through the (disobedient) line of Cain many of the world's significant cultural discoveries emerged." As I pointed out in *Insurgence*, cities were places of concentrated human power where people sought to make a name for themselves. While promising to unite and protect, they ended up being locations of exploitation, control, and alienation. The city was never God's original idea. The fundamental essentials of the city: industry, weapons, and entertainment – representing security, protection, and enjoyment independent from God – came with the fall.

⁶ Alva McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom* (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1959), 47-48. In *Insurgence*, I establish how God views the origin of the "city." Babel simply continues the trajectory that began in Genesis 4 with the city called Enoch. See Jacques Ellul, *The Meaning of the City* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011) and Frank Viola, *From Eternity to Here* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2009), part 2. The whole sweep of Scripture shows that the cities of fallen man depict self-alienation from God. Even so, God uses the city for redemptive purposes. The city is the alternative environment of false security, drawing people into its promise of enjoyment, provision, and protection.

organize power. And God's response is to diminish this power by dispersing the people and creating multiple nations.

Israel's Desire for Human Government

So the nation-state (human government) began in the ungodly city of Babel, and God condemned the whole enterprise.

But what happened when Israel, God's own people, wanted to create a government like all the other nations?⁷

The story is told in 1 Samuel 8.

So all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah. They said to him, "You are old, and your sons do not follow your ways; now appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have."

But when they said, "Give us a king to lead us," this displeased Samuel; so he prayed to the Lord. And the Lord told him: "Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king. As they have done from the day I brought them up out of Egypt until this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so they are doing to you. Now listen to them; but warn them solemnly and let them know what the king who will reign over them will claim as his rights."

Samuel told all the words of the Lord to the people who were asking him for a king. He said, "This is what the king who will reign over you will claim as his rights: He will take your sons and make them serve with his chariots and horses, and they will run in front of his chariots. Some he will assign to be commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and others to plow his ground and reap his harvest, and still others to make weapons of war and equipment for his chariots. He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive groves and give them to his attendants. He will take a tenth of your grain and of your vintage and give it to his officials and attendants. Your male and female servants and the best of your cattle and donkeys he will take for his own use. He will take a tenth of your flocks, and you yourselves will become his slaves. When that day comes, you will cry out for relief from the king you have chosen, but the Lord will not answer you in that day."

But the people refused to listen to Samuel. "No!" they said. "We want a king over us. Then we will be like all the other nations, with a king to lead us and to go out before us and fight our battles."

⁷ See 1 Samuel 8:20. Before the monarchy was established in Israel, God's people were guided by decentralized leadership, namely, "a plurality of offices, including judges, elders, priests, and prophets. Yet none of these leaders united all aspects of Israel's social constitution under a single human office. Each leader was accountable partly to the wider community (Deut 17:2-7 notes the importance of witnesses) and ultimately to God." John C. Nugent, *The Politics of Yahweh* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books), 49-50.

When Samuel heard all that the people said, he repeated it before the Lord. The Lord answered, "Listen to them and give them a king." (1 Samuel 8:4-22 NIV)

God created Israel to be a tribal people, not a nation-state ruled by authoritative structures.⁸

Yet even though it wasn't God's will for Israel to have a king like the pagan nations, and even though a human king would lead to Israel's downfall, God granted them their request. But He warned the people what would happen if they took this step (1 Samuel 8:11-18).

Israel persisted, and God conceded.

The Lord, then, worked within Israel's governmental system to accomplish His sovereign intentions, even though it was never His perfect will.

(Previous to Israel's kingship, God established elders and judges to settle disputes. But those people weren't political leaders who wielded political or governmental power over the people. God was Israel's sole King; He alone had authority over His people.)⁹

John Nugent identifies God's original thought for Israel saying,

When Abraham leaves Babylon and the Israelites leave Egypt, they are not simply moving to new places; they are moving away from corrupt empires whose totalizing vision of life stands in fundamental conflict with the totalizing vision God has for his people. The fundamental attribute God requires of Abraham and the Israelites is trust in him alone. The way of life to which God was calling his people and that they began experiencing on their journey to Canaan was graciously set forth in Torah. The governing dynamic of Torah is God's exclusive reign over his people. Two corollaries followed: trust in God alone for safety and deliverance (as opposed to trusting in military might or strategic alliances) and flexible decentralized leadership (as opposed to a king who subsumes all offices under a single human head).¹⁰

Significantly, God regarded Israel's desire for a king to be an outright rejection of His own authority and proof that His people did not trust Him.

⁸ Even though the tribes all shared the same language, the same culture, and the same religion, they did not have an overarching political authority – except for YHWH and "judges" whom YHWH would appoint when a need for coordinated military action arose.

⁹ When all the tribes needed to join together to defend Israel against an enemy, God would appoint a *shophet* ("judge"). These military/political leaders only had authority for a limited time and did not create dynasties or centralized bureaucracies such as the "other nations" did. Incidentally, the idea that human government began with Moses isn't true. Before the kingship of Israel, which God disapproved, Israel settled by clans and tribes. They didn't operate under a single human leader nor did they have a top-down authority structure.

¹⁰ *The Politics of Yahweh*, 108. Israel's egalitarian pre-monarchical tribal system was a deliberate witness against the monarchical, imperial powers of Egypt, Babylon, Assyria, etc.

The Truth About Human Governments

God's view of human governments hasn't changed since the days of Samuel. Ever since fallen humans rejected the Lord's kingship, they have insisted on having human governments to rule over them.¹¹

Despite their arrogance, God uses human governments and laws to keep basic order. And He does so even without their conscious awareness.¹² This is made clear from Romans 13. But again, what God *allows* isn't the equivalent of what He *approves*.¹³

While human governing institutions can limit human chaos, they are incapable of producing global peace and harmony (which they virtually always promise).

The reason is simple. All human governments are under the influence of "the god of this world" and are therefore inherently corrupt. They are part of the world system, which John says is under the control of the evil one (1 John 5:19 NIV).

Yet despite this fact, God is sovereign. He not only uses fallen human institutions to do good, but He also takes the corrupt and evil things they carry out and brings blessing out of them.

This principle is best revealed in the crucifixion of Jesus. At the cross, God withdrew His protection to forces that were bent on His destruction (Isaiah 51:13). Those forces conspired together to kill the Lord of glory, but God brought good out of the horrible ordeal.

¹¹ The establishment of the monarchy in Israel shows from the beginning that even the government led by people directly chosen by God ends up abandoning God's ways and negatively impacting God's people. Saul, David, Solomon, and all the rest are corrupt and abuse their power. Some of them also had good qualities and accomplished a great deal for God's people, but all were tainted by the great power that was put into their hands. The power of the king was always meant to be God's alone. Jacques Ellul was correct when he wrote, "Prior to these events [1 Samuel 8], Israel was a people without political organization, 'governed directly by God' ... political authority rests on defiance; it is a rejection of God ... There is no validation of political power whatsoever in the Old Testament. On the contrary, it is forever contested" (Jacques Ellul, "Anarchism and Christianity," KATALLAGETE, 19).

¹² Human governors often have no idea that they are actually accomplishing God's desires (Isaiah 10). While they think they are building their own kingdoms and gratifying their own cravings for power, the Lord often brings order to society through their instrumentality.

¹³ All authority comes from God even when it's illegitimate, meaning, God arranges and uses it. That includes the spiritual forces (principalities and powers) that stand behind the visible rulers of the earth. Because Christ has reconciled all things in heaven and earth to Himself (Colossians 1:20), He arranges earthly and cosmic powers to eventually bring about His will. Through the cross, God in Christ reconciled the world to Himself. There can now be peace between humans and God, and humans and humans. But the world is not aware of this until the gospel is preached. And people can accept or reject the message. As John Howard Yoder once put it, "Fallen powers could be God's servants for our good (Romans 13:4). By maintaining the peace they facilitate humanity's coming to the knowledge of the truth" (John Howard Yoder, *Revolutionary Christian Citizenship* [Harrisonburg, VA: Herald Press, 2013], 78). In this same volume, Yoder presents the New Testament view of the state (126-129).

Consider the language of divine withdrawal in the New Testament. God *gave Him up* (Romans 8:32) and *delivered Him over* to death (Romans 4:25). In like manner, the Gospels tell us that Jesus was “handed over” to His enemies.¹⁴

God is a master at giving evil forces freedom and accomplishing His perfect will through their wickedness and disorder. He does this through redemptive protective withdrawal.

Christ and Culture

This brings us to the matter of culture. Culture is a term that describes the social life of human beings. The culture of the world system includes language, habits, beliefs, customs, social organization, art, technology, and values.

John, the apostle, highlights the key characteristics of the world system:

For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. (1 John 2:16 NASB)

Notice the three elements listed in this text.

- The lust of the flesh – that’s passion or sex.
- The lust of the eyes – that’s possessions or salary.
- The boastful pride of life – that’s position or status.

John is speaking about money, sex, and power – outside of God and His ways.

But the culture of the world system is not the only culture in existence. There is also the culture of God’s kingdom, which I and others call “the culture of heaven.”

When it comes to the culture of this world, Jesus Christ stands *against* culture. Why? Because its goods, goals, and gods are completely at odds with the Lord and His kingdom (1 John 2:15-17). Allegiance to Jesus always collides with culture’s demand for loyalty.

While the culture of the world system is under God’s judgment, it’s also under His sovereign control. Thus Jesus uses it for His glory. From this perspective, Jesus is *above* culture.

In addition, the world system uses the things that Jesus Himself created, but in a misguided and perverted way. Such things as art, science, technology, etc. reflect on varying levels something of the Lord. From this perspective, Jesus is the Lord *of* culture.

¹⁴ Matthew 20:18; Mark 10:33; Luke 18:32; 24:7. God the Father was ultimately behind it all (Acts 2:33; 4:28), using Jesus’ crucifixion to undermine the very forces that put Him to death (Colossians 2:15; 1 Corinthians 2:8). In this regard, the death of Jesus was the ultimate Trojan Horse. Like a skilled wrestler who uses his opponent’s strength against him, God does the same with the evil powers.

Yet when those who are part of the world's culture give their allegiance to Christ, putting their trust and security in Him, Jesus becomes *the transformer of culture*, invading it in and through His people with the culture of heaven.

Unfortunately, culture has traditionally trumped the church. A prime example can be found in the great schism between the Eastern and Western church in A.D. 1054. Interestingly, the majority of those who lived in what was once the Roman Empire (the west) joined the Western church and those who lived in the eastern part of the empire joined the Eastern church. In other words, one's culture determined their religion.

So culture is an incredibly powerful force. But for the true follower of Christ, loyalty to Jesus – the world's true Lord – will trump culture.¹⁵

Along this line, the message of Jesus is political and anti-cultural. Jesus denounced arrogant rulers, announced the destruction of the Jerusalem temple (even acting it out beforehand), preached good news to the poor, condemned top-down leadership, and died the death of a political insurgent.

By contrast, the kingdoms of this world operate in and through worldly culture. As such, they employ fear, deception, physical violence, and military power.

The kingship of Jesus Christ, however, knows no such things (John 18:36).

Trust and Security

The Bible repeatedly warns us against putting our trust in kings, powerful humans, and armies.

Do not put your trust in princes,
in human beings, who cannot save.
When their spirit departs, they return to the ground;
on that very day their plans come to nothing.
Blessed are those whose help is the God of Jacob,
whose hope is in the LORD their God. (Psalm 146:3-5 NIV)

No king is saved by the size of his army;
no warrior escapes by his great strength.
A horse is a vain hope for deliverance;
despite all its great strength it cannot save. (Psalm 33:16-17 NIV)

Let me pick up a thread that I introduced in an earlier section and expand it a bit.

¹⁵ In this section, I've taken four categories from H. Richard Niebuhr's book *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper, 1951), but I've reframed and reinterpreted them to comport with the gospel of the kingdom.

Why did Israel want a king? Why do people – past and present – want human rulers in both church and state?

The answer is as simple as it is profound. It's because they don't trust the Lord to rule them.

Human governments originally came into existence because of human rebellion. It is for this reason that God viewed Israel's persistent request to have a king as being an "evil thing."¹⁶

By requesting a human king, Israel was rejecting God as her King (1 Samuel 8:7).¹⁷

Again, God uses governments, including the laws that are made and enforced by humans (Romans 13:1-7). But this doesn't equate to God's approval or His original intention.¹⁸

Rethinking Sovereignty

At the end of the day, the issue of human governments comes down to where we place our trust and find our security. Too many believers trust in the government to meet their needs. And they place their hope and security in a political movement to effect change. But as I pointed out in *Insurgence*, this is a misplaced hope. And it's an expression of a false security.

Jesus made clear that the pagans put their hope and security in earthly power and treasures. This is why they are constantly vexed with worry, anxiety, and envy (Matthew 6:19-34). The kingdom of God is at odds with all these things, and it's why Jesus ended His exhortation with a

¹⁶ 1 Samuel 12:17, NIV. When Jesus showed up, Israel had forfeited her allegiance to God and became just like the other nations, having "no king but Caesar." That's why the Lord said the kingdom would be taken from her and given to others (Mark 12:9; John 19:15). Israel had given up her right to have God as her only king.

¹⁷ John Nugent insightfully writes, "The Israelites were called to be an exemplary culture over against the cultures of the earth, which were built upon the Babel model of humanly engineered unity, stability, and civilization. The greatest obstacle to becoming an exemplary nation that trusts God alone and orders its life according to his intentions is the self-preserving societal reflex of ordering life around hierarchical, sword-driven governmental structures like we first saw in Cain's day. These structures are reiterated and further developed in the city of Babel, the Babylonian kingdom out of which God called Abraham, and the Egyptian empire out of which God called nascent Israel ... Israel was also chosen by God as one that was small and 'insignificant' (Deut 7:7). But the Israelites wanted to be impressive like the empires around them, and swindled their way into kingship like the nations. God was not pleased. He eventually deposed the monarchy and sent many Israelites into exile, effectively humbling his people and divesting them of the status to which they never should have aspired" (*The Politics of Yahweh*, 52, 110).

¹⁸ Richard Longenecker is correct when he states that using Romans 13:1-7 to justify the existence of all human governments and their actions is to misrepresent the text (Richard Longenecker, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NIGTC [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016], 963). Robert Jewett rightly pointed out that "Romans 13:1-7 was not intended to create the foundation of a political ethic for all times and places in succeeding generations" (quoted by Longenecker, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 964).

plea to “seek the kingdom first.” As a result, the King has promised to meet all our needs (Matthew 6:33-34).

Put another way, when our trust is placed in the nation-state and what it can provide, we’ll always live in worry and fear. But if our hope and security is placed in the King and His kingdom, we can know true peace in the midst of chaos, war, failed economies, and tyranny.

The political-governmental system is under God’s judgment. Therefore, it is foolish for God’s people to put their trust in any earthly authority.

As kingdom people, our allegiance should never be given to any human leader. God calls us to put our hope and trust in Jesus Christ and His cross, not in the sword or the vote.

Who Gets to Rule?

The kingdoms of this world are predicated on giving certain people power over others. So the constant bickering in the world is over the question of “who gets to rule?”

The kingdom of God is predicated on self-sacrificial service. So the governing question in the kingdom is “how can we please the King and serve others?”

In *Insurgence*, I established the fact that all human governments and political systems are in the hands of God’s enemy. They are part of the world system, which is headed up by Satan and the cosmic principalities and powers.¹⁹

This doesn’t mean that every person who serves in government or politics is motivated by Satan. But it does mean that the governmental-political system they are involved in doesn’t belong to God’s kingdom.²⁰

Regardless of what ruler or political party is in power, the political-governmental system remains opposed to God’s kingdom. People in the United States, on both the left and the right, are willing to condemn “the system” when their favored political party is out of power. But when their favored political party is in power, the inherent evil of the system is quickly forgotten.

In this regard, John Howard Yoder was right when he observed that “there is a very strong strand of Gospel teaching which sees secular government as the province of the sovereignty of Satan.”²¹

¹⁹ The nations are currently under the corrupted “sons of God” (i.e., the heavenly host who were once obedient to God. They are also called “heavenly beings” in The Net Bible, the “heavenly court” in the NLT, and “gods” in the NRSV) – Deuteronomy 32:8-9, LXX and DSS; 4:19-20; Psalm 82. One of the best discussions on the New Testament vision of principalities and powers, including the hierarchy in the satanic realm, is Clinton Arnold’s book, *Powers of Darkness* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1992).

²⁰ Jacques Ellul has rightly and cogently argued that social hierarchy and the authority of the nation-state were not God’s original will, but such powers are under the domain of the enemy (*The Subversion of Christianity* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986], 179-180).

Recall that Jesus rejected Satan's offer to possess all the governments of the world. A case could be made that Jesus could have done much good by accepting the devil's offer. But just as Jesus refused to put His trust in the kingdoms of this world, His followers should do the same.

To put it bluntly, following Jesus Christ and putting our hope and security in human government are diametrically opposed to one another. Try to remember this the next time election season arrives.

The Origin of Human Hierarchy

What I've argued so far in this essay meshes well with what sociologists and historians tell us about the origin of human hierarchy. That is, human hierarchy began with the Babylonians, the Egyptians, and the Persians.²² It was then perfected by the Romans.²³

Again, God's intention for Israel was never to establish a governmental hierarchy. Instead, His desire was for Israel to live tribally.²⁴ In my audio message [A Clash Between Kingdoms](#), I mention the three kinds of communitarian life: Fallen human civilization, tribal life, and ekklesia.

Fallen humanity lives in civilization. (The fallenness of civilization was showcased in Cain's city in Genesis 4.) The cities and kingdoms that fallen man builds are characterized by human organization (hierarchy). Israel was called to live tribally, not in high civilization (hence, the twelve "tribes" of Israel). Ekklesia life is similar to tribal life, but it contains a supernatural and divine element—God's own life. My book *Reimagining Church* provides details on how ekklesia life functions.

Interestingly, we can detect the seeds of human hierarchy right after the fall. (Remember, there was a cosmic fall before the human fall.)

Consider the wording in Genesis 3:16 where God tells Eve that her husband will "rule over" her as part of the curse.

²¹ *The Politics of Jesus*, 194.

²² Donald E. Brown, *Hierarchy, History, and Human Nature* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1988), 119-179; Murray Bookchin, *The Ecology of Freedom* (Palo Alto: Cheshire Books, 1982), 2-9; 62-88; "The Rise of Hierarchy" by Peter Gelderloos, published in The Anarchist Library, Fall 2005; "Origins of Hierarchy: How Egyptian Pharaohs Rose to Power" by Stephanie Pappas, published in LiveScience. August, 11 2014; "Mesopotamia Social Hierarchy," Hierarchy Structure. N.p., n.d. Web. June 16, 2017.

²³ "As Judea had given Christianity ethics, and Greece gave it theology, so now Rome gave it organization ..." (Will Durant, *Caesar and Christ*, 618). See also D. C. Trueman and J.H. Trueman, *The Pageant of the Past* (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1965), 105, 311.

²⁴ Jacques Ellul, *Anarchy and Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 46-48.

Here's how F.F. Bruce put it:

It is in the fall narrative, not in the creation narratives, that superiority of the one sex over the other is first mentioned. And here it is not an inherent superiority, but one that is exercised by force. The Creator's words to Eve, "your desire shall be for your husband, and he will rule over you" (Gen. 3:16), mean that, in our sinful human condition, the man exploits the woman's natural proclivity towards him to dominate and subjugate her. Subjugation of woman, in fact, is a symptom of man's fallen nature.²⁵

Interestingly, Eve's striving for power is what led her into sin to begin with (Genesis 3:4-6).

Along this same line, this is what I said about the hierarchical command system in *Reimagining Church*.

You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many. (Matthew 20:25–28 NASB)

The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who have authority over them are called "Benefactors." But it is not this way with you, but the one who is the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like the servant. (Luke 22:25–26 NASB)

The Greek word for "exercise authority" in Matthew is *katexousiazō*. *Katexousiazō* is a combination of two Greek words: *kata*, which means over; and *exousiazō*, which means to exercise authority. Jesus also used the Greek word *katakuriēuo* in this passage, which means to "lord it over" others. As I've explained elsewhere, what Jesus is condemning in these texts is not oppressive leaders as such. He's condemning the hierarchical form of leadership that dominates the Gentile world.²⁶

In my book *Pagan Christianity* (with George Barna), I traced how the clergy system developed and how human hierarchy entered the bloodstream of the Christian church.²⁷ The New Testament is crystal clear that the body of Christ is a classless society, not a human organization containing a pyramidal power structure.

²⁵ F.F. Bruce, *A Mind for What Matters* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 261.

²⁶ *Reimagining Church*, 155-156. Note that Jesus most likely spoke in Aramaic, but all four Gospels are written in Greek. So technically Jesus didn't use this Greek word, but those who translated His sayings did, which at least tells us how they understood Him.

²⁷ Frank Viola and George Barna, *Pagan Christianity* (Carol Stream: Tyndale, 2008), chapter 5.

Hierarchy Before Creation

While human hierarchy began in the pagan world before the nation of Israel was established, hierarchy itself existed well before humans came on the scene. (Some would say that there's a hierarchy in the Godhead, but this idea has been refuted by most of the best scholars and theologians in history.)²⁸

The sobering truth is that hierarchy wasn't made for humans. *It was made for the celestial world of angelic creatures.*

A careful reading of Scripture demonstrates that there is a hierarchy in the angelic order.

Consider the following:

- Scripture mentions archangels (1 Thessalonians 4:16; Jude 1:9, NIV). Michael is called a “chief prince” (ESV) or “archangel” (NLT) in Daniel 10:13. The term “archangel” or “chief prince” indicates that some angels are above other angels in authority.²⁹ Revelation 12:7 also confirms this saying, “Michael and *his* angels,” implying hierarchy.³⁰
- According to many scholars, Colossians 1:16 assumes a graded hierarchy within the cosmic order of heavenly beings. Paul writes,

For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. NASB

²⁸ Orthodox theology has rejected subordinationism in the Godhead. See *Reimagining Church*, 295-297.

²⁹ In Greek, “archangel” means an angel of the highest rank; chief of the angels. See <http://biblehub.com/greek/743.htm> for a listing of sources.

³⁰ For more on the hierarchy within the heavenly host, see E. Theodore Mullen, Jr., “Divine Assembly,” *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, Vol. 2 (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 215–216; S. B. Parker, “Sons of (The) God(S),” *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible* (Leiden; Boston; Köln; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge: Brill; Eerdmans, 1999); Michael S. Heiser, “Divine Council,” *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (eds. John D. Barry and Lazarus Wentz; Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012). Traditions vary on how many archangels there are. Some traditions say there are four: Michael, Gabriel, Raphael, and Phanuel (also called Uriel). Others say there are seven: Uriel, Raphael, Raguel, Michael, Saraqael, Gabriel, and Remiel. Valery Rees, *From Gabriel to Lucifer: A Cultural History of Angels* (San Antonio, TX: I.B. Tauris, 2013), 138; *1 Enoch*, 20:2-8. Also see P.T. O’Brien, “Principalities and Powers and their Relationship to Structures” in *The Reformed Theological Review*, January-April, 1981, Vol. XL, No. 1; John Stott, *God’s New Society* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1979, 263-275). There’s also good reason to believe that the “glorious ones” mentioned in 2 Peter 2:10-11 and Jude 8 outrank angels. According to 2 *Enoch*, 21:3, Gabriel is identified as one of the glorious ones of the Lord (Michael Heiser, *The Unseen Realm* [Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2015], 331-332).

The hierarchy found in this text flows in descending order: “thrones” (*thronos*), “dominions” or “powers” (*kyriotēs*), “rulers” or “principalities” (*archē*), and “authorities” or “powers” (*exousia*).³¹

- There’s a rich history in Second Temple Judaism that a hierarchy existed (and still exists) within the angelic order.³²
- Taking their cue from the Old Testament, Second Temple Judaism, and Paul’s letter to the Colossians, some of the early church fathers wrote about the celestial hierarchy.³³
- The Gospels indicate that there is a distinct hierarchical ordering within the satanic empire which keeps it unified.³⁴

³¹ James D.G. Dunn says that we should suppose these entities to be "a hierarchy of heavenly powers" (James D.G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, NIGTC [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996], 92; Peter O'Brien agrees saying, "They probably represent the highest orders of the angelical realm" (Word Biblical Commentary, *Colossians and Philemon* [Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982], 47). See also P.T. O'Brien, "Principalities and Powers and Their Relationship to Structures" in *The Reformed Theological Review*, January-April, 1981, Vol. XL, No. 1, 5-6. *The Testament of Adam*, 4, includes a list of nine groups of angelic beings in the celestial hierarchy. Paul's list of spiritual powers are found in Romans 8:38; 1 Corinthians 15:24; Ephesians 1:21; 3:10; 6:12; Colossians 1:16; 2:10, 15. Referring to Paul's list of entities in Colossians 1:16, Ben Witherington rightly says, "these were common terms for supernatural beings existing in the heavens" (Ben Witherington, *The Letters to Philemon, the Colossians, and the Ephesians* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007], 134). Also see M. Jeff Brannon, *The Heavens in Ephesians* (New York: T & T Clark, 2011), 212.

³² *Testament of Levi*, 3:8; *Apocalypse of Elijah*, 1:10-11; *1 Enoch*, 61:10; *2 Enoch*, 20:1. Interestingly, over 123 demons are identified by name in the rabbinic literature, including classifications (Clinton Arnold, *Powers of Darkness* [Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1992], 67).

³³ Pseudo-Denys (also known as pseudo-Dionysius) is the most famous for describing an elaborate hierarchy in the angelic realm. But there were others who preceded him, including Cyril of Jerusalem, Gregory of Nazianzus, Ambrose, and Chrysostom. See St. Denys, *The Celestial Hierarchy*; Cyril, "Catechesis Lectures," 23.6; Gregory of Nazianzus, *Discourse*, 28.31; Ambrose, *Apologia Prophet David*, 5; Chrysostom, *De Incomprehensibili Dei Natura*, III, 48.724; Valery Rees, *From Gabriel to Lucifer: A Cultural History of Angels* (San Antonio, TX: I.B. Tauris, 2013), 38-42. Angelic hierarchies are also described in *The Apostolic Constitutions* and *The Book of the Cave of Treasures*. Denys is credited for coining the word "hierarchy," which is a combination of *hieros* (sacred) and *arche* (source).

³⁴ Mark 3:22-30; Luke 10:17ff.; Revelation 12:9, 16:13ff. In addition, Satan is called "the ruler of the demons" in Matthew 9:32 and fallen celestial beings are referred to as "his angels" in Matthew 25:41. Satan is also called an *archōn* ("prince") in John 12:20; 14:30; 16:11. The word *archōn* was used in the Greco-Roman world to refer to the highest official in a city or region. See Clinton Arnold, *Powers of Darkness* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 81. The book of Job alludes to the fact that some of the celestial beings rebelled in the past (Job 15:15), a theme I explore in *Insurgence*.

How Angelic Hierarchy Was Introduced to Humans

When Lucifer fell and became “Satan” (adversary),³⁵ he imposed the hierarchy that was created for the cosmic celestial world onto human beings.³⁶

This ties back into the fuller meaning of government.

Government is synonymous with the nation-state as a hierarchical, sword-bearing institution.³⁷

John Nugent put it this way,

The state is thus a fallen institution that springs from human efforts at self-preservation. As soon as this violent reflex arose among humans, God sought to chasten it by placing it under his jurisdiction. Because governing structures are predicated upon human sinfulness, God’s people must always remember that such structures are fraught with ambivalence ... God orders the fallen state to accomplish relative good despite itself because people are better off with any kind of government—even a tyrannical one—than they are without one. The sword-bearing state is thus

³⁵ For a good review that Ezekiel 14 has in view the fall of Satan, see Forsyth, *Old Enemy*, 140-41; W. Eichrodt; *Ezekiel: A Commentary*, trans. C. Quin (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970), 392-93; N. C. Habel, “Ezekiel 28 and the Fall of the First Man,” *Concordia Theological Monthly*, No. 38 (1967), 516-24; J.L. McKenzie, “Mythical Allusions in Ezek. 28:12-18,” *Journal of Biblical Literature*, No.75 (1956), 322-27; A. J. Williams, “The Mythological Background of Ezekiel 28:12-19,” *Biblical Theological Bulletin*, No. 6 (1976), 49-61. For a good review that Isaiah has in view the fall of Satan, see J. M. Bertoluci, “The Son of the Morning and the Guardian Cherub in the Context of the Controversy Between Good and Evil” (Th.D. thesis, Andrews University, 1985), 4-36; M. Green, *I Believe in Satan’s Downfall* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981); Forsyth, *Old Enemy*; R. L. Allen, “Lucifer, Who or What?,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, No. 11 (1968), 35-39. In ANE culture, the sinister cosmic forces were depicted as monsters, most often monsters of the sea. This is apparent throughout the Old Testament. See Michael Heiser, *The Unseen Realm* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2015), pp. 83–91; Greg Boyd, *God at War* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 154–67; C. Fred Dickason, *Angels: Elect & Evil* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 135–45.

³⁶ Some may ask why God created hierarchy for the angelic world and not for humans. This question is beyond the scope of this essay, but in short, humans were made to be retainers of God’s own life. They were designed to receive, live by, and thus reflect God’s nature in a visible, material world, which means they were meant to live in community (just as the Godhead does). Angels are merely servants. They take orders from God, but as far as we know, they don’t possess the divine nature or make it visible in the earth. The New Testament teaches that humans who receive Christ have received God’s divine life. They aren’t merely servants, but sons (Galatians 4:7) – sons by the impartation of divine life, not simply because God created them (as He did the angels).

³⁷ Cain’s city along with Lamech, the power-abusing prince (Genesis 4), represent the violent tendencies of human governments. The city that Cain built produced the basic elements of sinful culture through his descendants: organization to protect and take vengeance (the state), civilization (the city of Enoch), entertainment (Jubal’s music), weapons of war (Tubal-Cain’s metallurgy), and Lamech’s increasing violence (warfare). After the flood, Babel represents a return to Cain’s failed city project. In *1 Enoch*, we are told that angelic beings taught humans how to create weapons of violence. See *1 Enoch*, 8 and Yoder, “Generation Alternative Paradigms,” 58.

another example of how God takes a human response to the consequences of sin and “ordains” or “orders” it to accomplish his purposes.³⁸

As I established in *Insurgence*, Scripture tells us that the nations of the earth are governed by fallen celestial beings. (This is confirmed by the third-century Jewish belief that different angelic beings oversaw different nations. It’s also attested by the church fathers.)³⁹

Consequently, the hierarchy among the cosmic principalities and powers in the heavenlies are reflected by the human principalities and powers on the earth.

To recap, hierarchy, as we know it, is a postlapsarian [after the fall] development and not part of God’s original design for humankind. Hierarchy marks the celestial world. But God’s enemy introduced it to humans after the fall.

A Parody of the Kingdom

The Christian's allegiance is to God, not to the state.⁴⁰ God didn't appoint the state any more than He appointed a king over Israel. But He uses both to achieve His purpose. And that’s the brilliance of our Lord, who works all things after the counsel of His will.

³⁸ John C. Nugent, *The Politics of Yahweh* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books), 34-35.

³⁹ This view is confirmed by the Enoch tradition. Because the celestial beings that God put over the nations after Babel rebelled and abused their power, God punished them just like He does human rulers (Psalm 82). The celestial beings were held accountable for injustice in the earth just like humans are. Interestingly, the Jews of the third century linked angelical rulers and human rulers on a single continuum, so what is said of the one applies to the other when it comes to accountability to God. Regarding the church fathers and their view that angelic beings were committed authority over aspects of the earth, especially the nations, see Athenagorus (*A Plea for the Christians*, 10); Origen (*Against Celsus*, 1:31; 8:31); Tertullian (*Apology*, 22). Some of the Old Testament texts that connect celestial, angelic beings with the nations are Deuteronomy 32:8 (following the LXX and ESV); 2 Kings 18:33-35; 19:12-13; Ezekiel 31:11; Job 4:18-19; Isaiah 24:21-23; Psalm 82:1-8; Daniel 10:1-14, 18-21. See also *1 Enoch*, 89:59-90:15 and *Jubilees*, 15:31-32. These celestial beings are called “the heavenly host” and “the divine council.” Michael S. Heiser, in *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (John D. Barry et al., eds.; Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012, 2013, 2014); Heiser, “The Divine Council in Second Temple Literature,” Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin Madison, 2004; *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Wisdom, Poetry, and Writings* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 112–116; “Deuteronomy 32:8-9 and the Old Testament Worldview,” *Faithlife Study Bible*, John D. Barry, Michael R. Grigoni, et al. (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2012).

⁴⁰ For a number of helpful essays on the relationship between church and state, see *Evangelical Review of Theology*, Vol. 22, No. 2, April 1998, “The Church in Nation Building.” The issue includes articles on church and state by N.T. Wright, Valson Thampu, Valdir Steuernagel, and Pietro Bolognesi. See also *Paul and Empire* edited by Richard Horsley (Trinity Press International, 1997) and *Paul and Politics* edited by Richard Horsley (Trinity Press International, 2000).

As followers of Jesus, when our lifestyle is marked by bearing the cross, the world considers it foolishness. This shouldn't surprise us because our life is based on a kingdom that's not physical and doesn't come from this world.

The kingdom of God is considered a threat because it demands a loyalty above all other loyalties.

The nation-state (the empire) is actually a parody of God's kingdom. It's a corrupt and exaggerated imitation of God's rule.

It is true that God originally created the cosmic powers in Christ (Colossians 1:16). But they abused that power, just as Adam abused his God-given rule. The cosmic powers overreached their dominion. When the curse came to humanity, Adam began ruling over Eve. Thus human power that was exercised over other humans, mired by sin, spread. We see it vividly in Lamech, whose lust led him to take two wives and rule over them (Genesis 4).

Consequently, all earthly power and position is on loan from God. The authority that the powers wield over territories is still under God's ultimate sway. But again, God's *use* of the cosmic powers and ungodly rulers and governments doesn't equate His *approval* of those entities.

Be Subject to the Powers

God arranges the powers, and they are subject to His ordering. For that reason, we submit to governmental leaders and the laws of the land (Romans 13:1-7; 1 Timothy 2:1-4; Titus 3:1; 1 Peter 2:13-17).⁴¹

Generally speaking, we should not be insubordinate to the state. It's a temporary institution that ultimately serves God's agenda.

However, if the state directly contradicts God's will, our obedience to the Lord Jesus trumps our obedience to any human leader or law. Thus in the end, our conduct isn't governed by what human rulers say or do, but by what God says and does. (And as I've argued elsewhere, submission and obedience are not the same thing.)⁴²

In God's providential ordering, the Lord uses the state to bring order to society. But because it's part of the world system, it has a tendency to usurp God and demand worship of itself, rendering it both idolatrous and oppressive.

⁴¹ Jesus taught that we shouldn't resist the evil person (Matthew 5:39). But having a submissive attitude toward someone is not tantamount to legitimizing them. Even when a Christian engages in civil disobedience, their attitude should still be peaceful and submissive, as taught by both Jesus and Paul. The New Testament vision calls Christians to comply with the socio-political structures of society without giving their primary allegiance to them, an allegiance that's reserved only for Jesus Christ and His kingdom.

⁴² Frank Viola, *Reimagining Church* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2008), 213-215.

In addition, to be subject to the governing authorities in Romans 13 doesn't mean to worship them. Nor does it mean to recognize their legitimacy or give one's allegiance to them. Paul is not encouraging blind obedience to human rulers. In fact, nowhere does the New Testament teach blind obedience to oppressive and deceptive regimes (like the Roman Empire).

On the other hand, God's people are not to act rebelliously against human authorities. (The New Testament is clear that we are to pay taxes and comply with the laws of the land – Mark 12:17; Romans 13:6-7.)

So the Christian position, from a New Testament standpoint, neither rejects the legitimacy of the powers nor encourages a revolution against them (Romans 12:19-21).

We are called to get along with the ruling powers as much as possible, striving to live at peace with them (Romans 12:18; 1 Timothy 2:1-2). But we are never to put our trust in them.

Thus rather than put our hope in any kingdom of this world, even if it has “righteous” people in it, God's people are called to live in ekklesia life, the divine alternative to the state.

Our citizenship is in heavenly places, not here on this fallen planet.

In Ephesians, the heavenlies (or “heavenly places”) represent the location of God's throne and the realm of the spiritual world under His throne. Interestingly, the Christian lives in two realms at the same time, the heavenly and the earthly. The lost are also influenced by these two realms.⁴³

(By the way, the lower heavens are the location of evil powers while the upper heavens are where Christ is exalted, “far above” them – Ephesians 6:12; 2:2; 1:3, 20-21).⁴⁴

The satanic hostile powers work in conjunction with the world system and the flesh (Ephesians 2:1-3). But because of the cross of Christ, they cannot harm or separate us from God's love.

Condemning Top-Down Power

In the Gospels, we see the disciples trying to grab power and prestige. But Jesus challenged them to both rethink and reject their usual way of thinking about authority. In the kingdom of God, there are no top-down levers to pull. There is no pecking-order or hierarchy in the community of the King (Matthew 20:25–28; Luke 22:25–26).

⁴³ The heavenly places (or “heavenlies”) in Ephesians refers to the spiritual realm where spiritual blessings reside and which is also populated by evil spiritual powers (Ephesians 1:3; 6:12). Satan is called “the prince of the power of the air” (Ephesians 2:2). According to one ancient Jewish text, there are 36 demonic rulers in the heavenly sphere (*Testament of Solomon*, 18:3). See also Clinton Arnold, *Exegetical Commentary on Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 131-132.

⁴⁴ For an excellent treatment of the term “the heavenlies” in Ephesians, see M. Jeff Brannon, *The Heavenlies in Ephesians: A Lexical, Exegetical, and Conceptual Analysis* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013). Brannon discusses the spatial dimension of the heavenly powers in pages 198, 208-209, 218.

Instead, the kingdom of God operates by bottom-up service and sacrifice, both of which stand in sharp contrast to top-down authority.

Yet the modern church has employed human hierarchy since the fourth century, benightedly assuming that it's a God-given construct.

According to the New Testament, however, the body of Christ doesn't take the form of the state. In addition, the very existence of the body of Christ is a statement against rampant nationalism. The ekklesia of God is a transethnic, transcultural, transterritorial society.

By contrast, nation-states are part of the old, fallen order. And God's in-breaking kingdom lives and functions in a completely different way.

Right now, God is in the process of shaping His kingdom-people to bear witness to the lordship of Christ by having a life together governed by His vision for economics, justice, education, security, leadership, and culture, all of which sharply contrast with the empires of this world.

The hard reality is that nations who set themselves up as the indispensable hope of the world are revolting against the kingship of Jesus, usurping His function as Messiah.

Yet even though Scripture condemns entangling ourselves with the top-down power structures of the world through politics and government, Christians often get ensnarled by these systems.⁴⁵

Reframing the Story

Let's quickly retrace and reframe the story we find in Scripture before we proceed to the next big point.

God creates the earth. The first humans are placed in a garden, which is an overlap of heaven and earth. In the divine intention, the garden is designed to spread all over the earth.

Adam and Eve fall, and with the fall, nascent hierarchy begins (Adam *rules* over his wife).

Note that when Adam falls, he hands the title deed of the earth to Satan. For this reason, Satan is called "the lord [*archon*] of this world" (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11), the principality and power of the air (Ephesians 2:2),⁴⁶ the god of this age (2 Corinthians 4:4), and the owner of all authority in the kingdoms of the world (Luke 4:5-7; 1 John 5:19).⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Jacques Ellul's book, *Anarchy and Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), is a brilliant statement that confirms many of the same points about the nation-state, human authority, hierarchy, and Romans 12-13 that I've articulated in this essay.

⁴⁶ In ancient Hebrew literature, the air was the personal abode of living evil spirits (*1 Enoch*, 15:10-11; *2 Enoch*, 29:4-5; *The Ascension of Isaiah*, 4:1-3; 7:9-12; 10:28-31; 11:23; *Testament of Solomon*, 2:3; 18:3; 20:12-15. The first-century Jews also saw the air as the domain of authority over the earth. Thus when Scripture says that the devil is the prince of the power of the air, it's another way of saying that he is the practical ruler of the world (Greg Boyd,

So as the god of this world, Satan gives hierarchy to the kingdoms of the earth, with himself being at the top. In time, top-down hierarchy will spill over into the religious world.

There is no hierarchy in the triune God. There was no hierarchy in the Garden of Eden, before the fall. And according to Jesus, there should be no hierarchy in the ekklesia.

Back to the story.

Cain murders his brother Abel, and leaves the presence of God to build the first city (the city is called Enoch). With Cain, we have the beginning of fallen human civilization, which is both vengeance-based and fear-based.

Pause and mark it down: *the first city that man created was attributed to murder and leaving God's presence.*

God hits CTRL-ALT-DELETE on His creation by sending a great flood. When the flood waters recede, God's good creation is rebooted. For this reason, the account of Noah in the new creation in Genesis 9 echoes many of the elements we find in Genesis 1 and 2.⁴⁸

Tragically, something of the old creation seeps into the new world. One of Noah's sons, Ham, carries the line of the old corrupt man.⁴⁹ Nimrod – from the lineage of Ham – founds Babel, the first “kingdom” on earth. Babel is the beginning of the nation-state.

(Note that if humans never fell, the sword-bearing nation-state would have never come into existence.)

Cross Vision [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017], 180). According to ancient thought, Satan and his agents occupied the upper regions of the physical sky. In Hellenistic cosmology, the space between the moon and the earth were believed to be the location of intense demonic activity. For this reason, the word “lunacy” is derived from the Latin word *luna* (which means moon) – Ralph Martin, *Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1991), 26.

⁴⁷ Remember, Jesus never disputed the devil's clam that he had all the kingdoms of the world in his possession and could give them to Jesus. 1 John 5:19 confirms this, which says that the whole world is under the power of the evil one.

⁴⁸ God repeats His word to Adam about image-bearing, multiplying, and filling the earth to Noah (Genesis 9:1-6). Also, the vineyard of Noah was intended to echo the Garden of Eden. John Nugent, *Polis Bible Commentary*, Vol. 1, *Genesis 1–11* (Skyforest, CA: Urban Loft Publishing, forthcoming), Genesis 9:18-28.

⁴⁹ Ham's descendants are a veritable “Who's Who” of Israel's worst enemies. Included in the list are the Egyptians, the Babylonians, the Assyrians, the Philistines, etc. John Nugent, *Polis Bible Commentary*, Vol. 1, *Genesis 1–11* (Skyforest, CA: Urban Loft Publishing, forthcoming), Genesis 10:1-32.

At Babel, God scatters the people of the earth all over the world and puts the newly-created nations under cosmic beings (His “heavenly host”). The heavenly host rebel against God and become the false gods over the pagan nations. (I explained this all in detail in *Insurgence*.)

God calls Abraham out of Babylon (i.e., Ur of the Chaldees) with its high civilization. Abraham becomes the father of a new kind of people who will be ruled directly by God Himself. This people (later called Israel) will have its own culture that reflects God’s ways.

God’s plan is to use this peculiar people (Israel) to bless all the nations, bringing His creation back to His original intention.

Abraham’s descendants are taken captive in the advanced civilization of Egypt. The evil Egyptian empire enslaves the Israelites through forced labor.

Under Moses, God calls His people out of Egypt and gives them His Law (Torah). The Law shows Israel how to live differently from the other nations.

God brings Israel into the land of Canaan, a land where no great empire has ever thrived. Canaan is regarded to be the new Eden.

Israel is to have no centralized government or hierarchy. God is to be her only King. God gives sporadic guidance to the people through judges, elders, and priests as the needs arise. But even the judges are keenly aware that God rules Israel and not them.

In fact, one of the judges makes this plain by saying, "I will not rule over you, nor will my son rule over you. The LORD will rule over you" (Judges 8:23 NIV).

Following the events recorded in 1 Samuel 8, Israel devolves from a tribal confederacy under God’s kingship to a human monarchy. Israel demands a human king to rule over her, effectively rejecting God’s leadership.

Because of her rebellion, God acts in judgment and Israel is taken captive by Assyria, then Babylon, then Persia, then Greece, then Rome.

Eventually, God sends His own Son, the Messiah, to create a new Israel which will restore His original plan for the earth.

Jesus gives birth to a new community made up of twelve men and a number of women.

The new community under Jesus is the embryo of the ekklesia, and it contains no hierarchy or centralized organization. This community represents the reconstitution of Israel and follows God’s original idea for her, where God Himself is its sole King.

Jesus spearheads a revolution that rejects the political status quo and offers an alternative vision for leadership, social life, and culture. His message is that the kingdom of God has arrived.⁵⁰

The kingdom of God is completely different from any human empire. When Jesus said, “My kingdom is not from this world,” He was saying that His ordering of social life and culture is void of political and governmental authoritarianism.⁵¹

The Empire Strikes Back

Jesus challenges both the Jewish aristocracy and the Roman authorities, and the empire strikes back. The “powers that be” put Jesus to death, mockingly calling Him “the king of the Jews.” It appears that Caesar and the Sanhedrin had won, putting another insurgent to death.

But three days later, the world’s true King rises from the dead. And shortly thereafter, He gives birth to the ekklesia, the bearer of His presence in the world.⁵²

The ekklesia, born on the day of Pentecost, continues to live in ways that contrast with the leadership structures of the world.

The ekklesia embodies God’s kingdom after Jesus ascends, and it stands on the earth as a witness to the lordship of Christ – an alternative counterculture to the kingdom of Caesar and all who stand in its lineage.

As one writer put it,

No need any more to look wildly about for signs of the Kingdom’s imminent coming: it is here “among you” (Luke 17:21). In the person and work of Jesus the Kingdom of God has intruded into the world.⁵³

By its vibrant life together, the ekklesia is called to give the surrounding world a sobering glimpse into the new creation. Through the body of Christ, God plants a new world in midst of the old one, drawing the people in the world to Himself.

The ekklesia is the only evidence that Jesus leaves in the world, showcasing the fact that He has inaugurated a new kingdom through Himself.

⁵⁰ Richard Horsely convincingly shows that the kingdom of God was the main theme of the Gospel of Mark, probably our earliest Gospel (Richard A. Horsely, *Jesus and Empire* [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003], 75).

⁵¹ My kingdom is not *from* this world (opposed to *of* this world) is a better translation of John 18:36.

⁵² The presence of God, a theme I develop in *Insurgence*, can be traced throughout Israel’s history. God’s promise that “I am with you” was given to Isaac (Genesis 15:26-24), to Jacob (Genesis 28:15), to Moses (Exodus 3:12), and then realized by Jesus to His followers (Matthew 28:20).

⁵³ John Bright, *The Kingdom of God in Bible and Church* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1955), 220.

God's strategy is to fill the earth with kingdom communities that manifest the economics of heaven where it is more blessed to give than to receive. These communities are called to live out before a watching world what love, forgiveness, equality, caring, giving, and justice look like. God uses these communities to reflect the new social order that Jesus Christ inaugurated in His resurrection. And all of that spills over to the unsaved.

In short, Jesus Christ has won the victory over the powers. But there is still a great deal of residual resistance to His lordship. The ekklesia carries the torch and stands on the victorious ground that Jesus has won.

The Defeat of the Principalities and Powers

In the New Testament, "principalities and powers" (or "rulers and authorities") refer to socio-political structures of human society as well as unseen spiritual forces that are hostile to God.

Because the spiritual principalities and powers have been defeated and disarmed, there's no reason for a Christian to fear them. In Christ, we have authority over them.

In Ephesians 1:20-23, Paul refers to the hostile powers. In Ephesians 1:10, he points out that they will ultimately be under Christ's headship in the future.

The rulers and authorities mentioned in Ephesians 6 will sometimes work through governmental rulers and socio-political hierarchical systems to prevent the gospel from spreading. The task of the church is to declare the reconciling mission of Christ, announcing that the rulers and authorities are subject to Him.

The world belongs to Christ, not to its temporal rulers and kingdoms. The reconciliation that God has brought about has already been effected on the cross (Colossians 1:20). But it's not yet complete (1 Corinthians 15:22-28).

This is the already-but-not-yet tension that we live in. Even though they are active in the world, the hostile cosmic powers have been made subject to Christ (1 Peter 3:22). So their power is limited, and their ultimate overthrow is certain. And in the end, they will completely submit to Christ as Lord, even unwillingly (Philippians 2:10-11; Ephesians 1:10; 1 Corinthians 15:24).

The very existence of the body of Christ displays God's multicolored wisdom to the principalities and powers. As I have argued elsewhere, when a body of believers gathers under the headship of Christ and they are led by Him (instead of a human leader), it shames principalities and powers.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ For scholarly discussions on "principalities and powers" in New Testament usage, see F.F. Bruce, *A Mind for What Matters*, chapter 7; Andrew T. Lincoln, "Liberation from the Powers: Supernatural Spirits or Societal Structures?," in *The Bible in Human Society: Essays in Honour of John Rogerson*, ed. M. Daniel Carroll R., David J.A. Clines, and Philip R. Davies, JSOTSup 200 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 335–54; Stephen F. Noll, *Angels of Light, Powers of Darkness: Thinking Biblically About Angels, Satan, and Principalities*, reprint ed. (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2003), 124–153. In his *Open Heaven: A Study of Apocalyptic in Judaism and Early*

John Howard Yoder was correct when he wrote about the fall of the powers, saying, “The creature and the world are fallen, and in this the powers have their own share. They are no longer active only as mediators of the saving creative purpose of God; now we find them seeking to separate us from the love of God (Rom. 8:38); we find them ruling over the lives of those who live far from the love of God (Eph. 2:2); we find them holding us in servitude to their rules (Col. 2:20); we find them holding us under their tutelage (Gal. 4:3). These structures which were supposed to be our servants have become our masters and our guardians.”⁵⁵

God’s Alternative Politics

Social-political hierarchies cause division by setting some people above others. The structures themselves, independent of those who populate it, breed envy and lend themselves to domination and control.

This fact can easily be observed wherever the hierarchical structure is at work, whether it be in businesses, ministry organizations, and especially “church” – the one place where it shouldn’t exist.

The blood-stained pages of church history witness to this fact all too well.

As I argued in *Insurgence*, God’s call is not to make the world a better place by sitting at Caesar’s table and leveraging the power of human governments.

Rather, it’s to be the better place in an evil world. And that is the role of the spiritual community of the believers.

Beginning with the fourth century, when the church merged with the Roman Empire, God’s people succumbed to the temptation to wield imperial power. And from this impulse, it imported hierarchy into its religious life.

This temptation is inherent in the fall. Even the disciples of Jesus clamored for power, asking the Lord to give them the prominent seats in the future kingdom. But Jesus made clear to them – *and to us* – that His kingdom doesn’t operate like the kingdoms of this world.

Christianity (Wipf & Stock, 2002), Christopher Rowland discusses the Jewish concept of angelic rulers over the nations, pointing out that each nation has angelic representation (89-92). In both the New Testament and Second Temple literature, there is an organic connection between celestial beings and governing authorities. This literature attributes the warfare of the nations to fallen angelical powers (Clinton Arnold, *Powers of Darkness* [Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1992], 70-71).

⁵⁵ John Howard Yoder, “Generating Alternative Paradigms,” *Human Values and the Environment: Conference Proceedings*, Report 140. Madison, WI: Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters, 1992, 58.

Human government, then, was a man-made invention. The impulse to dominate not only comes from our fallen nature, but it comes from outside spiritual powers. Thus the hierarchical structures on earth are inherently corrupt and bear all the marks of our fallenness.⁵⁶

This doesn't suggest that Christians should physically remove themselves from civilization and live in the wildernesses, apart from society. No. The body of Christ is to live in and among the world, but in a way that's completely different from the way the world lives.

Regrettably, Christians today (especially those living in the West) are frequently roped into the political rhetoric and vitriol during election times and beyond. And as a result, God's people sadly get caught up in nationalism, which is a form of idolatry.

But as kingdom citizens, we are resident aliens (Philippians 1:27; 3:20; Hebrews 11:13; 1 Peter 1:17; 2:21). Consequently, God has called us to live as soldiers for God's kingdom, not getting "entangled in civilian affairs," but seeking to please our "commanding officer."

Join with me in suffering, like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No one serving as a soldier gets entangled in civilian affairs, but rather tries to please his commanding officer. (2 Timothy 2:3-4 NIV)

If we become entangled in the things of this world, including its politics, we will be unable to properly carry out the task of our homeland – the kingdom of the heavenlies.

The reality is that we are standing in enemy territory. So let's not be distracted from our agenda. Let's instead stand for God's rule in a world that's occupied by hostile spiritual forces.

In this regard, the ekklesia is called to offer a radical alternative way of living and being. It answers a totally different set of questions than those which obsess the world. The chief objective of those questions is not "world change," but how to please and express the glory of the King.

And that's a mighty high calling.

Advancing the Insurgence

Unfortunately, countless Christians today live in ways that are indistinguishable from the world, entangling themselves in "civilian affairs."

They accept the same values and attitudes toward human governments that unbelievers do. By contrast, our spiritual forefathers were seen as subversive and unpatriotic because they refused to give their trust, hope, and devotion to the empire.

⁵⁶ Interestingly, when Peter talks about submitting to power-bearing rulers, he uses the term human *creations* – the literal Greek meaning that's often translated "institution" or "authority" in 1 Peter 2:13. These are mere inventions; the creations of fallen humans, not of God.

Jesus replied, “My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my servants would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jewish authorities. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here.” Then Pilate said, “So you are a king!” Jesus replied, “You say that I am a king. For this reason I was born, and for this reason I came into the world – to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.” (John 18:36-37 NET Bible)

By refusing to join the verbal smackdowns that the world engages in over politics, we demonstrate that our allegiance, hope, and security belong to another Ruler and another kingdom.

Understanding that Satan is behind the political and governmental powers that be leads us to adopt the following conclusions:

- We don’t trust government or the political process to accomplish any eternal good.
- We don’t strategically align ourselves with either government or politics.
- We don’t place our hope or security, let alone our allegiance, in them.
- We are less attentive to them and resist being “entangled” by them.
- We carry a healthy suspicion toward them and a respectful disengagement from them.
- We focus on being peaceful witnesses of the Christ who stands above the powers, bearing witness to the world and the powers themselves that Jesus Christ is Lord of the world and their stewardship and responsibility is to carry out the will of God. The body of Christ, then, holds the powers to account. But this often means facing the same consequences that Jesus faced.

As John Nugent put it, “The powers are not God’s solution to the problem of sin; they are part of the problem. Christ alone has risen above the fray. In him alone is the solution.”⁵⁷

Jesus Christ was killed by the powers because He challenged their presumptive authority.⁵⁸ But through His death and resurrection, Christ unmasked the powers as false gods.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ John C. Nugent, *The Politics of Yahweh* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books), 30.

⁵⁸ In the New Testament, “the powers” refer to people in positional authority, social structures, and cosmic spiritual entities, all of which claim sovereignty and seek to enslave humans. During His earthly ministry, Jesus challenged the hierarchical powers and their powers of domination. Christ’s victory over the powers is depicted as past, present, and future (Colossians 2:13-15; Ephesians 1:16-23; Luke 22:69; Matthew 28:18; Philippians 2:5-11; 1 Corinthians 15:24-27).

⁵⁹ John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 146-147.

As a consequence, the ekklesia of God – the body of Christ – stands on the earth as a living witness that the powers are no longer sovereign, and their dominion has ended. As such, the ekklesia continues the ministry of Jesus in the earth.

Plato longed for a philosopher-king. Jesus of Nazareth is the ultimate Wisdom-King. His kingdom is spiritual, but it's also a geo-political kingdom on this earth, just as Isaiah prophesied:

For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given,
and the government will be on his shoulders.
And he will be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
Of the greatness of his government and peace
there will be no end.
He will reign on David's throne
and over his kingdom,
establishing and upholding it
with justice and righteousness
from that time on and forever.
The zeal of the Lord Almighty
will accomplish this. (Isaiah 9:6-7 NIV)

The call to action in this essay is the same as it is in *Insurgence*. To sever our ties with the world system, not just certain parts of it. And to give our full and complete attention, allegiance, and affection to Jesus Christ and His kingdom.

Too many Christians today are sucked up into the misplaced hopes of contemporary nationalism. Others are helplessly embroiled in this world's political system. (I discuss what I mean by being "embroiled" in *Insurgence*.)

The challenge for all of us to is to bear faithful witness to another kingdom that is here in part, but which will one day arrive in fullness.

We live now in the firstfruits and anticipate the future harvest.

If you and I do this, people will notice, including the angels in heaven. And the *insurgence* will advance in the earth.