

The Idolatry of the Papal King #1

Daniel 11:38-39

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How did images of Christ, Mary, and Christian martyrs come to be used in worship? This is a pertinent question to our study of the papal king who leads God's people away from the true King, Jesus Christ. For as we continue in our study of the identifying marks of "the king" that are revealed in Daniel 11:36-39, we have come to the next one in Daniel 11:38: he shall honor "the God [god] of forces".

In the previous sermon from this text, we noted there are two primary interpretations of the phrase, "the God of forces".

First, "the God of forces" may be used here in a military sense of wars waged by this papal king against those who oppose his will (which we saw was realized in the papacy who raised armies and crusades against his enemies for hundreds of years like no ministerial leader in the church has ever done).

Second, "the God of forces" may be used in a religious sense of venerating in worship the martyrs and saints ("saints" is used by the Church of Rome as an exclusive category of Christians contrary to Scripture which calls all believers saints—Roman 1:7—similar greetings are also used by Paul in 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians). Biblically, the saints are not those who are canonized by the Church of Rome, but are all believers in Jesus Christ—set apart unto Christ to serve Him. We who trust in Christ are His saints.

As we shall see, whether one interprets "the God of forces" in a military sense or in a religious sense, that phrase marks out and identifies the papacy as "the king" that is revealed to Daniel by the angel, Gabriel, in Daniel 11:36-39.

Let us turn our attention to the religious interpretation of "the God of forces". Our main points are: (1) An Examination of the Text; (2) A Brief Summary of History.

I. An Examination of the Text (Daniel 11:38-39).

A. The papal king will in the estate or in the place of the God of his fathers (the fathers being the apostles) honor/glorify by way of worship the god of forces. This refers to a great apostasy from the religion of the apostles—replacing the true religion with a corrupted religion.

B. The Hebrew word for "forces" (*mauzzim*) is used in a military sense (as noted), but it is also used in a religious sense for a refuge, a patron, or a protector. God is called our *maōz* (singular) in many places (Nahum 1:7; Psalm 37:39; Jeremiah 16:9). Classic Hebrew lexicons (like Brown, Driver, and Briggs, and Gesenius) mention that "the God of forces" (*mauzzim*) here in Daniel 11:38 is used in a religious sense to refer to some false god that this king will honor. Thus, if we understand "the god of forces" in a religious sense how would this relate to the papacy?

C. The Papacy replaced a biblical Christianity that was void of veneration of "saints" and martyrs and that was void of making and worshipping before images of the "saints" and martyrs and fell into the heathen/pagan practice of making the "saints" and martyrs gods before whom they worshipped and unto whom they prayed and sought their protection as patron saints who were able to perform miracles and to protect from danger. In fact, as we shall see in a subsequent sermon, some church fathers referred to the "saints" and martyrs as *mauzzim* (patrons, protectors).

D. The religious interpretation also fits well with the rest of what is said concerning the papal king in Daniel 11:38.

1. The veneration of patron saints and their images was "even" a god whom his fathers (the apostles) knew not.
2. The images and relics (bones, possessions, etc.) of the "saints" and martyrs (*mauzzim*)

were adorned with gold, silver, precious stones, and pleasant things (ornaments, rich clothing, pictures, etc.).

3. Lavish shrines were built in cathedrals to glorify and venerate the *mauzzim* (the patron saints). In fact, it is stated in the *Catholic Encyclopedia* that Pope Boniface IV (in 609) converted the pagan Pantheon of gods in Rome into a cathedral and dedicated it to Mary and all the martyrs. Twenty-eight cartloads of sacred bones were said to have been removed from the catacombs and placed in a basin beneath the high altar within the cathedral. <https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02660c.htm>

E. The religious interpretation of the papal king also brings a good understanding to Daniel 11:39.

1. Under the leadership of the papal king, strongholds (cathedrals, shrines, fortresses) will be built to house this strange god (that was not known to the apostles).

2. Increasingly, more and more honor, glory, and veneration in worship were given to this strange god of images, icons, and relics of Christ, Mary, Joseph, the angels, the “saints”, the martyrs. In a future sermon we will see that a battle ensued between those in the Church who opposed the veneration of images and icons in worship and those who embraced it. The position of the Papacy prevailed in that controversy at the Second Council of Nicaea in 787.

3. Under the administration of the Papal King, the patron saints and martyrs were bestowed with power by the Church to rule and exercise power in the prayers and veneration that was offered to them—forgiveness of sin, healing, and protection from danger and power to bless individuals, families, churches, and nations. The patron saints did indeed increase in power and rule.

4. Finally, cities and nations were given over to these patron saints to protect them (e.g. Saint George is named as the patron saint of England; Saint Andrew is patron saint of Scotland etc.). So indeed the nations of the world were divided among the patron saints (*mauzzim*) as a further mark of the Papal King in Daniel 11:39. There is almost a patron (protector) saint for every part of the world, for all classes of individuals, for all circumstances in which one may find oneself. This is simply exchanging the patron gods of the pagan religions of ancient times with patron saints. This was unknown to God’s people in the Old Testament or in the New Testament.

II. A Brief Summary of History.

A. The veneration of “saints”, martyrs, and angels and of their images in worship was not recorded as a practice by the Christian Church prior to the Edict of Milan (313) at which time Emperor Constantine decriminalized Christianity and made it a protected religion together with all the pagan religions within the Roman Empire which already were protected.

1. As Christianity grew in its influence (greatly enhanced by Constantine’s role as a professed Christian emperor), many from pagan religions flooded into the church bringing also the practice of venerating images into Christian worship (which in earlier centuries had been condemned by the Church Fathers as we shall see in a future sermon).

2. In the Edict of Thessalonica (380), Emperor Theodosius decreed that Christianity be from that time forward the official religion of the Roman Empire (a religion by that time that was gradually adopting the veneration of the “saints” and martyrs and their images in worship).

3. Sir Isaac Newton (1642-1727) was not only a renowned scientist, but was also a notable biblical scholar (though not orthodox in his view of the Trinity). He wrote commentaries on the Book of Daniel and the Book of Revelation and traced the 1260 year reign of the Papal Antichrist from 800-2060. He also interpreted “the king” in Daniel 11:36ff to be the Papacy and believed that “the god of forces” (*mauzzim*) were the patron “saints” and their images that were venerated by the Papal King. Newton traced in his commentary on the Book of Daniel the historical progress/stages of the veneration of the “saints” and martyrs from the reign of Constantine in great detail, of which I can only give a brief summary: (1) the influx of pagans into the church at the time of Constantine with the veneration of their gods and images; (2) the celebration of the birthdays of the martyrs at their tombs; (3) the practice of making the tombs of the martyrs holy places where

prayers were offered to them; (4) the attributing to the martyrs a mediatorial and intercessory function in heaven for living Christians; (5) the calling upon the martyrs (through their images and relics) as protectors, patrons, and defenders of the living upon earth; (6) the venerating as acts of worship the relics of the martyrs (bones, or personal property) and then the images of the martyrs. This gradual process of the veneration of the “saints” and martyrs and of their relics and images did not happen overnight, but slowly grew over time until it was accepted by both the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Church of Rome at Nicaea II in 787.

4. This had not always been the practice of the Church; for the Synod of Elvira (305) forbade the use of pictures (and by extension) images to be used in worship. Canon 36 states, “There shall be no pictures in the church, lest what is worshipped and adored should be depicted on the walls.”

5. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* states, The Christian veneration of images is not contrary to the first commandment which proscribes idols. Indeed, “the honor rendered to an image passes to its prototype,” and “whoever venerates an image venerates the person portrayed in it” (2132).

6. But as we shall see in a future sermon, this is no different from the explanation of pagan/heathens who likewise said they did not pray to the image of the god, but through the image to the god it represented. If what the pagans were doing was idolatry, so is the practice of venerating the “saints” and their images. It is a violation of the Second Commandment in Exodus 20:4-6 (which we will look at more closely next Lord’s Day—God willing).

7. Idolatry is not simply worshipping a false God (a pagan God—the sun, the moon, or the stars). It may also be claiming to worship the God of the Bible by means of images, pictures, icons, statues (as did the Aaron and the children of Israel in making a golden calf to represent Jehovah). The early church father, Origen (185-253) wrote:

Being taught in the school of Christ, we have rejected all images and statues (*Contra Celsus*, 7:41).

B. Application

1. Idolatry and the corruption of the true religion happen slowly which is why we must not compromise what we believe in order to have ecclesiastical unity for which we pray. Seemingly little changes in doctrine and worship can lead to further departures from the truth. That is why we are not to be innovative in worship. We are not to keep up with the times and make worship “relevant” to each succeeding generation. We are commanded not to move the ancient landmarks of our faithful forefathers (Proverbs 22:28), and we are commanded to walk in the “old paths” of our faithful forefathers (Jeremiah 6:16). Let me illustrate by introducing one small innovation into the Lord’s Supper.

2. We are to honor father and mother (both physical and spiritual), but there is no biblical evidence for venerating those in heaven by praying to them to intercede/mediate for us (Jesus is only Mediator between God and man—1 Timothy 2:5). We honor our faithful forefathers not by making images of them before whom we worship, kissing them, and bowing down before them, but by walking in their footsteps, that as they followed Christ even to death so they have left to us an example to follow them (1 Corinthians 11:1).

3. The essence of idolatry is “Not God’s will, but mine be done.” It is exalting the will of the creature over the will of God, thus making the creature God. Dear ones, when we must have our own will over God’s will, we are led into a more “acceptable” form of idolatry, but it is idolatry (go through the Ten Commandments). The gospel of Jesus Christ is all about changing us from the inside out to declare, “Not my will, but thine be done.” Through the gospel we are forgiven our sin and imputed the perfect righteousness of Christ and granted everlasting life, but also our desire and will are changed by the power of Christ to want to do His will rather than rebel against our precious Savior and Lord. That’s the evidence that we are truly trusting in Christ as Savior and Lord.