

I. THE ESCHATOLOGICAL FIRE OF TESTING

A. The hour of testing for the earth

Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come on the whole world to test the inhabitants of the earth. (Re 3:10 NIV)

In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. (1Pe 1:6-7 NIV)

Those on the rocky ground are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away. (Lk 8:13 NIV)

B. The Day of disclosure

“For indeed, the day is coming, burning like a furnace, when all the arrogant and everyone who commits wickedness will become stubble. The coming day will consume them,” says the LORD of Hosts, “not leaving them root or branches. (Mal 4:1 HCSB)

- ***on the day when God will judge the secrets of human hearts, according to my gospel through Christ Jesus. (Ro 2:16 NET)***

If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person’s work. If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved—even though only as one escaping through the flames. (1 Co 3:12–15 NIV)

II. THE CONTEXT OF THE BEGINNING AND THE CURSE

A. Original perfection

So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”...God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day. (Ge 1:27–31 NIV)

- ***And the LORD God commanded the man, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.” (Ge 2:16–17 NIV)***

B. The divine discipline

To Adam he said, “Because you listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You must not eat from it,’ “Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.” (Ge 3:17–19 NIV)

You turn people back to dust, saying, “Return to dust, you mortals.”...All our days pass away under your wrath; we finish our years with a moan. Our days may come to seventy years, or eighty, if our strength endures; yet the best of them are but trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass, and we fly away. If only we knew the power of your anger! Your wrath is as great as the fear that is your due. Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom. Relent, LORD! How long will it be? Have compassion on your servants. (Ps 90:3–13 NIV)

C. The hope for restoration

When Lamech had lived 182 years, he had a son. He named him Noah and said, “He will comfort us in the labor and painful toil of our hands caused by the ground the LORD has cursed.” (Ge 5:28–29 NIV)

For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God. (Ro 8:20–21 NIV)

D. The curse and reliant faith upon God

Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the wilderness these forty years, to humble and test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands. He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your ancestors had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD. (Dt 8:2–3 NIV)

Without becoming weak in faith he contemplated his own body, now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah’s womb; yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform. Therefore IT WAS ALSO CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS. (Ro 4:19–22 NASB95)

III. IDOLATRY AND GREED

A. Idolatry and the false gods of the nations

“You shall have no other gods (heb. ‘elohim’) before Me. (Ex 20:3 NASB95)

Make sure there is no man or woman, clan or tribe among you today whose heart turns away from the LORD our God (heb. 'elohim') to go and worship the gods (heb. 'elohim') of those nations; make sure there is no root among you that produces such bitter poison. (Dt 29:18 NIV)

- **For all the gods of the nations are idols, but the LORD (Heb. 'YHWH') made the heavens. (Ps 96:5 NIV)**

B. Idolatry and greed in the NT

Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. (Col 3:5 NIV)

- **for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, (1 Th 1:9 NIV)**

For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a person is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. (Eph 5:5 NIV)

C. Origins of idolatry and greed in the OT

You, Judah, have as many gods as you have towns; and the altars you have set up to burn incense to that shameful god Baal are as many as the streets of Jerusalem.' (Je 11:13 NIV)

- **BAAL Baal, Deity (בַּעַל, ba'al). The Canaanite storm god and bringer of rain. Chief of the Canaanite pantheon: As the storm god and bringer of rain, Baal was recognized as sustaining the fertility of crops, animals, and people.¹**

However, if you do not obey the LORD your God and do not carefully follow all his commands and decrees I am giving you today, all these curses will come on you and overtake you... The sky over your head will be bronze, the ground beneath you iron. The LORD will turn the rain of your country into dust and powder; it will come down from the skies until you are destroyed... Your sons and daughters will be given to another nation, and you will wear out your eyes watching for them day after day, powerless to lift a hand. (Dt 28:15-32 NIV)

IV. THE MARK OF THE BEAST AND THE CULMINATION OF IDOLATRY

A. The great test of allegiance

Because of the signs it was given power to perform on behalf of the first beast, it deceived the inhabitants of the earth. It ordered them to set up an image in honor of the beast who was wounded by the sword and yet lived. The second beast was given power to give breath to the image of the first beast, so that the image could speak and cause all who refused to worship the image to be killed. It also forced all people, great and small, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hands or on

¹ Corduan, W. (2012). Baal. In (J. D. Barry & L. Wentz, Eds.) *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

their foreheads, so that they could not buy or sell unless they had the mark, which is the name of the beast or the number of its name. (Re 13:14–17 NIV)

- A more satisfactory indication of the relationship between ‘mark’ and ‘beast’ would be ‘a mark showing one’s relationship to the beast’ or ‘a mark of loyalty to the beast’ or ‘a mark of the party of the beast.’²

...The whole world was filled with wonder and followed the beast. People worshiped the dragon because he had given authority to the beast, and they also worshiped the beast and asked, “Who is like the beast? Who can wage war against it?” ... It was given power to wage war against God’s holy people and to conquer them. And it was given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation... “If anyone is to go into captivity, into captivity they will go. If anyone is to be killed with the sword, with the sword they will be killed. (cf. Jer. 15:2)” This calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of God’s people. (Re 13:3-10 NIV)

B. Prepared to endure through the present trials

...We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt we had received the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. (2 Co 1:8–9 NIV)

Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. (Jam 1:2-3 NIV)

Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. (1 Pe 4:12 NIV)

² Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains*. New York: United Bible Societies.