

CHAPTER 2

SIGNS OF THE LAST DAYS AND THE COMING OF MESSIAH

Sign 7: Antichrist / Anti-Messiah / Armilus

The advances in science and technology have brought great benefits to many, but also new problems. As international travel, commerce and modern means of communication have shrunk the world into a 'global village', the problems of humanity have also become international ones - drugs, terrorism, spread of weapons of mass destruction, economic crises affecting the whole global economic system, environmental pollution, new diseases, international crime, gulf between rich and poor nations, refugees and asylum and so on.

To try to bring order to all this, we have global institutions being set up, like the IMF, the World Bank, the World Trade Organisation, UNESCO, the International Labour Organisation, the G20, as well as the coming together of nations like the EU, the BRICS countries, ASEAN (East Asia), MERCOSUR (South America). Above all there is the UN, which states that its purpose is 'to maintain inter-national peace and security ... to develop friendly relations among nations ... and to achieve international co-operation in solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural and humanitarian character and to encourage respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion.' (Charter of the UN, Chapter 1, Article 1).

The Bible indicates that at the end of this age there will be a kind of world government out of which one known as the Antichrist or the Beast will arise. There are commentaries on this in both Jewish and Christian writings. Jewish writings refer to this 'anti-Messiah' as Armilus. In the Jewish Encyclopedia, we read:

'Anti-Messiah, legendary opponent of the Messiah and leader of the heathen forces in the battle against the latter which will take place at the end of time. Such a figure, under the name of Armilus, becomes a definite part of Jewish eschatology....[who] will overcome and destroy the Messiah of the house of Joseph and rule over the entire world, but will ultimately be defeated and slain by the Messiah of the line of David.'

(The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia, Vol. I. New York: Universal Jewish Encyclopedia Co., © 1948, p. 337).

Revelation 13 tells us about the Antichrist / Anti-Messiah:

'He was given great authority for 42 months ... And authority was given him over every tribe, tongue and nation ... It was granted to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them. All who dwell on the earth will worship him, whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. If anyone has an ear, let him hear. He who leads into captivity shall go into captivity; he who kills with the sword must be killed with the sword. Here is the patience and the faith of the saints. (Revelation 13.5, 7-10)

Revelation also describes one who works alongside the 'beast,' known as the False Prophet, who will cause people to worship 'the image of the beast.'

The prophetic scriptures indicate that at the time of the end the Antichrist will come to power. The book of Daniel contains an overview of history from Daniel's time down to the Second Coming of the Messiah. According to this prophecy, there would be four empires which would have power over Israel down to the time of the Messiah. This starts with the Babylonian Empire which was in power at the time of Daniel, followed by the Persian Empire, the Greek Empire and the Roman Empire (Daniel 2 and Daniel 7). During the time of the fourth Empire (the Roman Empire) the Messiah would come and be 'cut off' (die a violent death) 'but not for himself' (not for his own sins but for the sins of others) before the destruction of the Temple by the Romans in 70CE (Daniel 9.26).

Daniel prophesied that there would arise from 'this kingdom' (i.e. the Roman Empire), an entity which would be connected to it, but different from it (Daniel 7.24). Daniel prophesies that out of this kingdom would come the end time leader who is described as :

'a little horn ... speaking pompous words' (Daniel 7.8);

'a stern faced king who understands sinister schemes' (Daniel 8.23);

and 'the prince who is to come' (Daniel 9.26).

This one will persecute 'the saints of the Most High' (Daniel 7.25) and will also make some kind of covenant / treaty with many in Israel for 'one week' (7 years), a covenant which he will break half way through (Daniel 9.27).

His identity is further revealed in the New Testament book of Revelation, where he is called the Beast who persecutes the saints and brings in the 'abomination of desolation' (Daniel 11.31, Matthew 24.15-31, Revelation 13). The Book of Revelation, written in the days of the persecution of Christianity by the Roman Empire (Daniel's fourth beast), describes a future beast, whose leader will be given power by 'ten kings' (Revelation 17.10-13). Revelation implies that the Beast or Antichrist will arise out of some kind of revived Roman Empire (Revelation 17.9-11). His rule will be shattered by the Second Coming of Yeshua in power and glory at the end of this age.

There have been many attempts to identify the Antichrist throughout history. At the time of the Reformation the Protestant reformers said the Pope is the Antichrist, a belief still held by some Protestant Christians. Others believe that he will be a political leader who will arise out of the European Union, which is seen as the 'revived Roman Empire'. Significantly, the European Union was set in motion by the 'Treaty of Rome' and is situated in much of the area of the Roman Empire. A sculpture of Europa (a woman riding a bull) stands outside the European Commission building in Brussels. In Revelation 17, we read of the 'woman riding the beast' in reference to the Antichrist.

Another interpretation is that the Antichrist is an Islamic leader who will arise in the Middle East and bring together the Muslim nations in the Caliphate under Sharia law. This is actually the goal of Islamist terrorists who have taken over parts of Syria and Iraq. Significantly the eastern part of the Roman Empire had its capital in Constantinople (modern Istanbul) and this region is now Islamic (apart from Israel which, as we have seen, is the eye of the storm in the Islamic Jihad and the scene for the final battle of this age).

A further interpretation is that the Antichrist is a truly global leader who is given power through the UN as a result of a global crisis, which calls for a global government to manage the planet. Today we see many signs of globalisation bringing the nations together. There are many people saying the world needs some kind of global government to resolve all these problems. In order to deal with global problems, we already see the growth of global institutions – the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, Interpol,

International bodies for refugees, human rights, the environment etc. We also see blocs of nations emerging, the most advanced of which is the European Union. World leaders come together in the G20 which describes itself as the ‘global forum for forging global economic cooperation.’ We also have the United Nations, which brings all nations together in a world forum. We also have the development of technology, bringing in the possibility of the kind of control of people described in Revelation 13 and which we looked at in Sign 6.

We do not yet see the Antichrist in his position of power. However, at the moment the world is on a knife-edge with all kinds of calamities threatening, especially in the Middle East. At some stage in the future something will happen to tip us over the edge and unleash the events of the Great Tribulation on the earth. When this happens, the Antichrist will ride onto the world stage and take up his position of power and bring in the final catastrophe of this age.

According to the Book of Revelation, the final conflict which the Antichrist and the False Prophet will bring about will take place in Israel:

‘And they gathered them together to the place called in Hebrew, Armageddon.’ (Revelation 16.16)

This corresponds to a number of passages in the Hebrew prophets, notably Joel 3, Zechariah 12-14.

At that time, the Lord will come with all the power of God at His disposal to bring an end to the conflict:

‘Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself. He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses. Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written:

KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS

... And I saw the beast, the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army. Then the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who worked signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image. These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone. And the rest were killed with the sword which proceeded from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse. And all the birds were filled with their flesh.'
(Revelation 19.11-21)

This will be the end of the war and the beginning of the time of peace on earth, when the Messiah Yeshua will reign from Jerusalem, as prophesied in Isaiah 2, and when nations will destroy their weapons and not learn war any more. In Chapter 4 we will look at what the Bible says will happen in the time of Messiah's reign on earth.

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