

6.

WAR ON THE SAINTS

At the very bottom of the Antichrist's agenda (or perhaps I should say the top) is the issue of worship. His contention with the rest of the world is, in the end, all about religion. It is a question of who will be worshiped, who will be the god (or God) of this world.

This struggle is really an earthly manifestation of the spiritual battle which is going on in the heavens. It is a contest between God and the devil, between light and darkness, between truth and the lie. The Antichrist himself is, in fact, simply a pawn in this deadly serious game. The people of God, who are called "the saints" in the prophetic word, also play an important role.

As part of this struggle, a war begins. It is called a "war on the saints." Although this battle has been going on all through the ages, the end-times manifestation of it seems to begin around the time in which Satan is thrown out of heaven to the earth (Rev 12:9). He has just lost

his foothold in the heavens. The only place he has left is the earth. So, he will try to fully assert his authority over it.

The way he can do this is by eliminating all people who do not worship him. In order to demonstrate to the universe that he is the rightful ruler of this planet, he must cause all the inhabitants to accept his rule. Consequently, his goal will be to rid the globe of Christians and Jews alike who won't submit to him.

The Antichrist, because his heart is under the control of Satan, will also be promoting this eradication program. He too will be full of hatred toward God's people along with anything and everything which is labeled "Christian."

Just as Haman in the book of Ruth determined to destroy God's people and as Hitler had a hatred for the Jews, so the Antichrist will try to exterminate both believers and Jews. With time, it seems he will adopt a philosophy of "convert or die." Although many of its adherents try to deny this, the religion of Islam has often used such tactics before.

As the Antichrist's power and influence grow, he begins to think very highly of himself. His ego grows alongside of his successes. It is this writer's belief that he will gradually modify Islam to suit his own purposes. If so, as we have already pointed out, he will not be the first one to do so. Over time, he himself will want to

be seen as a kind of supernatural savior. He will begin to demand worship of himself along with the dragon. Satan will put his power behind this surge to the top. This will be a substantial amount of power. The Antichrist's new buddy, the false Prophet, will also lend a hand in urging the world to worship the beast.

This new Antichrist religion seems to reach a peak with the construction of a large image which resembles the Beast. The second beast, the false Prophet, is granted power to do miracles with this image. He can make it speak (Rev 13:15). One of things that this talking image says is that everyone who does not worship the Beast should be put to death.

Of course, any believer in Jesus Christ will not want to be a worshiper of the Beast. Consequently, he will soon be looking death in the face. So we see that not only will the Antichrist destroy Babylon, but he will also begin a campaign to rid the world as a whole of real Christians.

This period of persecution will be a terrible time for believers. It will be a time of "...great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be" (Mt 24:21). It may also be the "time of Jacob's trouble" mentioned in Jeremiah 30:7. Possibly this refers to the Jews also being persecuted. This will be a time of war. But it will not be a war in the usual sense. Instead, the

Antichrist will wage a one-sided war against believers.

We read that the "...horn was making war against the saints, and prevailing against them" (Dan 7:21). We also are told that he: "...shall persecute the saints of the Most High" and that "...the saints shall be given into his hand for a time and times and half a time" (Dan 7:25).

In the book of Revelation it is reaffirmed that God permits the beast to prevail against His people for a time. Verse 7 of chapter 13 reads: "And it was granted to him [by God] to make war with the saints and to overcome them."

Not only are these faithful believers persecuted, but they are frequently put to death. Significantly, one of the principal methods which the Beast will use to kill these Christians is beheading.

In Revelation chapter 20, verse 4 John sees an awesome sight. "And I saw the souls of those who had been *beheaded* for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands." I'm sure all readers know that one of the main ways that the Muslim radicals of our time use to kill their captives is beheading.

So we see that there is coming to this earth a tremendous slaughter of believers. It is so pervasive it is called a "war." How might this

work? Here again, we will indulge in some speculation as we seek answers.

As we have discussed, after the Antichrist consolidates his power and his control over the oil fields, he then would be in a position to dictate his policies to the rest of the world. But what are his policies? Is it job creation? Is it universal health care, or more retirement benefits? Is it some new plan to stimulate the economy? No! Instead his agenda is principally religious. He will demand that the world convert to his new brand of Islam.

Some may think that this religious preoccupation of the Antichrist is ridiculous. Much of the world today is very humanistic and has little orientation toward worship or God. But you must understand, for a religious fanatic, this is everything. The most important thing for such a person is his religion. Everything else is secondary.

Also, for these fanatics, conversion of the world to their way of thinking is paramount. It may also be hard for many readers to imagine that suddenly, modern, sophisticated men and women will start worshiping a new god. This possibility may seem extremely remote. How could much of the world suddenly be convinced to convert?

As time progresses, this will be the Antichrist's position, worship or die. This may seem a little ridiculous to you readers but it

does not to him. It will not seem trite to you either when it is happening. If anyone refuses to cooperate with his program, then off with his head.

Some have argued that Osama or someone like him could never be the Antichrist. They reason that such a person could never become universally popular and therefore no one would worship him. But the Antichrist will not be worshiped by most because he becomes popular. In fact, we have seen that he will not be well liked.

But death is a strong persuader. When men and women are faced with the option of conversion or death, they can suddenly become religious. This method of securing converts is time tested. It really works. When it becomes a question of losing your life or bending your knee, you will be amazed by how many people will suddenly “see the light.”

THE IMPACT OF OIL

We have guessed that the nations will have to go along with the Antichrist’s new demands because if they don’t they won’t receive oil. Not only won’t they receive oil which they desperately need to keep their society functioning or even keep on living, but they might be subject to terrorist attacks using weapons of mass destruction. Such attacks could prove to be very

powerful persuaders. The amount of pressure which could be applied will be enormous.

Truthfully, the economies of this world are all very fragile. They depend upon transportation, the flow of imports, exports, etc. to continue functioning. If this is disrupted, economic disaster would quickly follow. Unemployment, default on national debt, riots and demonstrations by angry citizens, shortages of food and many other things could soon come to pass. So, unless these countries are willing to go to war with the Antichrist to stop his program, they will have to go along.

Some may reasonably ask, "Why don't these other nations just attack the Antichrist and his nations to stop all this worship nonsense." Well, there are very few nations in this world which have standing armies large enough, along with the equipment necessary, to do the job.

At this writing, the U.S. is trying to subdue Iraq with very limited success and she is the acknowledged superpower of the world. The European nations do not have large militaries. Japan also does not. If the Antichrist has nuclear weapons, this would serve to deter any invaders. The truth is that the rest of the world apart from the U.S. is not well positioned militarily to stop the schemes of the Antichrist.

Every government of the world will be required to participate in this worship. They

and their populations will have to worship the dragon, the Beast and his image. If not, no oil. This may seem strange to you, but it could soon become very real.

Think about this for a moment. If your average person were required to perform a little religious duty to continue to be able to work, pay his bills and even eat, would he do it? Of course he would! If his family would starve on the streets unless he did a little genuflecting, well that would be a small price to pay.

You must understand the desperate situation in which these populations will find themselves. At first, no doubt, the oil reserves of some nations would carry them along. Perhaps their alternative fuels would hold them for a little while longer. It is possible that nations such as the United States, if they could not get Middle East oil, would pressure other countries such as Mexico or Venezuela to make up the difference.

But if these other nations were subject to threats of terrorist attacks with nuclear weapons, would they ship oil or protect themselves? Therefore, it would be quite easy for the situation in nations who depend on oil to become critical.

Most economies, except the most primitive ones, are completely dependent on oil. If you cannot fill up the tank of your car, you cannot work, you cannot buy food. Soon you won't be

able to pay your mortgage or bills. Without enough oil, rationing would be mandatory and thus many individuals would not have enough. Consequently, the citizens of these nations would begin pressuring their respective governments to give in a little.

A general outcry would be heard to do whatever is necessary to restore the flow of oil and therefore their survival. When people become pinched financially because their governments, influenced by those stubborn Christians, will not go along with the Antichrist's agenda, they will become vocal and enraged.

Everyone desperately needs oil. So, when push comes to shove, most people will do whatever it takes to preserve their lifestyles. They will pressure their leaders to make some concessions so that they can continue to live at the level to which they have become accustomed. The respective governments of these countries will be forced to cooperate.

THE ANTICHRIST RELIGION

I think it is possible that the Antichrist will offer his religion in a package which, at least in the beginning, will offer the minimum of offense to other religions. He may even seem to be a peacemaker, or unifier of the world. With the power of Satan backing it, there will certainly be a great amount of deception involved in

his program. With this extremely powerful spiritual force behind him, he will succeed in deceiving many into thinking that his way is some sort of solution or even that he is right.

This is referred to in the Bible as “all unrighteous deception” (II Thess 2:10). Incredibly, God actually assists the Antichrist with his deception. We read: “And for this reason God will send them [the unrighteous] strong delusion that they should believe the lie” (II Thess 2:11).

Here we find an unbeatable combination. The devil puts his power behind this new religion. The Bible calls this “all...deception.” Then God aids this process by sending “strong delusion” on the non-Christians. God actually anoints people to be deceived by the Antichrist’s religion! Will this new religion succeed? Will people go along? You can count on it!

Many suppose that what people believe is based upon their being convinced of some facts. But this is not the case. People believe something because they want to believe it. They allow themselves to be “convinced” because it harmonizes with what they really want. Belief is really a question of choice.

If then the incentive to believe is very strong, many will allow themselves to be convinced. When the financial impact begins to be felt, many will begin to rethink their ideas and opinions.

The pressure from the Antichrist upon the nations to conform to his religion will not diminish. Once a few concessions have been made, he will probably demand more and more. Once a foothold has been gained and these nations have begun to compromise and accede to his demands, he will probably begin to exact even more cooperation.

It is possible that the first of such demands made upon nations in order to continue receiving oil might be to withdraw recognition of Israel as a nation. Next they might be required to declare that Allah is really the same God as the Jewish and Christian God. The Antichrist might insist that these are just different names for the same God.

Perhaps for many, this might seem to be a small concession to make to continue to live and work as usual. Perhaps with time, people would be required to confess that Allah is the true God and that Mohammed/Osama? is his prophet. It is probable that the demands will escalate as the nations give in more and more.

Many Christians in the "West" today have not had much experience dealing with Muslims and their religious ideas. Islamic teachings concerning Abraham and Ishmael; about Christ being merely a prophet; the claim that the Jews and Christians have changed the scriptures and many other things will be new to them when the Antichrist emerges.

Since they have never heard these ideas before, many young and inexperienced believers are going to find themselves in a spiritual battle. It is without a doubt that the Antichrist will present his religion in a way which will sound appealing, benign and attractive. It is possible that his subtlety will seduce many away from their true faith, especially when their financial well-being is also involved.

Eventually, this Antichrist religion will arrive at the point where everyone must worship him and his image. They must worship or be put to death. If it comes to "believe or die" you will be amazed at how many believers will suddenly appear. As we have already mentioned, when it comes down to a decision of life or death, converts become easy to get.

ARE YOU PREPARED TO DIE?

It is here that real Christians will enter into the battle. They will be in a battle for their souls. They will look death in the face. Then they will have to make a decision. Will they compromise a little? Will they simply go along and hope that God will forgive them later? Or will they willingly sacrifice their lives in order to remain faithful to Jesus?

It is probable that many will make some mistakes here. The thought is unrealistic that every Christian will suddenly make the right

choices when many have been making wrong choices about many things for years. The scriptures seem to indicate this where we read that "...some of those of understanding shall fall" (Dan 11:35). This could mean that some believers, who should know better, will make some wrong decisions. God allows their mistakes for a purpose. It is to "...refine them, purge them, and make them white" (Dan 11:35).

If some take some wrong actions and make wrong decisions during this time, as the power of the Antichrist grows and his agenda becomes evident, hopefully they will realize their error. Their consciences will torment them. Yet God will use their mistakes, as He does with our errors today, to chastise and correct them.

The coming time of trouble will be a time of testing of our faith, of our love for one another and of our commitment to Jesus. It will reveal just where our hearts really are. It will bring to the surface any and all secret loves for other things besides our Savior.

God is going to allow this coming persecution or "tribulation" for a good reason. It will be a method to help His church become purified. Today, much of the Christian church is lukewarm and half-hearted. Many believers are pursuing wealth, comfort, entertainment, pleasure and all the things which this world has to offer. Many are already worshipping whatever will bring them these earthly things.

However, the coming time of trouble will change all that. It will test and try the faith and commitment of every believer. It will be a time of pressure, stress and difficulty. It will be like a very hot fire, such as is used to refine gold and silver, only God will use it to purify His church. All of us would do well to prepare our hearts today for this coming time of trial (Rev 3:10).