

## Why Antichrist Must Appear First

**Author:** Larry W. Wilson

The rumor mill among Christians in Paul's day worked very well - perhaps too well. One persistent rumor that went round and round during the first 20 years of the church's existence was alleged sightings of Jesus. The reader has to understand that communication in those days between distant places was very slow and subject to distortion.

So, rumors originating from Jerusalem about a "Jesus sighting" could have taken several weeks to reach Thessalonica with a high probability of being enhanced by a dozen people along the way. Further, the only way to verify whether a rumor was fact or fiction was to travel to Jerusalem, and that was out of the question because of time and effort. Consequently, correcting a rumor was practically impossible.

Add to this dilemma the vacuum produced by the persecution of early Christians, and any word concerning a possible fulfillment of Christ's words regarding His return for His followers became "truth."

Finally, the apostle Paul addressed this issue and brought the rumors about the appearing of Jesus to an end once and for all. Paul stated that Jesus would not return to Earth *until* two events occurred: **"Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers, not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report or letter supposed to have come from us, saying that the day of the Lord has already come. Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God."** (2 Thessalonians 2:1-4)

### Until the Rebellion Occurs

The awesome significance of the phrase "until *the* rebellion occurs" is poorly understood by many people. The rebellion that Paul is referring to is the forthcoming wholesale rejection of the gospel by the vast majority of Earth's inhabitants. When the Great Tribulation begins, God will empower 144,000 men and women in every quadrant of Earth. These will speak for God and proclaim three clarion messages (described in Revelation 14).

The 144,000 will proclaim, "Submit to God and comply with His commandments"; "Do not submit to the authority of Babylon"; and "If any man submits to the authority of the Antichrist, he will be tortured to death with burning sulfur." (Revelation 14:10)

Jesus has made it clear: **"And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come."** (Matthew 24:14) Consider this: The events associated with the Great Tribulation provide the only scenario in which the

gospel can be preached throughout the whole world as a testimony for salvation.

Many church groups are doing their best to broadcast their version of the gospel, but when Jesus was looking 2,000 years into the future, He was not speaking of a denominationally oriented broadcast of the gospel on radio and TV. Instead, He was referring to a penetrating presentation of the gospel that transcends every religious barrier. At this moment in time, three billion people have not even heard of Jesus Christ! Even worse, those people who may have heard of Jesus, do not really understand their need for Jesus.

For example, the devout Hindu does not thoughtfully consider the gospel presented by a devout Baptist. Nor does a devout Church of Christ member thoughtfully consider a religious message presented by a devout Moslem. Even among Christians, a devout Catholic does not thoughtfully consider the gospel presented by a Protestant, etc. The problem is that devoutly religious people cannot discuss differing "gospels" because their paradigms about God have little, if anything, in common.

So, broadcasting the gospel, in the manner that is being done today, is the best thing that can be done right now. But, understand that broadcasting the gospel to the whole world (as Trinity Broadcasting Network and many religious groups claim to do) is no substitute for what God is about to do.

God will open the heart and mind of every sincere person with displays of incredible power and authority by sending judgments upon the Earth. God will stop the world in its tracks with a global earthquake, meteoric showers of burning hail, two asteroid impacts and great darkness. This will get everyone's full attention so that *His* eternal gospel can be delivered by the 144,000 and thoughtfully considered by all people, regardless of religious background!

In this setting, the rebellion that Paul speaks about comes into sharp focus. As the truth about God's will (*the* gospel) is being forcefully and clearly set before every person on Earth, a decision will be required. The forces of Babylon (the crisis one world government that forms in response to God's judgments) will be aligned against *the* gospel. Decisions made for God during the Tribulation will not be easy. Much of the world's population will reject the truth about God and will stand in direct opposition to the clearest evidences of truth.

Notice what Paul says about the wicked: ". . . **They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness.**" (2 Thessalonians 2:10-12)

Notice: The wicked will perish because they *refused* to love the truth and be saved. God does not hold a person accountable for something they do not understand. God does hold a person responsible when the Holy Spirit brings conviction about truth and truth is rejected.

In other words, how can we say that a person has refused the gospel until he *hears and correctly understands* the terms and conditions of the gospel within his own religious reality. For example, how can the Catholic condemn the Hindu when the Hindu cannot honestly see things

in the same way the Catholic does, or the Hindu condemn a Baptist because the Baptist cannot honestly see things the same way he does.

In His great mercy, when God initiates the Great Tribulation, He will open every mind for a short season to thoughtfully consider the truth about His will. Every person will be forced, under dire circumstances, to give due consideration to the terms and conditions of His salvation – every person will understand the consequences of refusing to believe the truth. Then, the end will come, just as Jesus predicted, because every person will make their decision for or against the gospel.

## God Sends a Powerful Delusion

Paul is very specific about the basis for the appearing of the man of sin (the Antichrist). He wrote: "For **this reason** God sends them a powerful delusion." What reason is Paul referring to? *When a person rejects the Holy Spirit's strongest influence that can be exerted within the soul to submit to the will of God and rejects the clearest evidences of truth that God can set before him, God can do nothing further to save that person!*

This is amazing, so pay attention to how this unfolds during the Great Tribulation: The Holy Spirit will be poured out on every person, good and bad, (Joel 2:28) stirring the soul of every person in a manner never seen before. Further, the global devastations of God's wrath (the first four trumpets of Revelation 8) will cause everyone to consider the presence of the Almighty and the principles that govern His Kingdom during a short period of time.

The 144,000 will clearly and powerfully present the terms and conditions of salvation. As Babylon inflicts persecution, everyone *will be forced to make* a decision to either submit to God's truth or rebel against it. Unfortunately, most of the world will reject the terms and conditions of salvation, crumble under the pressure of persecution and side with Babylon. This wholesale rebellion produces the global rebellion that Paul predicts.

When God has done about all He can to save souls, the Antichrist will be released from his spiritual dungeon to accomplish his heart's desire. God will allow the Antichrist to have great miracle working powers so that those who delight in wickedness will be quickly deceived and thus destroyed.

## A Six-Step Process

God always follows a consistent pattern when dealing with mankind. This pattern can be seen clearly as God dealt with ancient Israel. There is a process which is illuminated in the Old Testament that the reader needs to be aware of:

1. When a group of people becomes corrupt and degenerate, God sends warnings through His servants, the prophets.
2. History indicates that typically the degenerate group rejects God's messenger and His message.

3. God responds by sending a destroyer.
4. Then, after the dust settles, God begins the process of restoration.
5. When the destroyer becomes proud and arrogant, then God brings destruction upon the destroyer.
6. It is God's ultimate purpose to bring about everlasting life and joy in an Earth made new.

Notice how this six-step scenario played out in ancient Israel:

#### North

1. The ten northern tribes of Israel became corrupt and degenerate. God sent warnings of reproof and correction through eight prophets.
2. Israel rejected God's message and His messengers.
3. God sent the king of Assyria as "His club of wrath" to destroy Israel in 722 B.C. (Isaiah 10:5)

#### South

1. The southern two tribes of Judah became corrupt and degenerate. God sent warnings of reproof and correction through five prophets.
2. Israel rejected God's message and His messengers.
3. God sent the king of Babylon as "His club of wrath" to destroy Jerusalem by 586 B.C. (Jeremiah 25:9; 27:6)

#### Both

1. God begins the process of restoring His people to their homeland (decrees to restore and rebuild Jerusalem).
2. God destroys the destroyers, i.e., the kings of Egypt, Assyria and Babylon. (See Isaiah 10 and Jeremiah 25, 43, 50.)
3. God's plan was to ultimately bring about everlasting life and joy. (Isaiah 65)

This six-step process explains the fall of Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Grecia, Rome and many empires down through the course of history. These six steps are consistent, even as we review the destruction of Earth during Noah's day or the divine destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. God is consistent. He is not willing that anyone should perish, but when decadence and degeneracy reach a point of no return, God steps in by sending a destroyer or destruction.

## At the End Time

This six-step process is also consistent as events unfold during the Great Tribulation. Especially notice how the destroyer, the agent of God's wrath, is ultimately destroyed:

1. At the present time, the world and all its religious systems are corrupt and degenerate.

Each generation, more degenerate than the last, corrupts God's truth with man-made ideas and doctrines, until God's will can hardly be recognized.

2. Religion is at a stalemate – the religious diversity of the world prevents one man from proving the superiority of his religion over that of another man.
3. God will devastate the world with judgments so that everyone will be able to discern the truth and intelligently consider the terms and conditions of *the* eternal gospel. Because no denomination has all the truth, God's servants, 144,000 people from all walks of life, will speak for Him during the Great Tribulation.
4. After a period of about two years, when most of the world has rebelled against the gospel, God will send Lucifer, the destroyer. Lucifer (Satan) is the Antichrist and is identified in many Bible texts, so we will not be deceived. He is known as "the king out of the North, the stern faced king." (Daniel 8) He is also described in Rev 13 as the beast having two horns like the Lamb. In 2 The 2, he is identified as the Man of Sin who claims to be God. In Greek and Hebrew, the devil's name means the same thing, the "destroyer." (Revelation 9:11)

Lucifer is the *angel king* of the abyss and he will be released from the spiritual realm to physically appear before the human race as a great delusion. Remember, the wicked perish because they refused to love the truth and be saved. Therefore, God sends a strong delusion – Lucifer appearing in the flesh – and those who refuse to believe God's truth will believe Lucifer's lies and be condemned.

5. After five months of gross deception, the devil will take control of Earth. (Revelation 9:1-11) God turns the whole world over to the devil and his angels, and they will kill one-third of mankind to gain complete dominion over Earth. (Rev 9:13-21) At that time, the mark of the beast (a tattoo) will be implemented. Only the faithful, those people who have learned to rely on God's sustaining strength, will be able to refuse the mark of the beast.
6. At the Second Coming, the devil and his forces, as well as the wicked of Earth who join their ranks, will be destroyed. Thus, the "destroyer" will be destroyed. After the 1,000 years have expired, God will create a new Heaven and a new Earth for His children, and everlasting life and joy will prevail.

## Summary

The Antichrist is coming and he is sent to destroy all people who rebel against the Sovereign God of Heaven and Earth. God sent Shalmaneser V as His agent of wrath to destroy Israel's ten tribes in 722 B.C. (Isaiah 10) and He used Nebuchadnezzar as "His servant" to destroy Egypt and Jerusalem by 586 B.C. (Jeremiah 25) God also used Cyrus and Darius to destroy the pomp of Belshazzar, king of Babylon (Isaiah 45).

In a consistent manner, during the Great Tribulation, God will send a great king with his deadly forces to destroy a large number of rebels upon Earth. (Revelation 9:13-21) This great king will be none other than Lucifer, the devil, the Antichrist. Scripture teaches that God brings each destroyer to an end (Daniel 4:17) and yes, the Antichrist will also be brought to a fatal end – and not by human power! (Daniel 8:25; 2 Thessalonians 2:8; Revelation 19:19-21)

One last point. As I understand Rev, more than 50% of Earth's population will perish before

Christ appears: 1.5 billion will be destroyed by the first four trumpet judgments and 1.5 billion will be destroyed by Lucifer and his angels. These figures do not include many martyrs for Christ's sake. (Revelation 6:9-11)

The forthcoming carnage is beyond comprehension. The battle between good and evil will be a fight to the finish, but Jesus Christ will triumph for He has overcome the world and sin! Even more, as soldiers of the cross, we have this assurance from the Captain of Hosts: **"If anyone is to go into captivity, into captivity he will go. If anyone is to be killed with the sword, with the sword he will be killed. This calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of the saints."** (Revelation 13:10)

In other words, our one and only concern should be to stand firm in Christ and not lose our hope or faith. God knows what He is doing and the role He has for each of us in days to come. We will celebrate the grandest victory with Him and enjoy the greatest homecoming ever seen.

Even if we must perish in the line of duty during the Great Tribulation, the sleep will be sweet, a release from the noise and din of battle. John wrote, **"Then I heard a voice from heaven say, 'Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.' 'Yes,' says the Spirit, they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them."** (Revelation 14:13)

A stupendous crisis is before us. Soon, our faith in God will be severely tested. My prayer is that the Lord will give us experiences today that will purify our faith and deepen our love and our confidence in Him. When the King of Glory finally appears, may we hear the words, "Well done good and faithful servants . . ."