

Horrors on the Horizon

Mark 14:14 – 27

Proposition: When the world goes after the anti-Christ in worship, God goes after the world in wrath.

Application: Be anchored in the Word of God to overcome deception. Be filled with His Spirit to overcome the world.

A tourist was viewing the sites of Lake Como in Northern Italy and came to a breath-taking scene of a castle called Villa Asconiti. Feeling brave, he pushed open the gate and entered. Everything was stunning. Flowers were blooming. Shrubs were vivid green and pruned to precision. Over to the side, the tourist noticed a gardener on his hands and knees clipping nearly every blade of grass. The man asked, *“May I look at the gardens?”* The gardener replied, *“Of course! Come in. I am glad to have a guest.”* The man toured the grounds and asked the gardener, *“Is the owner here today?”* The gardener replied, *“Oh no. He’s away.”* *“When was the last time you saw him?”* the tourist asked. *“About twelve years ago,”* said the gardener. *“Twelve years ago? This place has been empty for twelve years. Who tells you what to do?”* asked the tourist. The gardener explained that the owner had an agent in Milan. *“Do you ever see him?”* asked the tourist. *“Never, he just sends me the orders.”* The tourist could not believe his ears. *“But you have everything so beautiful. It looks like you are expecting him tomorrow.”* The gardener replied, *“Today sir. I expect him to come at any time – perhaps today.”* In the same way Jesus promised us that He will return at any time. Either in the near future or far future, days will come which will be the best of times and the worst of times. The worst of times because they will be wars, plagues, persecutions, such as the world has never known. The best of times because those days will usher in the return of the Lord Jesus to save His people and bring about His kingdom. That's our hope. And that is our subject this morning, as we explore the events of history leading up to the return of the Lord Jesus.

Just as there are three stages in the birth of a child - pregnancy, labour and delivery - so there are three stages leading up to the return of Christ Jesus. The pregnancy stage of history began with the destruction of the temple and will last until the building of the third temple. During this time, we will see an increase in frequency and intensity of deception, wars, natural disasters, persecution, and the proclamation of the Gospel.

Pregnancy leads to labour – or birth pangs. In this portion of Mark 13 we are looking at the birth pangs – the tribulation period which ends with the return of the Messiah. We prepare for the Lord’s return not by setting dates but by discerning the times. To discern the events of prophecy

we must know the context of a passage. If we neglect the context of Scripture, we misinterpret the times we are in. The context of Mark 13 is centered around Israel, in the city of Jerusalem and particularly in the temple. What is the purpose of the tribulation? 1. To teach us that when a Christ-rejecting world goes after the anti-Christ in worship, God pours out His wrath on the world (Rom 1:18, 21, 23; Rev 9:20, 21). 2. To teach us that the carnage of the tribulation will bring about the salvation of Israel (Jer 30:7; Dan 12:1b; Zech 12:9, 10).

Just as a child is born after labour pains, so the Messianic kingdom is born after the seven-year tribulation that precedes it.

The purpose of the tribulation is to punish a Christ rejecting world and prepare Israel for the return of her Messiah. The setting for this passage is the second half of the seven-year tribulation age. During the first half of the tribulation the world welcomes the anti-christ, a world leader who brings peace in the Middle East as he signs a treaty with Israel. People around the globe will rejoice over this “*peace and safety*” treaty (1 Thess 5:2, 3). During this season of peace and safety, Israel rebuilds the third temple and restores the sacrifices. Three and a half years into the tribulation the anti-christ will renege on the peace treaty he made with Israel and will put a stop to the sacrifices (Dan 9:27; 12:11).

I. The Rise of the Anti-christ (13:14 – 23)

1. Declaration (14a): With the consent of the people the anti-christ enters the temple, takes his seat in the holy place, and with signs and wonders, deceives the masses into believing he is the messiah. The worship of anti-christ is idolatry in its most despicable form. This defiance is an *abomination* to God. It is an object of disgust to Him and triggers an outbreak of His wrath. When the world goes after the anti-christ in worship, God goes after the world in wrath. A world that esteems the anti-christ more than the Lord Jesus Christ is a world under the wrath of God (2 Thess 2:3, 4).

Abomination triggers tribulation: The abomination will trigger the worst tribulation the world has ever seen. In the 20th century, the Communist revolution in China under Mao Zedong was responsible for over 60 million deaths. The communist revolution in Russia under Josef Stalin was responsible for over 40 million deaths. Under Hitler’s fascist regime 30 million people died. And yet the abomination in the holy place will cause carnage that exceeds anything we have seen until now. It will be an outpouring of God’s wrath on a world that willfully worships the anti-christ. If this period lasted more than seven years, there would be no survivors. But it is God’s will that His elect survive (Mark 13:20). It is God’s will that those who know the Lord Jesus find Him to be a refuge. For the sake of tribulation believers, God will allow it to last only seven years.

Israel must flee for safety (14b – 18): After the broken peace treaty, followed by the worship of the anti-christ, then soon after Jerusalem will be hemmed in by armies (Luke 21:20). And so, Israelis must flee for safety. Notice in 13:14 it says ***when you see*** – it does not say ***when you hear***. Unless people are in the temple region how will they see the anti-christ worshipped in the temple? Items this temple will have that no former temple in Jerusalem ever had, are video cameras. People will be sitting on the roofs of their houses cooling off from the heat of the day, watching the nightly news on their smart phones. They will see images of the anti-christ displaying signs and wonders and declaring himself to be messiah. When Israelis see this, they are to take off as fast as they can because soon after Jerusalem will be enclosed by armies.

Israel must flee in haste, without hindrance: Houses in the Middle East have stairs on the outside in order to get up on the flat roofs. Upon seeing the abomination, people are to flee from their roof tops in haste and not to go into their house to retrieve any items. Hauling their goods will only hinder their escape. Delay may prove deadly. Remember Lot's wife. She turned back because she could not detach herself from life in Sodom. She preferred to perish in Sodom than flee for safety (Luke 17:28 – 32). Are we so attached to this world that we cannot part with our stuff in a time of danger? It's impossible to flee in haste if we are attached to the things of this world. This is why the Lord exhorts Israel to pray that they will not be delayed in their escape. Remember those fire drills we had to endure in school? We had to stop whatever we were doing and get out of the building. The *abomination* is Israel's fire drill warning her to flee for safety because desolation is coming.

3. Deception (13:21 – 23)

False prophets preaching a false Christ (13:21, 22): When John the Baptist preached, he pointed to Jesus saying, “*behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.*” When false prophets preach, they will point to a false messiah saying, “*behold the man who brings peace and safety.*” Just as the mass of people followed the Lord Jesus on the testimony of John the Baptist, so crowds of people will go after the false messiah on the testimony of the false prophets.

Sign and wonders authenticate: There have been many anti-christs throughout history. For instance, Sun Myung Moon, the founder of the Unification Church whose followers are known as the Moonies, believed he was the Messiah, that he was sinless and the true representative of God on Earth. He taught in one of his sermons that the 'Hallelujah' chorus is really about him, and people will sing praises to Rev. Moon in heaven. On March 13, 2004, in a Senate office building in Washington, DC. Sun Myung Moon was crowned messiah. The event was witnessed by seventy-one congressmen, two senators, dozens of ambassadors to the United States, and various other figures from religious and political establishments of the nation.

During the tribulation age the anti-christ will be satan incarnate. He will perform authenticating signs and amazing wonders to mimic the Lord Jesus and deceive people. The Lord tells us to take heed.

Take heed (13:23): We take heed firstly, by knowing the Lord Jesus in personal relationship. We become part of the elect by accepting Christ Jesus as our Lord and Saviour. Secondly, we take heed by loving the truth. Signs and wonders are not proof of divine calling. Satan can counterfeit miracles. The final test is always the Word of God. It is when trials and tribulations come upon us, that we are at risk of being deceived. It is then we must be anchored in the Word of God so as to not be mislead with false hopes. If we know the Lord Jesus and love His Word, we will be kept from being deceived (Prov 30:7, 8a).

We have looked at the rise of the anti-christ and the carnage that follows. He declares himself to be god and the world goes after him in worship. When the world goes after the anti-Christ in worship God goes after the world in wrath. After the rise of the anti-christ comes the soon return of the Lord Jesus Christ.

II. The Return of the Lord Jesus Christ (13:24 – 27)

Darkness (13:24 – 27): After an outpouring of God's wrath, after the carnage on earth there will be a cosmic quake, heavenly bodies will be shaken. This is a common theme in Scripture to point out that the Lord is about to return. The world will know when the true Messiah appears on the scene because He will come from heaven with great power and glory (Rev 1:7). He will send out His angels to gather to Himself His chosen ones, believing Jews and Gentiles, scattered throughout the world. He will defeat satan once for all and set up His messianic reign in Jerusalem. The world will become the kingdom of our God and His Christ. Since the context of this passage is Israel, many Bible scholars believe Jesus is speaking about Jewish believers scattered across all parts of the world and re-gathered to their ancestral homeland (Isa 11:12; 43:6, 7; Ezek 36:24 – 28).

The carnage of the tribulation will bring about the salvation of Israel. As we move forward in time, evil will increase. As a Christ rejecting world goes after the anti-christ in worship God goes after the world in wrath. If we live for the Lord Jesus, we will face trials and tribulations. The Lord has given us all the resources we need to endure. He gives us His Word to overcome deception. He gives us His Spirit to overcome the world.