Socio-Economic Environment of the Last Days

by Rick Noorman

In the study of the last days it is very important to consider the first days and the purpose for which God made all things. God created a world in order that He might be glorified by that world. The world was created perfect. It was a very complex world in that only God could truly understand it; yet it was so simple in that everything revolved around God and was in harmony with Him. He, as authority, was the head of the institutions of state, of the church, and of society in general. There was really no economic system in that man was always satisfied and he could not, through any transactions, become better off, even though he was persuaded that this was possible.

This very world which God had created soon tore itself loose from Him and refused to submit to the simple harmony which God had instituted. Man fell and began to develop that world without God. Even though man has rejected God, God still allows him to reign over the creation and develop it to its full extent. As this development occurs we see with it the signs of the second coming of Christ. It is these signs that we are interested in today, especially as they occur in the social and economic environments of history.

I would like to divide this paper into four parts. First, I would like to look at three pertinent passages of scripture. Second, we will look at the social goal of the Antichrist. Third, we should look at the economic goal of the Antichrist. Fourth, we will discuss the implications of these things for the teaching of God's children.

THREE PERTINENT PASSAGES OF SCRIPTURE

The first passage we can refer to is Revelation 6:5, 6: "And when he had opened the third seal, I heard the third beast say, Come and see. And I beheld, and low a black horse; and he that sat on him had a pair of balances in his hand. And I heard a voice in the midst of the four beasts say, A measure of wheat for a penny and three measures of barley for a penny; and see thou hurt not the oil and the wine."

Another passage from Revelation that we will refer to is 13:11-18: "And I beheld another beast coming up out of the earth; and he had two horns like a lamb, and he spake as a dragon. And he exerciseth all

the power of the first beast before him, and causeth the earth and them which dwell therein to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed. And he doeth great wonders, so that he maketh fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men. And deceiveth them that dwell on the earth by the means of those miracles which he had power to do in the sight of the beast; saying to them that dwell on the earth, that they should make an image to the beast, which had the wound by a sword, and did live. And he had power to give life unto the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak, and cause that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed. And he causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads: And that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name. Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number is six hundred threescore and six."

We will refer especially to the mark of the beast and the privileges that go along with that mark.

Finally we will refer to Matthew 24:4-11: "And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many. And ye shall hear of wars and rumors of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes in divers places. All these are the beginning of sorrows. Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake. And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another. And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many."

It is not my purpose today to dwell on the idea of exactly who or what the Antichrist is going to be. I hope to look closer at what the antichristian power will try to accomplish.

THE SOCIAL GOAL OF ANTICHRIST

Let's first look at the social goal. We mentioned already that God in creation had set up a society. There was: man, woman, and God who all lived in harmony with each other in the realms of the state, the church and society. After the fall these institutions remained, although, like everything else, they were tainted with sin. These institutions were

necessary in order to maintain the possibility of orderly life and for the development of God's plan with respect to the establishment of His kingdom. Gradually throughout the course of history these institutions are being taken over by Satan and employed to bring about the kingdom of Antichrist.

The ultimate goal of the Antichrist will be to unify all the people of the world under his control. He wants a social uniformity and a political unity, and he wants a religious unity with all men bowing the knee to the image of the beast. It is his goal to heal the wounds of Babel. It is only when he can achieve this uniformity that there will be a black and white distinction between the children of God and the children of the devil.

Today we can easily hide in the world. God's people are a very small and insignificant part of this world. No one seems to give much notice to us, for good or for bad. This is because God's people are just another religious group in this world which harbors thousands of different groups. However, Satan will sway the world, by showing signs and wonders, to the one religion: the religion of the worship of the image of the beast.

Many attempts are being made in our times to unite the church world. Each year brings out another group working at an ecumenical movement. Churches are encouraged to break down the creedal and doctrinal barriers that prevent them from joining with other Christians to establish a religion where everyone can confess to believing the same thing. Revelation tells us that this will happen. Universally, men will worship the beast.

Politically, the Antichrist will rule over all nations. We read in Revelation 13 about the beast rising out of the sea. The beast has a deadly wound which is healed and this allows him to bring all nations into the fold. Many throughout history have tried to unite the world by the use of force but this unification will likely come about in peace with all willingly subjecting themselves to the Antichrist. We see signs of this in the world in the work of the United Nations and just recently the acknowledgement of Israel's right to exist by the Arab nations.

We live today in what is becoming more and more a global community. Nations are no longer isolated from each other, with each one being able to handle its own domestic problems as it pleases. The nations of the world are becoming closely intertwined, with the actions of one nation having a profound effect on the others. Consider, for example, the effect throughout the world of the nationalization of the Mexican banks and the devaluation of the peso. Banks and industry

throughout the world are also worrying about rumors of bank failures in many South American countries and the near certainty of the default of loans to Communist Bloc countries such as Poland. Modern telecommunications bring news, pictures, and ideas around the world instantly. Modern aviation can shuttle people back and forth across the continents bringing messages from both friends and foes, more and more able to speak the same language.

In society the Antichrist will bring together all the factions and make them as one. We see many examples of progress toward this goal of equality for everyone today. There is the feminist movement working for the passing of the Equal Rights Amendment. It has failed for now but it will come back. Men and women will be equal with one another, in the home, in the state, and in the church. Throughout the world the race barriers are breaking down bringing uniformity and leading to intermarriage and the mixing of races. Gay rights movements are marching forward. Society doesn't feel that a person with homosexual tendencies should be set apart but should be treated with equality.

The whole idea is to bring about a uniformity in life. There will be a new religion that will embrace all things and lay down the law for every sphere of life. Once this takes place there can only be one distinction or separation left. It will be as clear as black and white. There will be the disciples of Christ and the worshippers of the beast.

THE ECONOMIC GOAL OF THE ANTICHRIST

We find a very close connection between the social goals and the economic goals of the Antichrist. We can examine this in connection with the work of the black horse and rider. The purpose of the black horse and rider is generally considered to be the prevention of the premature coming of the Antichrist. They work to maintain a contrast between poverty and riches. On the one hand there are people who spend a day's wages on a day's subsistence, continually living hand to mouth. On the other hand the oil and the wine, symbols of luxury, are not hurt. It is the cause of feasting and riotous living on the one hand and dissatisfaction, rebellion, and revolution on the other hand. They create a class system of a rich minority or a poor majority.

We live in a society bent on the pursuit of material goods. Wealth, luxury, and a life of ease have been made a god over all. Yet wealth is a very elusive goal for many for they find that the more they make in wages the more they have to pay for the things that they need. Inflation is a marvelous tool of the black horse and rider. Where do we find

the steepest rise in prices but in the very necessities of life. The lower one's income, the harder one is hurt with inflation.

Soon these things will change. When the Antichrist rises up he will hold the key to riches for all men and he will be heralded as the savior of all mankind. There will no longer be dissatisfaction and squabbling over money and wealth. There will be equality for all.

Just as social equality means distinction for God's people, so does economic equality. We read in Revelation 13:17 that no man might buy or sell save he that has the mark of the beast or the name of the beast or the number of his name. I'm not really concerned with what this mark will be but the distinction made will be evident to all.

The very necessities of life will be in the power of the beast. He can prevent buying or selling according to his good pleasure. He will control who buys and sells and also what they buy and sell.

Many people in government have this type of attitude right now. There are those who feel that people who do not go along with the government should not share in the benefits of the government either. I use an example that I don't necessarily feel is right but shows the type of conformist thinking that will be very evident in the kingdom of Antichrist. The example is a law that was introduced into congress that would not allow young people over 18 who have not registered for the draft to take part in any government program such as student loan or F.H.A. financing of a home. The message is clear and will become more and more clear. Conform. Bow the knee. Receive the mark of the beast.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE TEACHING OF GOD'S CHILDREN

What are the implications of these things for the teaching of God's children?

The message of Matthew 24 is "Watch and be ready." Could there be anything better to teach than this? Matthew Henry says in his commentary, "It is the great duty and interest of all disciples to watch, to be awake, and keep awake. This implies not only believing that Christ will come but earnestly desiring his coming." If we are to watch and be ready, we must by all means know and see the signs of the times. Are you conscious of what is happening in the world? Can you show to the children you teach, whether in kindergarten or high school, how the events of history and the news today is a sign of the times? How are they leading to the building of the false kingdom of Antichrist?

We must educate our children to try the spirits to see whether they

are of God. Matthew 24 warns us to beware of false prophets. These false prophets will show many great signs and wonders. They will deceive many people. Will our children know the word of God well enough to be able to try the spirits? Biblical instruction in the home and school as well as the church can not be minimized. Only through prayerful study of God's word can we be strengthened for these last days.

We should encourage our children each day to stand fast in the truths that they are taught, without wavering and without compromise. This will be an important attribute of the child of God. There will be many temptations to bow the knee to the image of the beast. No one likes to be a social outcast. It will be very difficult to turn down the mark of the beast which will enable us to participate in the great society. Disciples of Christ will have to suffer many hardships in those days: imprisonments, persecution, killings, and hatred of all nations for the sake of Christ's name. Many who were thought to be faithful will turn apostate when confronted with the extreme costs of discipleship. Some of these people will turn their services over to the other side and betray fellow church members. As God's people we must not be afraid of being distinctive in our walk. This is difficult for adults, to say nothing of children. It seems we are so quick to conform to the world now without much pressure on us. We don't want to be different. It surely will not be easier to stand up for what we believe when we are threatened with our lives or the lives of the ones we love. I think it is important to confront our older children with these situations and questions and above all be examples of the way we should live.

Another important factor in these times will be the necessity of a unity of believers; the ability to live and work together in a Christian community. It seems that we often have different factions in our churches striving for different goals. There will be no room in a persecuted church for those who can not work together in defending the truth of God's word and the walk of those who believe it. We should encourage a oneness of faith and walk in our students with the common goal of the glorification of God's name.

Finally, we should point our students toward the reward which awaits the faithful followers of Jesus Christ; a continual reminder that *all* things, wars, persecutions, famines, pestilence, and death, work together for good to them that love God who are called according to His purpose. If we can by faith cling to God, we will not be harmed by the troubles of this present time. Just as there will be a sharp contrast

between darkness and light, so will there be a contrast between this present life and the glory that awaits us in heaven. I'd like to close with these words of Rev. Hoeksema from *Behold, He Cometh.* "Be not afraid, therefore, ye people of the kingdom! All these things must needs come to pass. In times of war and trouble, famine and pestilence, when the red horse drives through the earth and the black horse appears in your streets, or the pale horse enters into your homes, let your hearts rest in the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, who holds the book with the seven seals and controls all things in heaven and on earth unto the ultimate completion of His glorious kingdom!"

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The secular and Christian philosophies of life cannot be harmonized; both in their starting point and in their conclusions, they are irreconcilable. The one starts with man and the universe, and ends with man and the universe misunderstood; the other starts with the God of the Bible, and attains a genuine insight into the true meaning of reality. There is no area of life in which the difference between the regenerate and the unregenerate does not count. The three great doctrines of God, Creation and Providence must be accepted as the major premise of all study by the regenerate; these doctrines are rejected or regarded as irrelevant by the unregenerate.

What is Christian Education?
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