

End times or cryptic past?

Rapture, tribulation and the mark of the beast

A conversation between The Reverend Lyall Perris and Darryl Ward

What peculiar weather we're having at the moment!

Well, it is spring.

It may well be spring, but the weather has been more extreme than ever, and I reckon it is proof we are heading into the end times.

But there have always been signs of end times, if you want to see things that way.

Not like this. We've had the biggest earthquake in recorded history – with a tsunami. Calamitous earthquakes, in Christchurch of all places. And huge floods in Pakistan. Plus climate change. And add in global terrorism and financial collapse in the so-called Christian West.

The signs are all here for anyone with eyes to see. The end is on its way, and you surely have to agree that global warning is a real indicator that an end of some sort is on its way – unless you're a climate sceptic.

I don't disagree with you on climate change. That is a huge challenge to the world's peoples, but we have had climate changes in the past. The last ice age was about ten thousand years ago, and humans and other living creatures survived it – and the world did not come to an end. So I'm hopeful that the next one can be survived too.

No, I can't agree with that. This is not the time to get into it, but you know I believe in the Bible truth of creation, so your tales about climate change in the past don't cut it with me. We're staring disaster in the face, on all fronts.

We've had signs of end times before – maybe not exactly these ones. If you want earthquake and tsunami, what about the Krakatoa explosion in 1883? As for wars, how about World War II? And what about the Black Death in the 1300s? People thought they were bringing the end of the world, but the world did not come to an end. What makes your signs any worse than the ones in the past?

It's different now. The signs are all coming together, as written in Revelation.

Revelation has some pretty weird stuff in it. The images are so bizarre that some have claimed the author must have been under the influence of

something like hallucinogenic mushrooms, and I'm inclined to agree with them.

There are some fantastic images in Revelation, but so much of it is frighteningly accurate. It tells of the collapse of the natural world, not just human society. What's more, I've just discovered something really frightening. The other day I read a page on the internet that revealed who the antichrist is.

If I remember correctly, a few years ago you told me Osama bin Laden was the antichrist, and Saddam Hussein was the whore of Babylon. Or was it the other way around?

Yes, well, some well intended people were misled by the true antichrist and got it wrong.

[Interrupting] I can think of a proverb about good intentions.

There's no need for that.

Maybe not, but before we go any further, the word 'antichrist' does not appear anywhere in Revelation. The only books of the Bible that mention the antichrist are the First and Second Letters of John. The Book of Revelation does however talk about someone called the beast. Might that be whom you mean?

You are being a bit overly semantic here. Yes, the antichrist and the beast are one and the same.

Alright then, so tell me, who is it?

Why it's Barak Obama!

Barak Obama? I should have guessed. So how did someone work that out?

It's in the Bible. In Luke 10.18, Jesus tells us how He "...watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning." Now 'lightning' in Hebrew is 'Baraq', while 'high place' is 'bama'. So, 'baraq o bama' means 'lightning from a high place'. Isn't that something?

I see. But as Revelation 13:8 tells us:

¹⁸This calls for wisdom: let anyone with understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a person. Its number is six hundred and sixty-six.

So shouldn't there be 666 somewhere?

The day after Obama, who was a senator from Illinois, was elected President, the Illinois 'Pick 3' lottery draw came up with 666. Plus his Chicago zip code is 60606. That's three sixes, so it's GOT to be him!

I reckon Ronald Reagan was a far better candidate. His full name was Ronald Wilson Reagan. That's three names of six letters each. That's also three sixes.

What do you mean! He was a God fearing man!

Maybe, but, Barak Obama is also a Christian. In an interview with 'Christianity Today', President Obama stated: "I am a Christian, and I am a devout Christian. I believe in the redemptive death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. I believe that that faith gives me a path to be cleansed of sin and have eternal life."

Now, given you have referred to Luke's Gospel, I am going to quote Luke 12:8-9:

⁸ 'And I tell you, everyone who acknowledges me before others, the Son of Man also will acknowledge before the angels of God; ⁹ but whoever denies me before others will be denied before the angels of God.

Well, he could be just saying that to deceive us. I have read Obama is secretly a Muslim.

I don't think so. As 1 John 2:22-23 tells us:

²² Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son. ²³ No one who denies the Son has the Father; everyone who confesses the Son has the Father also.

By acknowledging the redemptive death and resurrection of Jesus the Christ, President Obama has PROVED he is not the antichrist of the Letters of John or the beast of Revelation. So can we please drop this ridiculous conspiracy theory once and for all?

Well I can't argue with scripture, can I? I know I should not have fallen into the trap of naming anyone, especially when I have been caught out by doing this in the past.

However, I do believe the Bible when it tells me that there is an antichrist or beast in the end times, and we have to be on our guard. I will concede though that there have been plenty of past nominees for the title of the beast. Why,

Aleister Crowley even claimed the title for himself, while members of some Protestant groups believe the beast is the pope!

I've heard about this, but I can see you want to say more.

You know how some Roman letters are also numerals, like V is 5 and X is 10 and so on?

Yes.

Well if you take the pope's official title: 'VICARIVS FILII DEI', which translates as 'Vicar of the Son of God', and add up the Roman numerals, you get 666.

$5+1+100 +1+5 +1+50+1+1+500+1 = 666$
V I C A R I V S F I L I I D E I

I hate to be picky, but the I understand title of the pope is actually 'Vicar of Christ' not 'Vicar of the Son of God', and there is considerable doubt as to whether the term "Vicar of the Son of God" was ever used.

Alright then, the same works with some of the pope's other titles, such as: 'DVX CLERI', which means 'leader of the clergy'.

$500+5+10+100+50 +1 = 666$
D V X C L E R I

Plus, I understand it also works in Greek with the word 'LATENIOS', which means the Latin speaking people. Now I am not suggesting the pope is the beast. This is just something I heard at a Seventh Day Adventist public meeting many years ago.

I understand you can also play around with numbers to match 666 with everyone from Martin Luther to Mohammed.

I would be surprised if nobody has managed to do it with Adolf Hitler, the Kaiser and Napoleon as well, but I remain convinced the beast is someone who is with us today. It would seem he or she is too clever to be revealed publicly right now, but instead is behind the scenes, manipulating his or her followers.

Well I think the most believable scenario is that the number 666 is a code reference to the Emperor Nero. In the Hebrew form of his name, the numbers add up to 666, but Gematria, the Hebrew system of assigning numerical values to words or phrases, is quite complex, and I don't pretend to fully understand it.

However, just to really confuse things, some of the oldest fragments of manuscripts of Revelation say 616 is the number of the beast instead of 666.

Now you are just being provocative. You know very well that I believe in the inerrancy of the received text.

Indeed I do. However, I believe Revelation was intentionally written in a cryptic manner and that it referred to the Roman persecution of the Church that was taking place at the time it was written.

Alright, so what do you say was the mark of the beast then?

I think it might have been the Roman system of commerce. You could not buy or sell anything without using coins, which had the image of the emperor's head. I just happen to have one denarius with me today, which I was taking to show someone. It is from later than Nero's time, but if you look closely, you will see the emperor's head on it.

As Newer Testament scholar Craig C. Hill has noted, "It is far more probable that the mark symbolizes the all-embracing economic power of Rome, whose very coinage bore the emperor's image and conveyed his claims to divinity (e.g., by including the sun's rays in the ruler's portrait). It had become increasingly difficult for Christians to function in a world in which public life, including the economic life of the trade guilds, required participation in idolatry."

Well, I remain convinced what is described in Revelation is still coming. There's a new world order ready to take over! FEMA, which is the American Federal Emergency Management Authority, is all set to take over, using the pretext of a fictional pandemic or something like that.

Was that on the internet as well?

Yes.

I see.

Seriously, would you like me to email you some links? I can show you testimonies of people who have stumbled across FEMA detention facilities for

those who will resist the new world order. They have even found railway carriages with shackles and guillotines inside for the execution of those believers who will not even make it to FEMA's detention camps.

I'm sorry, but that's all a bit much for me to take in right now. Even if FEMA could somehow gain administrative control of the USA, it doesn't have any authority here.

Just to backtrack a little though, would you please tell me, what do you think is or is going to be the mark of the beast, given you believe the great tribulation is coming?

Given how rapidly technology is advancing, I don't want to commit myself, but I think it is probably going to be microchipping. This has already been tested on cats and dogs, and I can see the day coming when we will be forced to accept a microchip on the back of our hand, which will be linked with the world's banking system, and this will replace cash.

So the microchips will be inserted into the backs of our hands, and without them, we will not be able to buy or sell anything. This will all take place during the great tribulation?

You've got it. We are heading towards a society where there's no cash or cheques, and we're all going to be directed by numbers. We have been moving towards a cashless society for some time now. Credit cards and barcodes were just the beginning. Now we have internet shopping, Facebook and so on. You mark my words, it's on its way. Let anyone with ears listen!

The only problem is that the back of the hand is not a suitable place to receive a microchip. Neither for that matter is the forehead, in case you were about to suggest that. I understand the only suitable place for a human to receive a microchip is somewhere near the shoulder blades.

The Bible clearly says the mark goes on the back of the hand or the forehead, and I'm not going to argue with the Word of God!

You've just reminded me of something though. Thinking back to our friends the Seventh Day Adventists, I understand many believe Sunday observance is the mark of the beast and that the mark being on the back of your hand refers to your actions and the mark being on your forehead refers to your thoughts.

Well, one learns something every day.

That aside, the end times are here, and we need to be ready for the rapture, when believers will be caught up in the air, and those left behind will suffer the great tribulation and will be forced to accept the mark or be put to death.

Do you know that many Christians do not believe in the rapture? The whole concept started with American Puritans in the 1600s, and was pushed along by Plymouth Brethren about 200 years ago, but it did not really take off until the 1970s.

But it's in the Bible!

The passage I think you are talking is in the Bible, but it is NOT in Revelation. From: 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17:

¹⁶For the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel's call and with the sound of God's trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will be with the Lord for ever.

It doesn't matter, it's still in the Bible!

While this passage talks about the Parousia or second coming of the Christ, it is in no way connected with the events described in Revelation. The concept of there being a rapture followed by a great tribulation is a modern construct that takes the fantastic events described in Revelation, throws in a bit of 1 Thessalonians and mixes it all up with the apocalyptic second half of the book of Daniel.

But it all fits together so well. You are probably old enough to remember films like 'A Thief in the Night' and its sequels, which pulled all the threads together and painted a stark picture of what the great tribulation is going to be like. And Hal Lindsey's book 'The Late Great Planet Earth' pulled no punches either.

I remember those films well. I was in my early teens when I saw 'A Thief in the Night' and 'Distant Thunder'. I was terrified by them. I couldn't sleep properly for weeks afterwards. I would lie awake at night, worrying that I might not be a proper Christian and would be left behind. I think all this contributed to me leaving the Church a few years later. I could not follow a religion based on fear.

Well I'm glad you found your way back.

I have to admit they scared me as well, and looking back, I suppose fear does not build the soundest of foundations for faith.

It certainly doesn't!

And Hal Lindsey did not get it all right either. I think he reckoned the beast was the European Community!

I guess you and I are going to have to agree to disagree on all this. I still believe the end times are coming and that they are coming soon, even if I was being presumptuous in trying to put a name to the beast, but I will accept there are different views on the context of Revelation. There are those who say it talks about the past, and there are those who say it is about things to come, and some who say it is a bit of both. But I know my view is right!

I maintain that Revelation is mostly a coded book about the past, although that does not explain much of the content, and I am not going to tell you what you must believe, other than to say be wary of any really fantastic claims you might read, especially if they are on the internet.

That sounds good enough for me, and I think I am now going to have to read the Book of Revelation all over again.

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