

Is the Antichrist About to Be Revealed?

I recently wrote that practical obedience to God today is far more important than speculation about the mark of the beast tomorrow. I have also made clear that I do not believe that COVID-19 is one of the plagues from the book of Revelation. At the same time, a number of recent developments help illustrate how quickly a false Messianic figure could emerge on the earth, in both religious and secular circles.

Prepare to read some shocking quotes. But first, let me set the stage.

As I have stated, I do not believe that a potential COVID-19 vaccine, replete with microchip, is the mark of the beast. And I do not believe that the virus is part of a larger, nefarious plot hatched by a clandestine one-world government cabal. (For more on all this, see my new book.) Yet the events surrounding the coronavirus have demonstrated how quickly the status quo can be overturned, how dramatically the fortunes of nations can shift and how a call for one-world cooperation can arise.

And what if there was a worldwide economic collapse, accompanied by plague and famine? Is it too farfetched to imagine that a powerful, problem-solving leader could gain an international following?

To say it again, I do not believe we are at that point. But I do believe that, in front of our eyes, we're seeing how quickly the table can be set, even from an entirely secular point of view.

All the more does this become feasible when we add in religious beliefs.

Jesus famously warned His disciples, saying, "Be careful that

no one leads you astray! For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Messiah,' and will lead many astray" (Matt. 24:4-5, TLV). He also warned, "Many false prophets will arise and lead many astray" (Matt. 24:11).

So, from a Christian perspective, before the true Messiah (Christ) returns in the clouds of heaven, there will be counterfeit Messiahs (antichrists) who will deceive many.

And this leads us to the promised, shocking quotes.

In the Islamic world, the belief in the Mahdi, the hidden Imam waiting to be revealed, could easily prepare the way for a counterfeit Messianic figure.

To be sure, Muslims believe that Jesus is the Messiah (though, quite plainly, they do not believe in the Jesus of the Bible). So, technically speaking, the Mahdi is not the Messiah. On the other hand, since he functions in Islamic lore as the end-times redeemer, he could be the perfect counterfeit Christ type of figure.

And here's where it gets very interesting: There are Muslim leaders today who claim to have met the Mahdi numerous times.

Writing in the Jerusalem Post on Jan. 20, Brian Schrauger explained that the Mahdi "is Islam's messiah, the 12th of 12 Imams who are successors to Mohammed. Said to have been born in 879 CE, the Imam Mahdi is believed by Shi'a Muslims to still be alive, but hidden from mankind in 'occultation' until a time of such upheaval on the earth that only his reappearance will rescue mankind and, in fact, usher in an age of global peace; Islamic peace, that is; a kind of peace in which all mankind is living in submission to the Allah of the Koran."

He continues, "Crazy to Western ears, this messianic creed is the *raison d'être* for the Islamic Republic of Iran according

to its founders and leaders. It is also the basis of Tehran's foreign and military policies; and it is impossible to overemphasize the Iran regime's visceral commitment to it. The Imam Mahdi is invoked in every public gathering, both civil and military; he is the singular inspiration for every policy, every tactic, every mission; indeed, he is nothing less than the regime's reason for its existence and, as such, its singular and unwavering motivation for the future."

And Schrauger can provide documentation for every single claim he has made.

In the words of Iran's Supreme leader Ayatollah Khamenei, "The Iranian nation enjoys a great privilege today: the atmosphere of the country is an atmosphere of Imam Mahdi. ..." And, Khamenei states, "many of our great scholars have personally met with this beloved [Imam] of hearts of the admirers during his occultation; many have made a pledge to him in person; many have heard from him some heartwarming words; many have been caressed by him and many others have received his kindness, care, and love."

The Islamic Mahdi is here, he is known to many insiders and he is about to be revealed. And remember: This article was written before Iran was smitten with COVID-19. What are the leaders thinking today?

But there's more.

A Feb. 20 headline in Israel Today stated, "Israeli Rabbi Says He's Already Holding Meetings With Messiah." And, "Israel's biggest rabbis are all afraid to leave the country lest they miss Messiah's coming."

The article, by Ryan Jones, cited a three-hour radio interview in which Rabbi Yaakov Zisholtz "told religious broadcaster Radio 2000 that Kanievsky recently told him that he (Kanievsky) is already in direct contact with the Messiah."

Rabbi Kanievsky, now in his early 90s, is considered to be the leading authority in the ultra-Orthodox (haredi) community in Israel, and he has often spoken of the nearness of the Messiah's coming. But it seems he is saying it even more today.

According to Rabbi Zisholtz, "... the process of redemption is about to start happening very quickly and at a fast pace. It is important that people remain calm and steady to act properly in the right time.

"There is a potential Messiah in every generation and there are righteous men who know precisely who it is. This is, of course, true in this generation.

"Getting the word out now that the Messiah is closer than ever is a matter of life and death. Haven't you heard of Gog and Magog? That is what is going to happen very soon. Right now, the situation is explosive more than you can possibly imagine. Everyone needs to know whether they are on the inside or if they are going to be left out."

Yes, these are the words of an ultra-Orthodox rabbi in Israel, not those of an evangelical Christian, Bible in hand, with end-times prophecies heavily underlined.

While Rabbi Zisholtz was careful to say he couldn't promise anything, he was certainly raising the bar with specific predictions and events. And again, he claimed that certain religious Jews knew exactly who the Messiah was and have even met with him.

Adding to all this was the statement of Israel's health minister, Yaakov Litzman, himself ultra-Orthodox, as reported in HaAretz on March 26 and with reference to COVID-19: "We are praying and hoping that the Messiah will arrive before Passover, the time of our redemption. I am sure that the

Messiah will come and bring us out as [God] brought us out of Egypt. Soon we will go out in freedom and the Messiah will come and redeem us from all the troubles of the world.”

The Messiah would be the cure to the coronavirus, and he would come (meaning, be publicly revealed, since in Jewish thought, he could already be here) by Passover.

Well, Passover ended on April 16. And, in case you missed the news, the expected Jewish Messiah did not come.

Ironically, Litzman himself contracted the virus, although he has since recovered. And for a number of reasons, including heavy criticism of his handling of the crisis, he is reportedly considering quitting.

But all this talk about the Mahdi being here, ready to be revealed, along with the traditional Jewish Messiah being here, ready to be revealed, underscores the point I have been making. It would not take much for a counterfeit Messianic figure to arise and deceive many.

And so, while I believe the table has not yet been set for this grand finale, it could clearly be set on very short notice.

Let us, then, keep our focus on the Second Coming of the true Christ (Messiah). But let us not forget the warnings about that false Messiah (Antichrist) who will come first.