

End Times Prophecy (Eschatology) 314: Illustrative Case Study



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Brian K. McPherson and Scott McPherson

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End Times Prophecy: An Illustrative Case Study

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Typical pre-millennial speculation and fiction often portray the prophecies in the books of Daniel and Revelation in terms of geo-political upheaval so massive and grandiose that its almost hard to imagine how it could possibly relate to (let alone ever take place on) the landscape of real, modern history. It's almost as if modern history is just plodding along as expected and then suddenly takes a sharp, unprecedented detour in an entirely unexpected direction plunging the world into events that would not have occurred along the normal course of history. It's also very difficult to imagine how such a catastrophic detour from normal events would ever catch anyone sleeping. But when we set aside the sensation of fiction and the embellishment of tradition, we find that the events predicted in the bible may not be so fantastical or outside of the current, geo-political landscape of our modern world.

We have deliberately titled this editorial "An Illustrative Case Study" for a specific reason. There are a variety of scenarios that could roughly fit the patterns described in Daniel and Revelation. In the second century, the early church writer Irenaeus once cited several contemporary names that would add up to the number 666 as prescribed in the Book of Revelation (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Book V, Chapter XXX). However, he also explicitly stated that his purpose was not to identify the exact, correct name. Instead, Irenaeus explained that his purpose was to illustrate how this particular prophecy in the Book of Revelation could be fulfilled in a very plausible way in his own day. As a corollary benefit, he provided insight on how the prophecy was to be interpreted and applied.

In a similar way, current geo-political events give us an opportunity to illustrate how the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation may not require unrealistic or mind-boggling departures from contemporary events in the modern world. We can understand just how reasonable, and how subtle, the types of shifts described in these prophecies may be by examining a series of events taking place in our own time in the Middle East. Like Irenaeus, our purpose here is not to proclaim the fulfillment of these prophecies is at hand. To the contrary, in our section on eschatology and prophetic symbolism, we outline multiple scenarios concerning how the end times might unfold (See, "Prophetic Symbols: Several Possible Scenarios - Parts 1-3). Instead, our purpose is to show that the prophecies in these books are still relevant today in very simple, reasonable scenarios that can

relate to real, current events. Moreover, this illustration allows us to demonstrate how the events of the last days will not necessarily constitute a dramatic departure from the normal flow of current events. After all, Jesus himself said that in the days before his return people would continue to eat, drink, marry, buy, sell, plant, and build unaware of his impending return right up until it happens (Matthew 24:33-42, Luke 17:26-30). But he tells his followers to be watchful. Such instructions could indicate that end times' events might not suddenly or obviously depart from the normal course of world events which precede them.

Consequently, not only will this illustrative case study hopefully help us gain insight into how the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation could take shape from seemingly un-alarming events, but it will emphasize the need for Christians to stay watchful, just as the New Testament instructs us. And, it may illustrate how end times' events could occur in such a way that many people will not even realize that biblical prophecy is being fulfilled and that the end of the age is upon them. We shouldn't become unilaterally focused on the end times. This is only one part of the moral and theological doctrine found in the New Testament. But we also must not become unaware or unconcerned, thinking that the events at the end of the age will be so overwhelmingly different or so obvious that there's no way any Christian could overlook their arrival. Likewise, we must also not be so narrow or uncritical in our contemplation of biblical prophecy as to risk overlooking its fulfillment just because the fulfillment may not match the fictional or overly simplified scenarios to which we may have grown accustomed.

To illustrate how plausible it might be for potential prophetic developments to slip by unnoticed, let's take a list of garden variety details about the figure known in the bible as the antichrist, a figure whose arrival is probably perceived as something that will be unmistakably obvious to Christians. (A greater analysis of relevant prophetic symbols is provided in the "End Times Prophecy/Eschatology" Section of our website under our Prophetic Symbols and Revelation Chronology studies. But because our purpose here is not to be conclusive or predictive, we will not overly discuss the points that follow or provide an in-depth presentation of prophetic details.)

Combined details from the Books of Daniel and Revelation depict a progression of empires using the imagery of beasts in which heads and horns represent lesser national powers (and also specific rulers or kings) that are tied to those empires (beasts). Among other details, these books speak of a time when a beast or empire comprised of ten horns or nations will emerge out of a region that is related to both the Greco-Macedonian and Roman/Eastern Roman empires. And among the ten nations that will constitute this end times' empire there will also emerge a little horn or nation who will subdue three of the ten kings or nations. This little horn represents both this emerging nation and a man that Daniel describes as "a vile person, to whom they shall not give the honor of the kingdom," who will "come in peaceably and obtain the kingdom by flatteries." And after a league or agreement is made with him, he will work deceitfully. He will become strong despite having started with just a small number of people. He will "enter peaceably upon the fattest places of the province" and unlike his predecessors he

seems to distribute the spoils of his power among his people instead of perhaps keeping it all to himself. It is important to note that there are, of course, many other details predicted about this figure. For instance, Daniel goes on to describe this man as ultimately turning his aggression against Israel and successfully polluting the Temple, taking away the daily offering, establishing the abomination that brings about desolation, and destroying the Great Harlot city. And, of course, we know from the book of Revelation that this man's name will equate in Greek to the number 666. But the question we're considering here is whether or not such a figure could fit in with real, modern geopolitical events and whether he could arise on the world stage unnoticed.

On this question, we can look at a parallel situation, which has already been slowly unfolding for the better part of a century and shares some of the characteristics of the prophetic picture. In the mountainous region where Turkey, Syria, Iraq, and Iran all come together there is a people known as the Kurds. When the new national borders were drawn at the end of World War I, the Kurds were denied national status. Instead the Kurdish population was divided and absorbed into the nations of Turkey, Syria, Iraq, and Iran. They have since petitioned the UN for national status defining their geographic borders along lines that would take territory from Turkey, Syria, Iraq, and Iran. Yet their country has never been officially recognized as a nation by the UN or the countries they live within. In more recent decades, some of the Kurds have engaged in armed struggle (primarily in Turkey) for which they have earned the designation of a terrorist organization by Turkey, the European Union, and the United States.

In 1999, Abdullah Ocalan, the leader of the Kurdish uprising in Turkey was captured. Ocalan is a man whom even the chief politicians of Iraqi Kurdistan acknowledge as the leader of the Kurdish people. Turks, on the other hand, tend to regard him with revulsion, blaming him for the deaths of tens of thousands over the course of the conflict. Ocalan began his rise to prominence by founding a political group initially comprised of students but which evolved over time to include thousands of armed fighters. Although Ocalan has been imprisoned in isolation by Turkey for more than a decade, he is widely described as the only man that can bring the Kurds to peace. Recently, the Turkish Intelligence Agency has met with Ocalan at the direction of the Turkish prime minister. The purpose of these negotiations is to settle the ongoing conflict. According to reports, the release of Kurdish prisoners of war, including most notably Ocalan himself, is offered in exchange for Ocalan's promise to get Kurdish militants to lay down their arms against the Turkish state. Ocalan's promise to the end hostilities including the surrendering of arms has been bolstered by multiple ceasefires which he has orchestrated among Kurdish militants from his prison cell. The plight of Ocalan and his people has been compared to famed South African statesman, Nelson Mandela who was also formerly branded as a terrorist.

In addition, the particular region that Kurdistan occupies is known for its wealth of natural resources, ranking in the top ten largest oil reserves in the world, and Ocalan's earlier writings portray that he founded his organization with a strong socialist philosophy.

So, here we have the leader of a people who have been deprived of national sovereignty, who is hated by many yet presented as a pinnacle figure in the quest for peace, negotiating directly with the intelligence division of the Turkish government to obtain a political agreement, advocating a socialist agenda, popular in a resource-rich region, and rising from an initially small political group to become the leader of an entire people divided among three or four established countries struggling to emerge and rectify their unrecognized political status in a volatile part of the world comprised of more than a dozen smaller, potentially unstable, third-world regimes situated within the greater area of the Greco-Macedonian and Roman/Eastern Roman empires. And all of this is happening at a time when Kurdish Iraq operates with a great deal of autonomy (including a recent military stand off against the Iraqi army and central government), when Kurdish Syria is experiencing similar independence, and while the greater Middle East is undergoing much political instability and change.

Now, for anyone who is tempted to shout, “Eureka! The antichrist!” – that is not the point of this exercise. This brief paper does not contain in-depth analysis or a discussion of other relevant factors which are presented in biblical prophecies of the end times. Rather, the point of this exercise is simple: if this one, real-life situation which has been going on for more than a decade can go unnoticed despite its similarities to biblical prophecy, is it really a stretch to imagine that the total, future fulfillment of biblical prophecies could likewise go just as unnoticed? In the end, this exercise illustrates how prophetic details of the end times could easily relate to the unfolding of real, modern, geopolitical history. And it’s a tangible reminder that as Christians we shouldn’t let ourselves become so engrossed in the distractions of daily life that we ignore Christ’s command to keep a watchful eye and an ear to the ground so as not to be caught off guard. This illustration can also remind us not to be so narrow or uncritical in our contemplation of biblical prophecy or so committed to a fictional or overly simplified scenario that we risk missing the fulfillment of such prophecies if they do occur in our lifetime.