



# ANTI-CHRIST

PART XII

## THE RISE OF ROME

**D**uring the Intertestamental Period anti-Christ attempted a number of times to eradicate or, at least severely hamper, Israel's existence. In our previous chapter we consulted extra-biblical historical sources for information on these attempts. Nation after nation invaded the Holy Land, subjugating Israel in the process. Had it not been for God raising Judah Maccabee who led the Maccabean Revolt in 165 BC, Israel's identity as a nation might have been erased. But God's promises never fail, and He stirred up the Jews to defeat the Seleucid army, opening the way for 25 years of Jewish independence under the Hasmonean Kingdom of Israel established by Judah Maccabee's brother Simon some twenty years later. Yet centuries earlier the conflict of world powers was unfolding to bring about the fulfillment of scriptural prophecy that foretold the coming of Israel's Messiah.

Around the middle of the seventh century BC, at the same time that Greece was flexing its muscles in conquest of the Middle East, subjugating Judah in the Holy Land, anti-Christ was birthing a new state that, centuries later, would be the means by which he would execute Israel's Messiah. But the death of the Messiah was YHWH's plan for the redemption of mankind—the mystery hidden from the angels since the beginning of time, which mystery would unfold with the confounding of anti-Christ and his minions on earth. That fledgling state, Rome, was beginning to exercise strength through trade among the Mediterranean nations.

The founding of Rome is steeped in mysticism and legend. There is no solid historical evidence of how Rome came into existence as a nation. The traditional account of Rome's early history is attributed primarily to the ancient historians Dionysius of Halicarnassus (c. 60 BC – after 7 BC), Livy (59 BC – AD 17), and Plutarch (cir. AD 46 – 122).

As the legend goes, Rome was founded on April 21, 753 BC, by Romulus and Remus, twin sons of the Italian god Mars who sired them through the priestess Rhea Silvia. Rhea Silvia was said to be a Vestal Virgin (priestess of the goddess Vesta) in the ancient Italian city of Alba Longa. She was the daughter of

Numitor, king of Alba Longa, who was deposed by his brother Amulius. Amulius forced Rhea Silvia to become a Vestal Virgin in order to ensure that she would not bear children who might grow up to be a threat to Amulius' reign. But she was taken by force by the god Mars, thus setting into motion the intrigue that characterizes the legend of Rome's founding.

Upon the birth of Romulus and Remus, Mars abandoned them. Fearing that the twins would rebel against him when they were grown, Amulius had them put into a trough and thrown into the Tiber River. When the river receded, the trough came to land where a she-wolf found it with the boys still inside. The she-wolf nursed the two boys, and raised them with the help of a woodpecker who brought them food. (Both the wolf and woodpecker are animals that were sacred to Mars.)

When they became adults, Romulus and Remus assassinated Amulius and reinstated their grandfather, Numitor, as king. They then set out to found a city of their own, choosing the site of the Palatine Hill where the she-wolf had nursed them. As they were building the city, Remus ridiculed Romulus for building the city's wall too low. To prove his contention, Remus leapt over the wall. Angry at his brother's taunting, Romulus killed Remus, then continued to build the city, naming it after himself (Roma).

Rome's first citizens are said to have been outlaws and fugitives. Because there were too few women for them, they captured women from the Sabines, another tribe in Italy. The Sabines declared war against the Romans, but the Sabine women, having grown fond of their Roman husbands, intervened. A peace pact was made, and the Sabine leader, Titus Tatius, ruled with Romulus over the two tribes until Titus Tatius was killed in battle. Romulus ruled alone until he allegedly disappeared in a storm. The Romans believed that he didn't die, but was taken to heaven, whereupon they worshipped him under the name of Quirinus. He was succeeded as king of Rome by Numa Pompilius.

Alba Longa, where the story begins, is now called Castel Gandolfo. It is the summer residence of the pope, and overlooks Lake Albano about 12 miles southeast of Rome.

## The Roman Kingdom

The actual date of Rome's founding is in dispute among archaeologists, but it is generally accepted that Rome grew from farming enclaves on the Palatine Hill. Eventually the city developed into the capital of the Roman Kingdom which, according to tradition, was ruled by a succession of seven kings who followed Romulus. It is believed that the kings were elected for life by the citizens of Rome, and none relied on military force to gain the throne. These kings had several insignia, including the curule chair, a purple toga, red shoes, a white crown, and twelve lictors (civil servants who guarded Roman magistrates and who carried about the fasces [a bundle of white birch sticks tied with leather straps] with the head of an axe protruding from them). The most important of these insignia was the purple toga. All these are now insignia attendant to the pope as *Pontifex Maximus* ("Greatest Bridge-builder").

It is believed by historians that the title *Pontifex Maximus* was literal: in Rome the position of bridge-builder was important, particularly for those who built the bridges over the city's sacred river, the Tiber. Only authorities with priestly duties could build those bridges. The religious significance was that only the *pontifices* could build the bridge between gods and men.

As far back as the seventh-century BC, anti-Christ was preparing the spiritual groundwork for the great apostasy that would come to fruition one thousand years later in the mid-third century AD, known as Roman Catholicism, headed by another *Pontifex Maximus*—the pope.

The Roman Catholic Church teaches that the pope is the "Vicar of Christ," that is, he takes the place of Christ on earth as the mediator between God and man. As *Pontifex Maximus* the pope is implied to have the spiritual power to provide the way for man to reach God.

Another of the pope's titles, "Holy Father," is reserved in Scripture for our heavenly Father.

The pope's crown, the *Triregnum* ("triple crown"), represents the pope's three functions as "Supreme Pastor," "Supreme Priest," and "Supreme Teacher." Although recent popes have not worn the *tri-regnum*, it remains the symbol of the papacy and has not been abolished.

We see, then, how the popes have usurped the titles of the triune Godhead: "Pope" means "Father"; "Supreme Pastor" and "Supreme Priest" places him in the stead of Jesus as our "One Shepherd" and "High Priest"; "Supreme Teacher" places him in the stead of the Holy Spirit, whom Jesus said would be our teacher.

Were it said that the pope merely represents the Godhead, one might not be able to find fault. But these are titles reserved for the man, not for the God he claims to represent.

The Roman Kingdom, then, laid the groundwork for one of anti-Christ's greatest achievements in polluting the pure faith of God's people, not only among the Jews, but among the followers of Jesus Christ.

## The Roman Republic

Around 509 BC, the Roman monarchy was overthrown and replaced with a republican form of government. The Roman Republic was originally governed by men under the constraints of

written laws. It consisted of a complex constitution that incorporated the separation of powers based on the principle of checks and balances. The development of the constitution grew from the struggle between the aristocracy (the patricians who could trace their ancestry to the early history of the kingdom) and other prominent citizens (the plebeians) who were not from among the aristocracy.

At first the republic was controlled by the aristocracy, but over time the laws that allowed them to dominate the government were repealed. What developed was a new aristocracy that depended on the structure of society rather than on law to maintain its dominance. In other words, popular opinion took the place of the rule of law, and elected representatives became the new aristocracy (sound familiar?).

During the first two centuries, the Republic's territory expanded from central Italy to the entire Mediterranean world. In its third century of existence the Republic took control of Greece, North Africa, the Iberian Peninsula (modern Spain, Portugal, Andorra, Gibraltar, and southern France). It was the most stable, prosperous, and powerful nation in Europe, rivaling Greece in Asia Minor. By the third century BC Rome had developed into the pre-eminent city in Italy. Virtually every Italian city and tribe had succumbed to Rome's dominance.

In 264 BC Rome embarked on its first military campaign against the Carthaginian Empire—the first of the three Punic Wars. (The term Punic comes from the Latin *Punicus* [or *Poenicus*], referring to the Carthaginians' Phoenician ancestry.)

At that time the Carthaginian Empire dominated the Western Mediterranean. As the Roman Republic continued to expand within the Italian Peninsula, the island of Sicily—which was then a cultural melting pot—came into its sights. Part of Sicily was controlled by the Carthaginian Empire, so Rome's design for conquest was naturally resisted by Carthage.

The Punic Wars lasted more than one hundred years. By the end of the third war Rome had conquered the Carthaginian Empire and destroyed the city of Carthage, making Rome the most powerful state in the Western Mediterranean. At the same time Rome was fighting the Punic Wars it was embroiled in the Macedonian Wars in which Rome defeated the Seleucid king, Antiochus III the Great. In 146 BC, the same year Rome razed the city of Carthage, Rome destroyed the Greek city of Corinth, bringing to an end the Fourth Macedonian War, and establishing Roman supremacy over the Eastern Mediterranean. From there it was merely a matter of time before Rome would control the entire Middle East, including the tiny province of Judah, situated between the Mediterranean Sea and the Dead Sea. It is here that anti-Christ's most intense battle against YHWH would begin and, eventually, will end.

## Israel Under The Roman Republic

From the time of the Roman Republic's beginning (509 BC) until the coming of Jesus Christ (c. 4 BC)<sup>1</sup> there were few words of YHWH written down in the Hebrew Scriptures. The last book of the prophets is that of Nehemiah, written sometime between 446-430 BC. During the years that Rome was developing into the most powerful empire in the history of mankind, destined to crucify the Son of God to appease the Jewish religious leaders in His day, YHWH remained virtually silent. It's as if He had stopped

dealing with Israel while establishing through anti-Christ the nation that would complete the prophecies of Daniel. The spiritual prince of Greece would give way to the prince of Rome.

Within two decades of their conquest over the Seleucid army during the Maccabean Revolt in 165 BC, the Maccabees, led by Simon Maccabaeus, established Judah's independence through the Hasmonean Dynasty. Thus began twenty-five years of Jewish independence as the Seleucid Empire suffered defeat at the rising power of the Roman Republic and the Parthian Empire. Around 139 BC, the Roman Senate recognized Israel's independence, but in time Israel would be subjugated by the coming Roman Empire.

In 64 BC the Roman general Pompey conquered Jerusalem and made Israel a tributary state, exacting taxes and exercising authority over its political elements. Around 56 BC, Aulus Gavinius, proconsul of Syria under Roman rule, divided the Jewish Kingdom into three territories: Judea, Samaria, and Galilee. About 39 BC, Herod the Great (74 BC - 4 BC) was appointed tetrarch of Galilee by the Roman Senate.

Herod was the second son of Antipater the Idumaean, a highly ranked official within the Roman Republic, who appointed Herod governor of Galilee at the age of 25. His appointment ended the Hasmonean Dynasty and began the Herodian Dynasty.

Herod is credited with some great cultural and archaeological achievements, foremost being the expansion of the Second Temple in Jerusalem. But although he had the backing of the Roman Senate, his brutality of the Jews was decried by his subjects, most notably the Sanhedrin, the ruling council of the Jews.

### **The Roman Empire**

Because of Rome's great expansion of power, the republican form of government was replaced with imperialism, which allowed Rome to rule over its territories through military and political power. Thus was developed the Roman Empire, ruled by emperors who enjoyed the worship of the people as divinity—god-men to whom even the Roman Senate gave obeisance. It was to the Roman god-man, Caesar Augustus, that the Jewish religious leaders and people gave their allegiance over the only true God-man, Jesus Christ, when they shouted, "We have no king but Caesar," and demanded that Jesus be crucified. Anti-Christ stirred up the people to succumb to the greatest apostasy possible—giving to a mere man precedence over God, even to the point of committing deicide.

Gaius Julius Caesar Augustus became the first emperor of Rome upon the ending of the Second Triumvirate, the political alliance through which he ruled with Aemilius Lepidus and Mark Antony from 43 BC to 33 BC. With Caesar Augustus' ascension to the throne as emperor the Roman Empire was born—the only empire in history, even to this day, to gain total dominance over all of Western Europe. (The current European Union appears to be headed toward reviving that dominance.)

Under the Roman Empire the ruling establishment in Judea remained, keeping Herod as a puppet king over the province of Galilee.

Herod was not a Jew by descent, but from a family of Idumaeans that had converted to Judaism through duress imposed by the Maccabean John Hyrcanus who had conquered the region of Idumaea (Edom) sometime between 140-130 BC. Hyrcanus forced the Idumaeans to either obey Jewish law or leave. Most converted and were circumcised. Herod publicly identified himself as Jewish, but his religious claims were contradicted by his and his family's decadent lifestyle.

It is during Herod's reign that Scripture again picks up Israel's history, beginning with the birth of the Messiah:

Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, look, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, saying, "Where is He who is born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the east, and have come to worship Him."

When Herod the king heard these things, he, and all Jerusalem with him, were troubled. And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together he demanded from them where Christ should be born.

And they said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judaea, for thus it is written by the prophet, 'And you, Bethlehem in the land of Judah, are not the least among the princes of Judah, for out of you shall come a Governor who shall rule My people Israel.'"

Then Herod, when he had privately called the wise men, diligently inquired of them what time the star appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search diligently for the young child, and when you have found Him, bring me word again so that I may come and worship Him also."

When they had heard the king, they departed. And look, the star that they saw in the east went ahead of them till it came and stood over where the young child was. When they saw the star they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy.

And when they had come into the house they saw the young child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshipped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented to Him gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

And being warned by God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they went into their own country another way. And when they had left, look, the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, "Arise, and take the young child and His mother, and flee into Egypt, and you stay there until I bring you word, for Herod will seek the young child to destroy Him.

1 The year of Jesus' birth was miscalculated by Roman Catholic historians, resulting in an error in the Gregorian calendar.

When he arose he took the young child and his mother by night and went into Egypt, and was there until the death of Herod, so that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, "I have called My Son out of Egypt."

Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked by the wise men, was exceedingly angry, and sent forth and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem and in all its coasts, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently inquired of the wise men. Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, saying, "In Rama there was a voice heard: lamentation, weeping, and great mourning—Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted because they are not."

But when Herod was dead, look, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, "Arise, and take the young child and His mother, and go into the land of Israel, for they who sought the young child's life are dead."

And he arose, and took the young child and His mother, and came into the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus ruled in Judaea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Notwithstanding, being warned by God in a dream, he turned aside into the parts of Galilee. And he came and resided in a city called Nazareth, so that which was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled: "He shall be called a Nazarene." (Matthew 2:1-23)

Anti-Christ was fully aware of the prophecies about Israel's Messiah. Those prophecies spelled out clearly the year and place of Messiah's birth. Foremost in anti-Christ's mind was to destroy the Messiah before He could fulfill His God-ordained destiny. Yet although anti-Christ knew the time and place of Messiah's birth he had no power within himself to kill Him. He had to rely upon man, and he was constrained by the will of God. Evidently God was able to hide from anti-Christ the whereabouts of Jesus by secreting Him in Egypt until the death of Herod. This caused anti-Christ, impelling Herod in blind rage, to strike out at any baby boy born around the time that the Magi had come to him, up to two years of age.

Herod died soon after, and his son, Herod Antipas, continued as ruler of Galilee from 4 BC to AD 39. This same Herod Antipas would be used by anti-Christ to keep the Jews under subjection to Rome, and to facilitate the deaths of both John the Baptist and Jesus.

With the birth of Jesus came the end of the Intertestamental Period, although that end is not officially recognized by historians to have ended until the writing of the first Gospel by Matthew around AD 37.

Although Jesus did not write Scripture, He closed the chapter of the Law and the Prophets, and established the Kingdom of God in the physical presence of men, which Kingdom will be more fully established during His millennial reign on Earth, and ultimately in the New Heavens and New Earth for eternity. ❖