

St. Ephraim the Syrian: Concerning the Coming of the Lord, the End of the World, and the Coming of Antichrist



St. Ephraim the Syrian (c. AD 306 - c. AD 373-9) was an ascetic, deacon, and a prolific Syriac-language hymnographer and theologian of the 4th century from the area of Syria. His works are hailed by Christians throughout the world for their beauty and depth of spirituality.

Concerning the Coming of the Lord, the End of the World, and the Coming of Antichrist

by St. Ephraim the Syrian

Orthodox Life, Holy Trinity Monastery, Jordanville NY 1970, #3, pp. 20-27.

Source: <http://rocorrefugeesreadmore.blogspot.com/2013/06/st-ephraim-syrian->

[on-antichrist.html](#)

Shall I, the most small, sinful Ephraim, who am filled with transgressions, be in a state to express what is greater than my powers? But as the Savior, according to His compassion, taught wisdom even to the illiterate, and by them enlightened the faithful everywhere, likewise will He make my tongue intelligible and unerring for the benefit and edification both of myself, who speak, and all who listen. Yet I shall begin my speech with pain, and with sighs shall I speak concerning the end of the present world and that most shameless and appalling serpent who will bring the whole world into turmoil, and will put fear, cowardice, and terrible disbelief into the hearts of men. He will work wonders, signs, and terrifying spectacles, **inso much that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect** (Matt. 24:24), to delude all by false signs and indications of miracles wrought by him. For by permission of the Holy God he will receive the power to deceive the world, because impiety will have filled the earth, and everywhere every sort of horror will be committed. Therefore, the most pure Master will permit, because of the godlessness of the people, that the world should be tempted by the spirit of falsehood, since men desire to apostatize from God and love the evil one.

Great will be the contest, O brethren, in those times, especially for the faithful, when signs and wonders will be wrought with great authority by the serpent himself; when he will show himself in awful apparitions as being similar to God -- he will flay about in the air, and all the demons, like angels, will exult before the tormentor. For he will cry aloud with might, transforming his countenance, and dismaying all men without measure. Who, brethren, will then prove to be guarded, unshakable, having in his soul the faithful sign -- the holy coming of the Only-Begotten Son, Our God -- as soon as he beholds this unspeakable affliction coming from every direction on every soul, since there will be for her utterly no comfort, neither rest, whatever, neither on earth nor on the sea; as soon as he beholds the whole world in turmoil, everyone fleeing to hide himself in the mountains, and some dying from hunger, others melting like wax from thirst, and no one who will take pity; as soon as he sees every (21) countenance pouring forth tears and with strong desire asking, "Is the word of God somewhere on the earth?" and hearing the answer, "Nowhere"? Who will bear these days, who will endure the

insufferable affliction, as soon as he sees the mingling of the peoples, who come from the ends of the earth to see the tormentor, and many worshipping him, crying with trembling, “Thou art our Savior”? The sea rebels, the earth dries up, the heavens do not give rain, plant life withers, and all those living in the eastern parts of the earth flee to the west because of the great terror, and likewise those living in the western parts of the earth flee to the east with trepidation. But the shameless one, having then taken power, will send the demons to all the ends of the earth to preach: “The great king has appeared in glory, come and see him.” And who will have such an adamant soul as to endure all these temptations? Where, as I said, will such a man be, whom all the angels would bless?

But I, O Christ-loving and perfect brethren, become horrified at just the recollection of the serpent, considering in myself that sorrow which will overtake men in that time, considering how cruel this despicable snake will prove to be to the human race, and how he will have still more malice towards the saints, who can overcome his illusory miracles. For there will be found many then who have pleased God, who will be able to save themselves with many prayers and unbearable weeping in mountains and desert-places. The holy God, seeing their unspeakable wailing and sincere faith will have compassions on them as a tender father, and will cover them where they hide. Meanwhile, the most loathsome serpent will not cease to seek out the saints on the earth and the sea, thinking that he rains already on earth, and that all have submitted to him. And not acknowledging his weakness and that pride through which he fell, the wretch will design to make opposition at the very hour when the Lord will come from the heavens. He will bring about perturbation in the earth and terrify all by false magical signs.

At the time when the serpent shall come, there will be no calm on the earth; there will be great affliction, consternation, disorder, death and famine unto all the ends of the earth. And our Lord Himself said with His divine lips that such affliction **was not from the beginning of the creation** (Mark 13:19). How indeed can we sinners imagine this measureless and even unspeakable affliction, when God gave it such a name. Let everyone hold his mind with attention on the holy sayings of the Lord and (22) Savior, how He, according to His compassion, because of the

extreme necessity and tribulation, wishes to cut short the day of sorrow, exhorting us and saying: **Pray ye that your flight be not in winter, neither on the Sabbath** (Matt. 24:20); and again: **Watch ye therefore, and praying always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape these things...and to stand before God** (Luke 21:36), because the time is near. We are all plunged into this misfortune but we do not believe. But let us ask unceasingly with tears and prayers, day and night prostrating ourselves before God in order that we sinners may be saved. He who possesses tears and compunction, let him entreat the Lord to deliver us from the affliction which will come upon the earth, and that we see not this beast at all and do not hear of his dreadful spectacles. For there will be **famines and earthquakes in divers places** (Matt. 24:7) and various sorts of death throughout the earth. A courageous soul will be required, that will be able to keep her life in the midst of these temptations. For if a man is proved to be even a little careless, he will easily be exposed to assaults and will be captured by the signs of the evil and cunning beast. And such a one will find no mercy for himself at the judgment; it will be revealed there that he willfully believed in the tormentor.

Many prayers and tears are necessary for us, beloved ones, in order that some of us should prove firm in temptations, because many will be the illusions wrought by the beast. He is a wrestler against God, and desires to destroy all. For the tormentor will employ means such that he will have to bear the seal of the beast on themselves, when in his own time -- that is, at the fulfillment of time -- he will come to deceive all with his wonders. At that time, only when one bears this seal will it be possible to purchase food and other necessities, and the beast will set overseers to carry out his orders. Take not, my brethren, of the boundless evil cunning of the beast and the subtleties of his maliciousness, how he begins with the stomach in order that man, when he is brought to a state of extreme want of food, shall be forced to receive the seal of the beast, that is, the impious brand. He will not be required to receive this brand on just any member of the body, but on the right hand and also on the forehead, so that it will be impossible for a man to make the sign of the cross with his right hand, and likewise impossible to sign the holy name of the Lord and the glorious and venerable Cross of Christ our Savior on the forehead. For the wretch knows that the (23) Cross of the Lord, signed upon a man, destroys all his power, and therefore he puts his seal on a man's right hand, as

it seals all our members with the Cross. Similarly the forehead, like a lampstand which carries the lamp of light on high, the sign of our Savior. Wherefore, my brethren, a fearsome contest lies before those who love Christ, in order not to be dismayed before the hour of death comes, and not to remain in inaction when the snake will brand his seal in the place of the Cross of the Savior. For undoubtedly he utilizes such means so that even the name of the Lord and Savior should not be named at that time. Indeed, the powerless one does this while trembling at and fearing the holy might of our Savior. If anyone will not be sealed with the seal of the beast, then he shall not be captured by his illusory wonders. And the Lord forsakes not such ones, but enlightens them and draws them to Himself.

Brethren, we must understand with all exactness the odious and illusory miracles of the enemy. Indeed our Lord will come to all of us in the stillness, and will repulse the subtleties of the beast for our sakes. Keeping the steadfast faith of Christ in purity, we will make the power of the tormentor falter. Let us acquire an unwavering and firm reason, and the powerless one will withdraw from us, being unable to do anything to us.

I entreat you brethren, being the least among you, let us not be lax, O Christ-lovers, rather let us strengthen ourselves even more by the power of the Cross. The inevitable contest is at the doors. Let us take up the shield of faith. Indeed, let us be ready, the faithful servants, and not receive that one. For the godless and savage thief will come beforehand, in his own time with the intention of despoiling, blocking up, and ravaging the elected flock of the true Shepherd. Let us try to find out, O friends, under what appearance the shameless snake will come to the earth.

As the Savior, having willed to save the human race, was born from the Virgin and in human form trampled upon the enemy with the holy might of His Divinity, thus the enemy will contrive to take on the form of His coming that he might deceive us. Our Lord will come to the earth on light-bearing clouds, like terrible lightning; but the enemy will not come thus, because he is an apostate. In reality his weapon will be born of a defiled virgin, but this will not mean that he becomes incarnate. The most despicable one will come as a robber, in a manner such as to deceive all: he will come as one humble, meek, a hater (as he (24) will say of himself) of

unrighteousness, despising idols, giving preference to piety, good, lover of the poor, beautiful to an extreme degree, constant, gracious to all. He will especially esteem the Jewish race, since the Jews will await his coming. But together with all this he will work signs and miracles and dreadful spectacles with great authority; and he will use sly means to please all, so that the people will quickly fall in love with him. He will not accept bribes, speak with anger, show a gloomy countenance, but with a decorous exterior he will take to deceiving the world, until he has become king. Whence, when the many classes and the people see such virtue and power, suddenly all will conceive the same thought, and with great joy will proclaim him king, saying among themselves: "Can another man so good and righteous be found?" He will quickly establish his kingdom, and in anger will defeat three great kings. And then this serpent will become proud in heart and vomit forth his bitterness; he will disturb the world, confound its limits, oppress all, and defile souls. Soon he will not show himself as a pious man, but at every opportunity he will act as a man who is harsh, brutal, wrathful, petulant, violent, indecent, terrible, disgusting, hateful, abominable, wicked, pernicious, shameless, who will strive to cast the entire human race in to the crevice of impiety. He will work multitudinous signs -- however, they will be false ones, having no reality. In the presence of a great crowd of people, who will praise him for his illusory wonders, he will give forth a mighty voice, from which the place whereon the crowd gathered before him stands will shudder, and he will say: "All peoples know my power and authority!" In the sight of the spectators he will move mountains and call in islands from the sea, but all this will be by deception and with illusion, not in reality. He will deceive the world, delude the sight of all; many will believe on him and glorify him as the mighty God.

Then will every soul weep and sigh deeply; then all will see that unspeakable affliction pursues them day and night, and nowhere will they find food to satisfy their hunger. For the snake will appoint cruel overseers and only he who has on his forehead and right hand the seal of the tormentor will be permitted to purchase a little food, whatever kind can be found. At that time infants will die on the bosoms of their mothers, and the mother will die on top of her children. Likewise, will a father perish with his wife and children in the middle of the marketplace, and there will be no one to bury them and put them in a (25) grave. From the many corpses

cast out upon the streets there will be everywhere a stench which smites men heavily. With pains and sighs each man will say in the morning: "When will evening come, that we might have rest?" But when evening comes, they will say to themselves with most bitter tears: "Will the dawn come soon, that we may escape the tribulation come upon us?" But there is nowhere to flee or hide because all is in turmoil, both the sea and the dry land. For this reason the Lord told us: be vigilant, praying importunately to be delivered from the afflictions. Stench on the sea, stench on dry land. Much gold, silver, and sumptuous clothing will be of no use to anyone during these trials; all men will call blessed the dead and those already buried before this great sorrow came upon the earth. Gold and silver spilled out in the streets, and no one touches them, because all this has become abhorrent. But all hasten to flee and hide themselves, and there is nowhere to cover themselves from the affliction. On the contrary, during the famine, affliction, and terror, flesh-eating beasts and reptiles will come to bite men. Terror within; without; trembling; day and night corpses lie in the streets. Stench in the streets, stench in the homes; hunger and thirst in the streets, hunger and thirst in the homes; the sound of wailing in the streets, the sound of wailing in the homes; uproar in the streets, uproar in the homes. Men will meet one another with lamentation -- father with son, and son with father, and mother with daughter. Friends in the streets embracing friends, end their lives; brothers embracing brothers, die. In all flesh the beauty of the face fades, and the appearance of men is that of the dead. The beauty of women has become loathsome and odious. All flesh and human desire will wither. All who have believed the wicked beast and taken upon themselves his seal, the godless brand of the foul one, will approach him suddenly and say dolorously: "Give us to eat and drink, because we all perish, oppressed with hunger; and also drive away from us these poisonous beasts." And this miserable one, not having the means for this will give them answer with great cruelty, saying; "From whence, people, shall I give you to eat and drink? The sky does not wish to give the earth rain, and the earth likewise gives neither harvest nor fruit." The people, hearing this, will weep and shed tears, not having comfort in tribulation, but on the contrary, another unutterable sorrow is (26) added unto their affliction -- namely that they so hastily believed in the tormentor. For he is poor, and has not the power to help himself, and how will he show them mercy? In those days, great will be the necessity from the many tribulations inflicted by the

serpent, from terror and earthquake and raging of the sea, from hunger and thirst and bites of beasts. And all who have received the seal of Antichrist, and have worshipped Antichrist as the good god, will have no part whatsoever in Christ's kingdom; rather they will be cast into hell together with the serpent. Blessed is he who will show himself holy and faithful, whose heart is given over incontrovertibly to God --for he will fearlessly repulse all the serpent's offers, disdaining both his tortures and illusions.

But before all this will come to pass, the Lord, according to His mercy, will send Elias the Thesbite and Enoch, in order that they might proclaim to the human race the reverence of God, and boldly preach right knowledge to all, instructing them not to believe in the tormentor from fear, crying and saying: "Omen, this is falsehood! Let no man believe in it at all; let no man submit himself to the wrestler against God; let no one of you become afraid because the beast will soon be brought to inaction. Behold, the holy Lord cometh from heaven to judge all who have believed in his signs." But only a few then will wish to listen to and believe this preaching of the Prophets. The Savior does this in order to display His unspeakable love for men, for even at that time He will not leave the human race without His preaching, in order that all will be without answer at the judgment.

Many of the saints, those who can be found at the time, at the coming of the execrable one, will shed rivers of tears before the holy God, that they may be delivered by Him from the serpent. With great haste they will flee into the wilderness and with dread they will conceal themselves in mountains and caves; they will pour earth and ashes on their heads, praying day and night in great humility. And this will be granted them from the holy God: His grace will lead them to the place determined for this, and they will save themselves, hiding in precipices and caves, not seeing the signs and terrifying spectacle of Antichrist, -- because the coming of Antichrist will be made known without difficulty to those who have knowledge. But to him who has his mind on the affairs of this life and loves the earthly, this will not be comprehensible; for he who is always tied to the matters (27) of this life, although he even hear, he will not believe, and will despise him who says these things. But the saints will be strengthened, because they scorned every care for this life.

All the earth and sea will weep then; the air will weep, and together the wild beasts and birds of heaven will weep; the mountains and hills and trees on the plains will weep; the heavenly lamp will weep over the human race, because all will have turned away from the holy God and believed in falsehood, taking for themselves in place of the Life-giving Cross of the Savior, the brand of the foul one and assailant of God. The earth and the sea will weep because the sound of the psalms and prayers will suddenly cease from the lips of men. And the Church of Christ will weep with great weeping because the celebration of the divine service and the offering will not be.

After the fulfillment of three and one-half years of the authority and activities of the impure one, and when all the temptations fill the whole earth, then at last the Lord shall come, according to His word, like lightning flashing from heaven; our holy, most pure terrible, and glorious God will come with incomparable glory, the glory of the orders of the Angels and Archangels preceding Him; indeed they are all a flaming fire. And the river of fire with terrible boiling, the cherubim with their eyes downcast, and the Seraphim flying, covering their faces and feet with fiery wings and crying out with trembling: "Stand up, ye who have fallen asleep, behold the Bridegroom cometh!" The graves will be opened, and in the twinkling of an eye, all the generations will awake and look aloft at the holy magnificence of the bridegroom. Ten thousand then thousand and a thousand and thousand Angels and Archangels, innumerable hosts will rejoice with great joy. The saints and the righteous and all who did not receive the seal of the serpent, the vile one, will make merry. The tormentor, with all the demons, bound by the Angels, and likewise all who received his seal, all the impious and sinners will be bound and led before the judgment seat. And the King will give sentence upon them of eternal damnation in the unquenchable fire. But all who did not receive the seal of Antichrist, and all who hid themselves in caves will rejoice with the Bridegroom in the eternal and heavenly bridal-chamber with all the Saints unto the boundless ages of ages. Amen.