

The Antichrist

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Introduction

The very mention of the word conjures up frightening images of a diabolical monster, a man of unspeakable wickedness, treachery and power. The mere mention of his name evokes terror. The Antichrist.

To many people there is nothing more intriguing, more fascinating, more mysterious than the identity of the so-called Antichrist. In fictional accounts he is Rosemary's baby, Damien Thorn, Nicolae Carpathia. What do most people believe about him? What does the Bible say about him? We will show that the answers to those questions are quite different, that is, the popular views of the antichrist are as unbiblical as they are sensational. After all, it makes a thrilling, action-packed movie, but is it the truth?

Dispensational Premillennialism

To understand what most believe, we bring to mind the system of Dispensational Premillennialism. According to this view, which is widely held and propagated with much enthusiasm in our day, we are living in the "End Times." Supposedly the biblical signs are now being fulfilled before our eyes that indicate that Christ is about to come secretly to rapture away His people. Then the Antichrist will arise during the period of tribulation for those left behind. He will be a global dictator. Hal Lindsey has called him the "Future Fuehrer." This fanciful view has him rising to power and taking control of the European Union (revived Roman Empire). He will make, then break, a treaty with Israel. Allegedly he will be an intellectual, oratorical, political, military and religious genius. He will deceive the world into believing he is the savior of mankind and men will therefore give their allegiance to him. But his evil intention is to control the world and destroy God's people.

In *The Preacher's Outline & Sermon Bible*, Leadership Ministries propagates the very teaching of dispensationalist premillennialism in its notes found in 1 John 2:18-23. I would hasten to say that it gives an excellent outline of these verses, but when it gets to explaining what these verses are talking about, it falls far short of what the Bible says and right into the dispensational concept. Notice a few remarks:

Believers must know that it is the last time, that the midnight hour is about to strike for the end of the world. Note the term 'the last time' (eschate hora). It really means the last hour, the midnight hour when the world is to end... Believers must know that it is time for the antichrist. We must be alert to the fact that the antichrist can appear upon the scene of world history anytime. Note this: the Bible definitely teaches that there will be a personal antichrist, a man to arise in the end time who will oppose and stand against Christ more fiercely than anyone else has ever done... The Bible is clear about this: the antichrist refers to a person, a man who is to arise upon the scene as a world leader—a world leader who is going to exalt the state and world government above all worship of God. Believers must know that the antichrist will come. Unless they know the teaching of the Bible, they will not be prepared. Believers must prepare and know that he is coming soon. They must sound forth the warning (12:260).

Where do people get ideas like this? These are very popular beliefs in our world today. One of the reasons for such popularity is the best selling *Left Behind* series that has really pushed this idea on to our society. The third in the series is, *Nicolae: The Rise of the AntiChrist*. I would say that Leadership Ministries has done more study in the *Left Behind* series, and all other such writings of men, than they have in their Bibles. How many times did the quote have the phrase, "believers must know"? In one place they wrote, "Unless they know the teaching of the Bible, they will not be prepared." Really it should read, "Unless they know the fanciful teachings of the Dispensationalists, they will not be prepared." Truly, the Dispensationalists, to be prepared for the antichrist and the last day, must have in one hand the Bible, and in the other hand the newspaper (then the question would be – which newspaper?). They must keep tabs on the events that are happening in the world or they may not be ready for the antichrist. It is interesting that, according to Leadership Ministries, John was not warning people of his day about the antichrist, but about forerunners of the antichrist. Does that sound like what John was warning his "little children" about? Especially when he says that there were many antichrists and that they were already at work.

A *WorldNetDaily* poll asked, "Do you think the Antichrist mentioned in the Bible is alive today?" 40% answered, "Yes, and the person is likely an adult now." And this was not aimed at religious people; among denominationalist the figure would surely be much higher.

Attempts to Identify the Antichrist

Attempts to identify the Antichrist are not new. Some of the early church fathers thought him to be the Roman Emperor Nero. In modern times, people have equated anyone who is ruthless, diabolical or just someone they don't like as the antichrist. Here are just some of the names that have been set forth: Napoleon, Kaiser Wilhelm, Benito Mussolini, Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin, Nikita Khrushchev, John F. Kennedy, Ronald Reagan, Bill Clinton, and Saddam Hussein. Have we left anyone out? I'm sure the list would grow if we would just send out a survey.

Those who believe in Dispensational Premillennialism think the beast of Revelation 13 is the antichrist, but the fact is John does not once use the word "antichrist" in the book of Revelation at all!

Antichrist in the Bible

The Greek word *antikristos* is a compound term. It is the Greek word for Christ, the equivalent of the Hebrew Messiah, meaning “anointed one” or “one sent,” preceded by the word “anti.” The word “anti” can mean “in place of,” which is why some say the antichrist is someone who will pretend to be the savior of the world, taking the place of Christ. But the normal usage of the prefix is simply, “against,” suggesting someone in opposition to Christ.

In all the Bible, the term “antichrist” is found in only two of John’s epistles, 1st and 2nd John, and is mentioned five times. It is not found in any other passage of the Scriptures.

- 1 John 2:18: Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time.
- 1 John 2:22: Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son.
- 1 John 4:3: And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is the spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world.
- 2 John 7: For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist.

Just by reading these four verses of Scripture, neither the casual reader, nor the Bible scholar would get the slightest inkling of the dispensational idea we mentioned earlier. In fact, notice several important points: (1) John says it was already the “last hour,” which may be a reference to the entire Christian age. Therefore, to suggest that we are only now in the “last days” contradicts the fact that John used that terminology of his time, 2,000 years ago (cf. Heb. 1:1-2). (2) There were many antichrists, not just one. (3) These antichrists had already arisen in John’s day. (4) This contradicts the futurists’ interpretation of the antichrist as a single, ominous, individual who is to arise in our time. There were many already in John’s time (1 John 2:18; 2 John 7).

Gnosticism and the Antichrist

In the early days of the church, when it was composed of significant Jewish and Gentile elements, one of the great issues troubling the brotherhood was the relationship of the Christian to the Law of Moses. The early epistles of Paul deal at length with this controversy, emphasizing that the Law of Moses has been abolished and that men are not justified by keeping it. But by about 80 A.D., the Jews as a nation had rejected Christ, and the church had very few Jewish converts. The church was now almost exclusively Gentile. Many of the Hellenistic Gentile converts were heavily influenced by false philosophy. They were interested especially in the person of Christ. They questioned that if He was God, how could He die? Debate over the nature of Christ would occupy the church for another four centuries.

One problem in particular which began to be an issue in John's day was Gnosticism, from the Greek word, gnosis, for knowledge. Gnostics thought matter was intrinsically evil, and spirit is good. Because of this view, they thought it impossible that God could have occupied a fleshly body. A form of Gnosticism, known as Doceticism said that Jesus Christ did not really have a human body, but only appeared to occupy the flesh. Though Gnosticism did not develop fully until the second century, the later epistles address it, and John was probably dealing with the precursor of it in 1 John 4:3 and 2 John 7.

While John applies the spirit of antichrist to Gnostic heresy in his day, the expression more generally embraces any attitude or person who is against Christ. That is what I believe on the subject and I believe it follows what the Bible teaches. The idea that it applies to a particular individual to rise just before the end of the world to cause a cataclysmic World War III is without any biblical support whatsoever. The antichrist, I believe is talking about anyone who opposes Christ and His teachings. Anyone who is antagonistic towards the Lord's truth is antichrist. Whether it is the college professor who blatantly teaches there is no God, or the gray-haired grandmother who does not believe in Christ or His cause.

Paul's "Man of Sin" and John's "Antichrist"

Most of those that I consulted in working on this lesson teach that Paul's "man of sin" (2 Thess. 2:3) and John's "antichrist" (1 John 2:18) is one and the same. They offer a lot of comparisons to prove their point and a few of them, though saying they could not be dogmatic concerning the issue, seemed to be very dogmatic on the issue. Not a few of them uphold the notion that the "man of sin" Paul mentions has main reference to the Catholic Church and its system of the papacy. If that were true then the antichrist would be the Popes.

My present belief on this subject is that the "antichrist" and the "man of sin" do not have to be the same person or principle. They can include each other, but there are differences in the description of the two that would seem to uphold my belief that they don't have to be one and the same. Do I believe, as do some, that the "man of sin" must be the popes of the Catholic Church? I believe they are included in the description of the "man of sin." Just as I believe that the popes of the Catholic Church are included in the description of the "antichrist," to the extent that they teach or live in a way that opposes Christ and His cause. I do not believe that the "man of sin" (2 Thessalonians 2:3) and the "antichrist" (1 John 2:18) have to be talking about the same person or principle.

CONCLUSION

Who is the antichrist? There are some fanciful notions in the world, and most of them claim to be founded upon Bible teaching. We have a tremendous task as God's children and Bible believers to open our Bibles and see if what is being taught is really what the Bible teaches, and not just some popular belief.

My belief concerning the "antichrist" is this: It does not apply to a particular individual to rise just before the end of the world to cause a Holy War against Christ and truth. But, as John teaches, it is

a principle that embraces any attitude or person who is against Christ. The popular view of it being Nicolae Carpathia (*The Left Behind Series*), or any other single individual that would lead the battle against Christ in the very last day, is simply without any biblical support whatsoever. In fact, would not anyone who taught this false doctrine really be in opposition to Christ since it is not what the Lord taught in His word? And if so, would that not make them antichrist?

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