

LIVING WATERS NEWSLETTER

HARRY BOWERS, EDITOR 7844 GRIMSBY CIRCLE, HARRISBURG N.C. APRIL 2015

WHO IS THE ANTICHRIST?

Beginning with the era of the “Church Fathers” (Bishops following the death of the last Apostles) and continuing until the present day, one of the greatest mysteries of all time is the identity of the “Antichrist.” He is described as the ultimate villain in human history, the personification of all evil and the very incarnation of wickedness and perversion. It is no surprise that throughout history prophecy Zealots have sought to identify and expose him.

An example of what the early Church fathers believed concerning the Antichrist is taken from *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs*.

“By means of the events that will occur in the time of the Antichrist, it is shown that he, being an apostate and a robber, is anxious to be worshipped as God...For he is endowed with all of the power of the devil. He will come, not as a righteous king, nor as a legitimate king in subjection to God, but as an unholy unjust, and lawless one. He will set aside idols to persuade men that he himself is God. Jeremiah does not merely point out the Antichrist’s sudden coming, but he even indicates the tribe from which he will come, when he says, ‘We will hear the voice of his swift horses from Dan’ (Jer. 8:16). Once the Antichrist has devastated everything in this world, he will reign for three years and six months, and sits in the temple at Jerusalem. And the Lord will come from heaven in the clouds. But now since the last times are upon us evil is spread abroad among men” (*Irenaeus 180 AD*).

“Since now the end of the world is at hand, turn your minds toward God, in the fear of God...The ending and completion of the world, the hateful time of the Antichrist is already beginning to draw near...Even the Antichrist, when he begins to come, will not be allowed to enter into the church just because he threatens. We will not yield to his arms and violence, even though he declares that he will destroy us if we resist. Some will endeavor to imitate the coming of the Antichrist, who is now approaching. The Antichrist will come as a man. Isaiah says, ‘This is the man who arouses the earth, who disturbs kings, who makes the whole earth a desert’ (Isa. 14:16) (*Cyprian 250 AD*).

“The Antichrist will divide the globe into three ruling powers, when Nero will be raised up from Hades. Elijah will first come to seal the beloved ones. At this time the region of Africa and the northern nation, the whole earth on all sides, will tremble for seven years. But Elijah will occupy one half of the time; and Nero will occupy the other half. Then the embers of the whole Babylon, being reduced to ashes, will advance to Jerusalem. And the Latin conqueror will then say ‘I am Christ, whom you always pray to.’ ...He does, many wonders. Since the false prophet is his. That they may believe him, his image will speak. The almighty has given him power to appear as such. The Jews, recapitulating Scriptures from him, exclaim at that they have been deceived” (*Commodianus, 240 AD*).

This is just a sample of the writings of the Church Father’s a few hundred years after the Apostles. In his book *Antichrist—Two Thousand Years of the Human Fascination with Evil* Bernard McGinn traces the efforts of religious Zealots throughout the history of the church to identify the Antichrist. Even his book of 367 pages could not examine all the outlandish claims concerning the Antichrist. The history of the church throughout the centuries is replete with attempts to identify the Antichrist with historical or contemporary persons. During the Reformation the frequent charge brought by Wycliffe, Huss, Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, Knox, and other Reformers was that the Roman Church was Babylon and the Papacy the Antichrist. However, the Reformers themselves were accused of being Antichrists. A few other examples: Muhammad, Napoleon, Kaiser Wilhelm, Hitler, Mussolini, Roosevelt, Stalin, Gorbachev, Kissinger, and the list is never ending as historical changes occur, especially in the Middle East. Books flooding the religious market by soothsayers, of the Second Advent such as Tim Lahaye and Jerry Jenkins (*Left Behind* series) fan the flames of the ridiculous and keep the Antichrist theories alive.

The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible defines the Antichrist as “a mythical demonic or demonic-human adversary of Christ who will appear before the Second Advent as the last oppressor and persecutor of the Christians, only in turn be defeated and overcome by Christ in his return to earth.” Its ending statement on the subject is: “The antichrist tradition has had a long and involved history. Its origins are somewhat obscure, but the use made of it through the centuries in the Christian church is fairly clear. For many Christians it is still an important belief, even if the antichrist is not identified with any actual person, but is considered a supernatural embodiment of evil.”

Who, then, is the Antichrist? If it is important that this question be answered then the answer must be found in the Scriptures. It is ironic that the word “antichrist” is not found in the book of Revelation. The word is found only in the Epistles of John and is only used four times. I John 2:18, 22: “It is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, *even now many antichrists have appeared*...Who is a liar but the one who denies Jesus is the Christ? *This is the antichrist who denies the Father and the son.*” I John 4:3: “Every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; this is the *spirit* of the antichrist, of which you have heard is coming, and *now already is in the world.*” II John 7: “Many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ coming in the flesh. *This is the deceiver and the antichrist*” It is strange that none of the prophesy pundits when writing of the antichrist cite these verses. To John the antichrist is not in the future but in the present (when he is writing). He does not picture the antichrist as an individual but as *many*. He reduces him from a person to a spirit (a deceiver). From these passages we learn antichrist is not an individual to appear somewhere in our future. Rather the antichrist was a heretical spirit current among many in John’s day. Certainly this deceiving spirit that denies Jesus is the Christ and came in the flesh has appeared throughout history.

WHAT ABOUT THE MAN OF SIN, THE SON OF DESTRUCTION? II THESS. 2:5

II Thessalonians 2:7: The mystery of lawlessness (mystery of iniquity KJV). If Paul does not want the Thessalonians to be “quickly shaken from their composure or disturbed either by spirit or letter (ver. 2); if he wants “no one to deceive you” (ver. 3); and “the mystery of lawlessness is already at work” and the one that “now restrains him was going to be taken out of the way” (ver. 7); it would seem that he would not tell them a mystery that could not be understood. He had warned them of this before (ver. 5).

Most prophecy adherents say all this is future. However, the context shows it took place in the days of the New Testament and they knew who the lawless one was and what restrained him. Paul is further telling them that Jesus would come in judgment and with the breath of his mouth (that is, his word) the lawless one would be brought to an end. This was no mystery to the Thessalonians since Paul was revealing it to them. The reason this passage is said to be sometime in the future is the use of the word “coming” of the Lord. The word describing the “second coming” of the Lord in the last day is the word “revealed” in chapter 1:7 and describes the day when he “comes” to “deal out retribution to those who know not God and so not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus,” and “to be glorified in His saints” (verses 8, 10). The word “coming” used in 2:1 is the word “presence,” the same word found in Matthew 24:44 showing that Christ is “coming” in judgment upon Jerusalem. Christ has “come” many times (in the Holy Spirit and in judgment), but has not yet “appeared” as he will in the future (I John 3:2).

Some had said “the day of the lord has come” (ver.2), but Paul assures them it has not come, but when it comes the man of lawlessness would be revealed and destroyed (ver. 3, 8). In the Old Testament “the day of the Lord always referred to the day of God’s judgment upon the nations. For example: His judgment upon Israel (Amos 5:18, 20; Mal. 4:5); upon Egypt (Jer. 46:10), upon Edom (Obad. 1:15); upon Judah (Zeph. 1:7, 14). Is there any reason the phrase “the day of the Lord” would not mean the same in the New Testament? So here, as in Matthew 24, the context is the judgment of God upon Jerusalem and the whole Jewish system in 70 AD. This being true the “man of sin” would have been Nero Caesar. Paul, as John in Revelation, does not refer to him by name so as not to speak evil of imperial authority. Paul had already suffered at the hands of the Thessalonica Jews for “acting contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying there is another king---Jesus” (Acts 17:7). In the book of Acts the persecution of Christian was mainly by the Jewish system. It was under Nero’s reign that severe persecution of the Christians began by the Romans. Paul states “the mystery of lawlessness is *already at work*; only he who now restrains will do so until he is taken out of the way. Then the lawless one will be revealed...” (I Thess.. 7, 8). The emperor previous to Nero was Claudius. In the book of Acts Paul was protected by the Romans (Acts 18:12ff) and made use of the Roman laws (Acts 25:11-12; 28:19). As long as Claudius was emperor Nero was restrained from persecuting the Church. But Claudius was “taken out of the way” and Nero became Emperor and persecution began. Nero was slain by “the breath of His mouth (His word, preached by the faithful) when he came in Judgment upon Rome after the destruction of Jerusalem. Nero was not *the* Antichrist but *an* Antichrist, and ruled in the “spirit of the Antichrist.”

POGO POSSUM WAS RIGHT...

The late Walt Kelley, the creator and author of the comic strip “Pogo” had the little possum saying: “We have met the enemy and he is us.” Since Satan appears “as an angel of light” (II Cor. 11:14), it is hard sometimes to recognize the enemy. Satan being a liar and the father of lies (I John 8:44) operates in the realm of denial of the truth or in the realm of the lie. Since Jesus is the truth (John 14:6) then the truth is found in his body, the church. After all Satan controls the world (I John 5:10), so the thrust of his activity is toward the church. What more effective way to do this than to infiltrate the church, and use it against itself, thus making it its own worst enemy?

The church is called to be at peace with God and at war with the culture. Too often the church is at war with God and at peace with the culture. This is nothing new. James, in one of the earliest writings of the early church speaks poignantly of this subject (James 4:1-4) “What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is it not the pleasures that wage war in your members? You lust and do not have, so you commit murder. And you are envious and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask with the wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures. You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God, therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.” The following comment on this passage is found in William Barclay’s *The Daily Study Bible*: “James is here setting before his people a basic question-- Whether it is your aim in life to submit to the will of God, or to gratify your own desires for the pleasures of the world? And his warning is that, if pleasure is the policy of life, then nothing but strife and hatred and division can possibly follow. He says the result of the over mastering search for pleasure is war and battle and he means that the overmastering desire for pleasure, and the feverish search for it, issues in long-drawn-out resentments.” How many “contemporary, relationship above doctrine and obedience, let’s not offend our worldly but sincere seekers” clergy would lay such a message upon their “feeling-orientated, self-self-seeking, make me feel good about myself” congregation during the worship service?

Note the source of quarrels and conflicts... “among you.” If the church spent as much time and energy fighting “the good fight of faith” as it did fighting and nit-picking one another the world would see a difference in culture. James mentions their lusts, pleasures, friendship with the world and wrong motives. On top of this he points out their envious attitudes which had led to committing murder. It seems that all these things are “among them” which was a description of the church to which James wrote. It is also a good description of much we are seeing in the religious world today. The modern church is constantly surrendering, inch by inch, to the forces of modern secularism, deviate religion and worldly standards. This means it is guilty not only of spiritual adultery, but, as James points out, murder, spiritual murder, by killing both the spirit and witness the church should have before the world. Perhaps the saddest note of James’ writing is that they made themselves enemies of God (ver. 4). If the church becomes the enemy of God it is its own worst enemy. Pogo was right. We have met the enemy and he is us.