

12. The Antichrist (3Q 2012—1 and 2 Thessalonians)

Biblical material: 2 Thess. 2:1–12, Matt. 24:1–14, Zech. 3:1, Dan. 8:8–11, Acts 2:22.

Quotes

- We here are of the conviction that the papacy is the seat of the true and real Antichrist...personally I declare that I owe the Pope no other obedience than that to Antichrist. *Martin Luther*
- The oracles of God foretold the rising of an Antichrist in the Christian Church: and in the Pope of Rome, all the characteristics of that Antichrist are so marvelously answered that if any who read the Scriptures do not see it, there is a marvelous blindness upon them. *Cotton Mather*
- He [the pope] is in an emphatical sense, the Man of Sin, as he increases all manner of sin above measure. And he is, too, properly styled the Son of Perdition, as he has caused the death of numberless multitudes, both of his opposers and followers... He it is...that exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped...claiming the highest power, and highest honour...claiming the prerogatives which belong to God alone. *John Wesley*
- Everyone who does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is an antichrist [1 John 4:2-3, 2 John 7]; whoever does not confess the testimony of the cross is of the devil; and whoever perverts the sayings of the Lord for his own desires, and says that there is neither resurrection nor judgment, such a one is the firstborn of Satan. *Polycarp of Smyrna*
- By means of the events which shall occur in the time of the Antichrist it is shown that he, being an apostate and a robber, is anxious to be adored as God, and that although a mere slave, he wishes to be proclaimed as king. For he, being endued with all the power of the devil, shall not come as a righteous king nor as a legitimate king in subjection to God, but as an impious, unjust, and lawless one... setting aside idols to persuade [men] that he himself is God, raising himself up as the only idol.... Moreover [Paul] has also pointed out this which I have shown in many ways: that the temple in Jerusalem was made by the direction of the true God. For the apostle himself, speaking in his own person, distinctly called it the temple of God [2 Thess. 2:4... in which the enemy shall sit, endeavoring to show himself as Christ. *Irenaeus*
- The man of sin, the son of perdition, who must first be revealed before the Lord comes, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshipped; and who is to sit in the temple of God and boast himself as being God.... According indeed to our view, he is Antichrist; as it is taught us in both the ancient and the new prophecies, and by the apostle John, who says that ‘already many false prophets have gone out into the world,’ the forerunners of Antichrist, who deny that Christ is come in the flesh, and do not acknowledge Jesus, meaning in God the Creator *Tertullian*
- Where is the absurdity, then, in holding that there exist among men, so to speak, two extremes—the one of virtue, and the other of its opposite; so that the perfection of virtue dwells in the man who realizes the ideal given in Jesus, from whom there flowed to the human race so great a conversion, and healing, and

amelioration, while the opposite extreme is in the man who embodies the notion of him that is named Antichrist?... one of these extremes, and the best of the two, should be styled the Son of God, on account of His pre-eminence; and the other, who is diametrically opposite, be termed the son of the wicked demon, and of Satan, and of the devil. And, in the next place, since evil is specially characterized by its diffusion, and attains its greatest height when it simulates the appearance of the good, for that reason are signs, and marvels, and lying miracles found to accompany evil, through the cooperation of its father the devil. *Origen*

- The word 'Antichrist', to me, is the collective disbelief in god. *Marilyn Manson*

Questions

What does the term "Antichrist" really mean? Why should we spend time identifying the Antichrist? How do we see this concept affecting us and our theology? In what way does the Antichrist and associated ideas fit into the whole concept of the Great Controversy? What methods does the Antichrist use? What of God and Antichrist?

Bible summary

In 2 Thess. 2:1–12 we see the "lawless one" at work, and the attitude and actions of those who follow such a lawless spirit: "Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, because the Rebellion must come first, and the lawless man be revealed, the one whose end is destruction. He is the enemy of God, and proudly sets himself up over everything that is called God and is worshiped. He even installs himself in God's temple, claiming to be God.... He (the lawless one) comes to do Satan's work, having all kinds of powers, using miracles, and performing amazing but deceptive displays. Using every type of evil trick he deludes those who are on their way to destruction, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. Because of this God sends them a convincing delusion so that they put their trust in the lie. As a result everyone who did not trust in the truth will be condemned, for they preferred what is evil." 2 Thess. 2:2-4, 9-12 FBV.

Jesus in Matt. 24:1-14 gives a dual answer to the disciples' question about "when will all this happen?" by describing the destruction of the Temple and the end of the world. His key concern is to give them courage and to prevent them from being deceived. This is always the emphasis in Scripture: not to be deceived by the Devil's lies.

Satan is the Accuser, the one who speaks to condemn us before God and the jury of the on-looking universe (Zech. 3:1), while Jesus defends us. This "trial" scenario should not be taken to indicate that God needs to be "convinced" either way; this is simply a description of God's open government. In Dan. 8:8-11 is described prophetically the work of the little horn, who sets itself up in opposition to God. Peter speaks in Acts 2:22 of how Jesus came from God to do his work, which included a refutation of Satan.

Comment

The extensive quotations listed are just a sample to show the extent to which ideas about Antichrist has affected Christian belief. There have been many identifications of Antichrist—to different individuals and to whole systems of belief. However the truth is that as a specific term "Antichrist" is used only in 1 and 2 John, where it is also used in the plural, "antichrists." (1 John 2:18). The concept is primarily one of a person or persons who are adversaries of Christ and also seek to replace Christ. The term is for all

those who are in opposition to the God Christ came to reveal, and who seek to replace this God with some other belief. As John says, “Every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist.” (1 John 4:3 NIV). John also clarifies that anyone who does not believe that Jesus is the Christ is antichrist, since they deny both the Father and the Son (1 John 2:22), and that those who deny Jesus’ incarnation are “deceivers and antichrists.”

The passage here in 2 Thessalonians describing “the man of sin” is often linked to the concept of the Antichrist since the descriptions of their actions are similar. The descriptor for the “man of sin” however is literally “the lawless one” in the original. It therefore identifies all beings that choose to reject the law of God and operate in this “lawless” fashion, rejecting even the jurisdiction of law in their lives. This is far more than simple “law-breaking” though of course it also includes it. It is a wholesale rejection of God and his government, his laws and his principles. It is a whole anti-God philosophy that finds expression in the description of Satan’s rebellion that is at the heart of the great controversy as described in Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28.

Ellen White Comments

The last great delusion is soon to open before us. Antichrist is to perform his marvelous works in our sight. So closely will the counterfeit resemble the true that it will be impossible to distinguish between them except by the Holy Scriptures. {GC 593}

When the Thessalonian church received erroneous views concerning the coming of Christ, the apostle Paul counseled them to carefully test their hopes and anticipations by the Word of God. He cited them to prophecies revealing the events to take place before Christ should come, and showed that they had no ground to expect him in their day. “Let no man deceive you by any means,” [2 THESS. 2:3.] are his words of warning. Should they indulge expectations that were not sanctioned by the Scriptures, they would be led to a mistaken course of action; disappointment would expose them to the derision of unbelievers, and they would be in danger of yielding to discouragement, and would be tempted to doubt the truths essential for their salvation. The apostle’s admonition to the Thessalonians contains an important lesson for those who live in the last days. Many Adventists have felt that unless they could fix their faith upon a definite time for the Lord’s coming, they could not be zealous and diligent in the work of preparation. But as their hopes are again and again excited, only to be destroyed, their faith receives such a shock that it becomes well-nigh impossible for them to be impressed by the great truths of prophecy {GC88 456-7}

The greater man’s influence for good, under the control of the Spirit of God, the more determined will be the enemy to indulge his envy and jealousy toward him by religious persecution. But all heaven is on the side of Christ, not of Antichrist. Those who love God and are willing to be partakers with Christ in His sufferings, God will honor. Antichrist, meaning all who exalt themselves against the will and work of God, will at the appointed time feel the wrath of Him who gave Himself that they might not perish but have eternal life. All who persevere in obedience, all who will not sell their souls for money or for the favor of men, God will register in the book of life.— Manuscript 9, 1900. {3SM 402}