

## **I. Antichrist: What do they say that it is?**

The term *antichrist* conjures up so many images that it would be difficult if not impossible to list them. One thing is for certain though, all of the images conjured up would be dark, disturbing and the stuff of nightmares. Many see the term as referring to a great and terrible character found in the book of Revelation who comes along at the very end of time to do deeds of untold destruction and evil. Others may see it as some kind of a monster-man living at the very end of time, and others may see this as referring to some sort of human manifestation of Satan himself. While any (or all) of these may be correct in some way or measure, a careful look at the Bible seems to indicate something rather different.

The best way for us to study the subject of Antichrist is to begin by jumping head long into the Book of Revelation, to the section that 'everyone' is certain deals with the subject: Revelation 12, 13 and 14. Here, we will discuss chapters 12 and 13 to see what these characters look like and what their characteristics are.

### Revelation 12

The twelfth chapter of Revelation is a benchmark chapter because it is the beginning of the second section of the book; chapters 12-22. At the same time, it is also the opening chapter of the fourth vision in the book; chapters 12-14. Understanding the book of Revelation usually depends upon what you think about it before you ever look at it. There are three main views on the book which are briefly outlined in the special study which follows. We are not going to deal with the debate between the three methods here; quite frankly for our study it really doesn't matter one way or the other, after all we are studying antichrist, not Revelation. We will take the approach that makes the most sense and come at the chapters we need to look at using the Apocalyptic method of interpretation, and not the literal method, since the literal method does not work for Apocalyptic texts. (You may have seen this in our recent study of the Olivet Discourse)

As stated above, chapter twelve is the beginning of the fourth vision in the book. Each of the seven visions in Revelation covers the period of time from Pentecost to Christ's return. Each approaches the same subject from a different point of view, and when we put them all together we have a complete view of the time we live in. The first 11 chapters show us the outward struggle between the church and the antichristian world, while the second section shows us a more "behind the scenes" point of view, one that shows us what is really behind it all.

Chapter 12 opens with a scene in which we have three characters; a woman, a child and a dragon. The woman represents the church, both Old and New Testament: the people of God. (Is. 50:1; 54:1; Hos. 2:1; Eph. 5:32) The child is nothing less than the Christ; the seed of woman (Gen. 3:15; Gal. 4:4) The dragon of course is Satan (Rev. 20:2) The crowned heads represent his world dominion (Eph. 2:2; 6:12).

The dragon takes up his place in front of the woman when she is ready to deliver the child so as to devour it at once. A male child is born, he is to rule all nations. Before he can be devoured, he is snatched up to Heaven... to the throne of God to rule. The dragon, very angry makes war on Heaven and is cast out and down to the earth, where he makes war against the woman (church). The woman is protected by God, while she is in a dangerous position in the midst of spiritual battle, she is not destroyed, and the chapter closes with a very angry dragon at the seashore, ready to continue the fight. No doubt, recalling the story of Jesus contained in the Gospels, and along with the story of the church in the book of Acts, you can easily see how this is playing out.

## Chapter 13

In this chapter, there are two characters revealed, the Beast from the Sea and the Beast from the land. The beast that rises out of the sea represents anti-Christian governments that persecute the Church over the centuries. The sea represents nations and their governments. Note that in Isaiah 17:12 the roaring of peoples is compared to the roaring of the seas, and the surging of nations to the surging of great waters. (cf. Revelation 17:15.)

The beast has a resemblance to the dragon of the previous chapter, with seven heads and ten horns. It represents the power of Satan embodied in the nations and governments of the world. Its seven heads represent all of the empires, nations and governments of history that oppose the truth. Its ten horns represent their power. Notice that like the dragon, it also has crowns, but unlike the dragon, the beast's crowns are set upon its horns, not its heads. Satan is the master of this beast, and its crowns adorn the horns, showing that its glory come from its power, not from its person. In other words, the beast is inspired and rules by Satan!

One of the heads has received a mortal wound, and yet recovered. Much has been made of this by some, but it would appear that this shows that one of the empires or nations shall cease to exist, and then return to its former glory. This may or may not have occurred as of today, it could also be in the future...

Next is the beast from the land. this beast represents the anti-Christian religions and philosophies of this world, and it operates in complete coordination with the first beast. Note that James 3:15 says that anti-Christian 'wisdom' comes from the earth! (cf. Phil. 3:19)

In appearance this beast looks much like a lamb, but it speaks with the mouth of the devil. It seems to be harmless, warm and fuzzy, but it is voracious in its opposition to the Church. It requires all to worship the first beast, it kills all who refuse. It performs signs and wonders, but all are delusions to corrupt the people and promote the beast from the sea. Consider the empires of the world and how they behave. In John's day, the people were required to worship the Emperor. This has been the case in one way or another right up to the present day. If you doubt this, think of the Supreme Ruler of Iran, who is declared to be God's voice on earth, and is venerated accordingly. What happens to anyone who questions this arrangement? In short, the second beast is the false prophet of Revelation 19:20.

The vision wraps up in chapter 14, where we find the victory of the church over the devil and his allies, and the final judgment of God at the very end.

The beast from the sea is said by many commentators to be the Antichrist. You may have read books or heard sermons that refer to "the Antichrist and the False Prophet"; they are our two beasts from Revelation 13. Are these commentators right? Is the beast from the sea the Antichrist? Could be... we'll have to do some investigating, and then you can make your own decision.

## **Special Study: Millennial Views**

Interpretations of Revelation generally fall into line based upon the interpreter's view of the *Millennium*, which is found in Revelation 20:1-6. These views about the Millennium fall into three main groups, which are discussed in brief below. Quite naturally, just to make things interesting, there are sub-views of the three main views. The main reason for all of this is that Rev. 20:1-6 refers to a period of time in which the Kingdom of Christ exists on the earth, and the placement of this Kingdom affects such basic themes of the book as when Christ returns, when the final judgment will take place and so on. Let's begin with a brief synopsis of the three views, and then we will look at a few sub-views.

### *Amillennial*

Strictly speaking, this term is a misnomer because it means "no millennium" and that is not the actual belief it represents. In an Amillennial view, there is no literal kingdom on the earth for a literal thousand years. This view holds that the time referred to in Rev. 20:1-6 refers to the period of time from the resurrection of Christ to His second coming, and that the thousand years is representative of a long but definite period of time. Christ's Kingdom is "not of this world" as Jesus Himself stated in (John 18:36). While this approach harmonizes nicely with the bulk of Revelation, difficulty does arise from the fact that during this time Satan is said to be bound. (Rev. 20:2, 3) Clearly, both Revelation and the whole of the New Testament indicate that Satan is quite active during this, the Church age. To understand this, one would consider the fact that Jesus Himself told His followers that all authority in Heaven and on earth had been given to Him, and that He made this bold statement after His resurrection. (Matt. 28:18) Since Jesus was well aware of the activity of Satan at the time He claimed that He had been given "*all authority*" it doesn't seem to be a stretch to say that Satan operates only so far as he is allowed by the One who has been given "all authority". This particular view is an ancient one, being found in the writings of early Church fathers, and by commentators throughout the Age, including Augustine.

### *Postmillennial*

The postmillennial view holds that Jesus will return after the millennial period has ended, thus the name. In this view, the Gospel will gradually increase until a period of peace and righteousness is achieved, lasting for a definite period. Some say that the period of a thousand years is to be literal, and others say it's long but definite (figurative). This was a very popular view during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, but has fallen off in the 20<sup>th</sup>, as one great war after another has rocked our world, and after postmillennial Christians were purged from the Progressive movement they began in the mid nineteenth century.

### *Premillennial*

The Premillennial view became popular in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, being taught by the early Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses and Seventh Day Adventists. In the latter 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, it gained popularity after being taken up by such commentators as John Darby and C.I. Schofield, and later by the Dallas Theological Seminary and

modern writers coming from there, such as Hal Lindsey. Currently, it is the most popular view of those within the Fundamentalist and Evangelical movements.

In this view, Christ is said to return before the millennium, which will be a literal and earthly Kingdom based in Jerusalem, and lasting for a literal thousand years. There are several subcategories within premillennialism, the most prominent being the *dispensationalist* view. Within this view, the Church age is said to be divided into seven dispensations as represented by the letters to the seven churches, culminating with a seven year period of tribulation immediately preceding Christ's return. After His return, He sets up His literal earthly Kingdom and rules from Jerusalem for a thousand years. At the end of the thousand years, Satan is let loose to foster a final rebellion which is ended by yet another return of Jesus who then throws Satan and his allies into the lake of fire and a new heaven and earth are established after the final judgment.

Some interesting components of this view include the notion that Jesus failed in His first advent because of the rejection of the Jews, that the Church is a "mystery" because it was never foretold by the Old Testament, and that the ultimate purpose of God is to re-establish the Old Covenant sacrificial system. It is not much of a stretch to say that this view has a great number of apparent conflicts with both the Old and New Testament doctrines and texts.

Below is a recap of the major tenants of each view:

<b>Amillennial</b>	<b>Postmillennial</b>	<b>Premillennial</b>
Thousand is figurative number	Thousand is figurative number	Thousand is literal number
Consists of the period from the resurrection of Christ to His second coming	Begins when the acceptance of the Gospel on earth brings an ideal response to the reign of Christ	Begins with the second coming of Christ and lasts for a literal thousand years
The reign will be in Heaven	The reign will be on earth	The reign will be on earth following seven dispensations
Satan is bound and loosed but his activity continues, though limited	Satan will be bound and Heavenly conditions will prevail on earth	Satan will be bound and Heavenly conditions will prevail on earth
The resurrection, second coming and judgment will follow immediately after the millennium	The resurrection, second coming and judgment will follow immediately after the millennium	Just before the end of the thousand years, Christ will leave, and then return for a third time for judgment

### The Man of Lawlessness

Paul writes to the Thessalonians about the "man of lawlessness" (man of sin) in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12. Many scholars and commentators have identified this with the antichrist as well as the beast from Revelation. Could this be true?

When we review these verses, we do see quite a nasty picture of a guy who is in total opposition to God. The section opens with Paul writing to tell the people not to believe a report that Jesus has already returned. It would appear that the Thessalonians have misunderstood what Paul had written to them in his first letter concerning Christ's second coming. (1 Thess. 4:13-5:11) Many have quit their jobs and put a halt to all of their daily activities, assuming that Jesus' return would be immediate. To compound matters, a rumor, possibly in the form of a letter, has gone around that Jesus returned and has left them behind! (The first internet rumor, no doubt) So Paul wants to lay this concern to rest, and clarify his teaching on Christ's second coming. In verse three, Paul says that there must be a rebellion before Christ's return, but the word used here does not indicate some sort of a civil rebellion or earthly war; it is the rebellion of sin. What is being revealed here is not the rebellion, which is almost assumed in this context, but rather the identity of the instigator of the action: the guy behind it all. This character, who is doomed, will try to pass himself off as God, and set himself up as something really great for all to worship. Moving into verses 5-7, Paul reveals that he has spoken with the people about this before, and that the lawlessness (sin, rebellion) is already taking place, but that the one who is behind it all hasn't yet been revealed; something is holding the revelation back.

At some point, the person or force keeping the lawless one hidden will be moved away, and the lawless one- the person or force behind the lawless rebellion against God will be exposed for all to see, and then that person or force will be utterly destroyed by Christ.

Verse 9 talks about the activities of the lawless: the works of Satan that are done to deceive and fool people, and to cause people to follow the deceptions of Satan and turn their backs on the truth of God. The passage ends with a disturbing thought: Those who will perish in judgment will do so because they have loved the lie, the deception- and have refused to listen to the truth. Since they have loved the lie and despised the truth, God gave them over to the lie and they will perish. Can God be the one who is holding back the revelation of who is behind the rebellion? Can the man of lawlessness be the antichrist? Or Satan himself?

## II. Antichrist: Scope of the subject

### Introduction

The word *antichrist* is only used in the Bible by one author: John. It is found in only four verses, and is used a total of five times. None of these mentions of the word are found in Revelation... a fact that may surprise many. That is not necessarily to say that the concept is not referred to in Revelation or elsewhere, but it is not used. When one studies Revelation honestly and without preconceived ideas to prove, an interesting thing happens; he finds that the book isn't necessarily about the end of time. Of course, most Christians (who haven't studied the book) believe that it is only about the very end of time – after all, isn't it called "Revelation"? If we carefully study it, however, we discover rather quickly that it isn't the revelation of the end, even though the end is revealed. Revelation 1:1 sets the context for the entire book. "The revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place..." In that book, Jesus is being revealed, along with events that will "soon" take place. We can well expect that Revelation deals with much more than merely the end of time, and we would be quite correct in doing so. The same would apply to a study of the antichrist. One can make a strong case that at the end of time, there will be a very big antichrist, but it is almost impossible to study the subject and not realize that the subject is not limited to the very end of time.

If antichrist was a subject that is limited only to the very end of time, it would make little sense to study it at all, unless we believed that we were living at the end ourselves, which of course many people today believe. It is interesting to note that most every generation believes this, and for two thousand years they have all been wrong. For this study, we will leave the end of time for another study. We will study the passages containing the word antichrist, determine exactly what John is talking about in context and then look to see if we can find the same theme elsewhere and attempt to determine if this is a concept that we should be concerned about. If it is something we need to be concerned with, then it would behoove us to see if we can figure out what it looks like *today* and let others worry about the distant future. Hopefully, this approach, although novel in many ways, will be interesting, and will yield understanding that will help us in our daily Christian walk.

### Antichrist defined

As we begin our study, it's always a good idea to learn what the key words mean. Here are some definitions and their sources:

### Easton's Bible Dictionary

Against Christ, or an opposition Christ, a rival Christ. The word is used only by the apostle John. Referring to false teachers, he says (1 John 2:18, 22; 4:3; 2 John 1:7), "Even now are there many antichrists."

(1.) This name has been applied to the "little horn" of the "king of fierce countenance" (Dan. 7:24, 25; 8:23-25).

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(2.) It has been applied also to the "false Christs" spoken of by our Lord (Matthew 24:5, 23, 24).

(3.) To the "man of sin" described by Paul (2 Thessalonians 2:3, 4, 8-10).

(4.) And to the "beast from the sea" (Revelation 13:1; 17:1-18).

## **Noah Webster's New International Dictionary of the English Language**

(*n.*) An enemy or opponent of Christ. Specif.: A great antagonist, person or power, expected to precede Christ's second coming.

## **Smith's Bible Names Dictionary**

### **Antichrist**

This term is employed by the apostle John alone, and is defined by him in a manner which leaves no doubt as to its intrinsic meaning. With regard to its application there is less certainty. In the first passage-- (1 John 2:18)--in which it occurs, the apostle makes direct reference to the false Christs whose coming, it had been fore-told, should mark the last days. In v. 22 we find, "he is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son;" and still more positively, "every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of antichrist." Comp. (2 John 1:7) From these emphatic and repeated definitions it has been supposed that the object of the apostle in his first epistle was to combat the errors of Cerinthus, the Docetae and the Gnostics on the subject of the Incarnation. (They denied the union of the divine and human in Christ.) The coming of Antichrist was (believed to be foretold in the "vile person" of Daniel's prophecy, (Daniel 11:21) which received its first accomplishment in Antiochus Epiphanes but of which the complete fulfillment was reserved for the last times. He is identified with "the man of sin, the son of perdition." (2 Thessalonians 2:3) This interpretation brings Antichrist into close connection with the gigantic power of evil, symbolized by the "beast," (Revelation 13:1) ... who received his power from the dragon (i.e. the devil, the serpent of Genesis), continued for forty and two months, and was invested with the kingdom of the ten kings who destroyed the harlot Babylon, (Revelation 17:12,17) the city of seven hills. The destruction of Babylon is to be followed by the rule of Antichrist for a short period, (Revelation 17:10) to be in his turn overthrown in "the battle of that great day of God Almighty," (Revelation 16:14) with the false prophet and all his followers. Rev. 19. The personality of Antichrist is to be inferred as well from the personality of his historical precursor as from that of him to whom he stands opposed. Such an interpretation is to be preferred to that which regards Antichrist as the embodiment and personification of all powers and agencies inimical to Christ, or of the Antichristian might of the world.

These three definitions found in three different sources give differing points of view on the subject. For our purposes at this early stage, we will define the word "antichrist" as being someone who is in opposition to Christ, possibly an imitator or "false Christ". To narrow our definition more towards that of the Bible, we will undertake to study all of the Scriptural passages in which it is found, to see if John defines it for us.

## **1 John 2:18-27**

**<sup>18</sup>Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour. <sup>19</sup>They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us.**

**<sup>20</sup>But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth. <sup>21</sup>I do not write to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it and because no lie comes from the truth. <sup>22</sup>Who is the liar? It is the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a man is the antichrist—he denies the Father and the Son. <sup>23</sup>No one who denies the Son has the Father; whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also.**

**<sup>24</sup>See that what you have heard from the beginning remains in you. If it does, you also will remain in the Son and in the Father. <sup>25</sup>And this is what he promised us—even eternal life.**

**<sup>26</sup>I am writing these things to you about those who are trying to lead you astray. <sup>27</sup>As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit—just as it has taught you, remain in him.**

### *Comments:*

It is quite interesting to note that this section is immediately preceded by a section telling his readers not to love this world, or anything in it. (1 John 2:15-17) Consider that a love of this world, its systems, cultures, activities, allurements and ways is in opposition to God and that it is something that can lead us to ruin. With this in mind, let's continue on to our passage...

**18-19: ...the last hour** Is John saying that the time he wrote this was the time immediately before Jesus was to return? Most likely not! From our vantage point, that would seem a little odd considering that nearly 2,000 years have elapsed since then. There are several places in the New Testament that speak of the last age or last days as being in the present tense. (Acts 2:17; 2 Tim. 3:1-9; Heb. 1:2; James 5:3; 2 Peter 3:3) What is really happening here is that John (and others) are aware of the fact that the age of the Law of Moses is over, and the church age has begun; the church age being the last age before the return of Jesus and the final judgment. There is no age on earth as we know it after this one.

**and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour.** The appearance of "antichrists" had been predicted by Paul and others, although they used other terms than "antichrist" to describe those who would act in opposition to Christ. Thus, the fact that they were already in the world of John's day reveals that they must be living in the last age. There were not "antichrists" prior to the advent of Christ... it only makes grammatical sense,

although most lived in opposition to God. Note the fact that in this verse, John, 2,000 years ago stated bluntly that there were already many antichrists in the world. If that were true, then we would be mistaken to say that antichrist is a concept or a person that is reserved only for the very end of time. Further, if they had already appeared in the first century, then it is highly likely that they are here with us in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as well. Jesus warned in Matthew 24; 24-25 that many false Christs and false prophets would appear and even deceive the elect... if that were possible. John has picked up on this theme.

**<sup>19</sup>They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us.** Here John, while he hasn't yet identified or defined his term, indicates that those of whom he is speaking were at once "with us." This would seem to show that they had either been, or had appeared to be Christians. In his day, the Gnostic movement had grown out of the church and spread heresy, false teaching and division amongst the body. They taught among other things, against the divinity of Christ. They taught that Christ lacked sufficiency. The time may come when there will arise false teaching in any local church body. It is the duty of the elders of that body to remove the false and divisive teaching from the church!

**<sup>20</sup>But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth** You have an anointing from the Holy One is an interesting turn of phrase. "Christ" is the Greek word for "Messiah" which means *Anointed One*. Our anointing is the gift of the Holy Spirit that we have received from the Godhead. Thus, if we are filled with the Holy Spirit, we know the truth.

**<sup>21</sup>I do not write to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it and because no lie comes from the truth.** The anointing we have received is the truth. If we have remained faithful to the anointing we received, we are not liars, thus we know the truth. See John 14-16 for what Jesus had to say on this subject.

**<sup>22</sup>Who is the liar? It is the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a man is the antichrist—he denies the Father and the Son. <sup>23</sup>No one who denies the Son has the Father; whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also.** John draws a fascinating contrast here between those who are anointed with the truth, and those who are liars. The Gnostics of his day believed that they had received special revelation from God, and the conclusion was that Jesus was not divine. Thus, they are liars! If they follow the lie, and Satan is the liar and the father of lies, then they follow Satan, and cannot be believers in fellowship with the church. Note that John has now defined exactly what "antichrist" means: a person who denies that Jesus is the Christ. Anyone who does that does not have the Father. Anyone who does that is a liar. Anyone who does that is a follower of the father of lies.

**<sup>24</sup>See that what you have heard from the beginning remains in you. If it does, you also will remain in the Son and in the Father. <sup>25</sup>And this is what he promised us—even eternal life.** John urges his readers to remain faithful to what they have heard from the beginning. Once again, the time reference is to the beginning of this age, and what they have heard was the pure Gospel of Christ. Similarly, we also need to remain faithful to the Gospel message that was from the beginning of this age. We have no need of new religious "facts" that have come along, for these "facts" always seem to move beyond Christ into

new territory; territory that is full of the devil's lies. The result of holding firm will be eternal life if we remain firm in our commitment to Christ and to the truth.

**<sup>27</sup>As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit—just as it has taught you, remain in him.** Remain faithful and you will be OK; this is John's message. The anointing we have received, the Holy Spirit, must be encouraged and nurtured within the Christian. It is overwhelmingly important for us to get a firm grasp on the Word of God, and to allow it to grow within us. We must be regularly in prayer; we must be regularly in service to the Lord. When we do this, we will find ourselves led more and more by the Spirit within us, and we will not be deceived by the lies of the Enemy!

### *Section Recap:*

Here are several important points that we have learned from this section about antichrist.

1. Antichrist was active in the world 2,000 years ago.
2. There are many antichrists.
3. Any person who denies that Jesus is the Christ is an antichrist.
4. Denial that Jesus is the Christ is a lie.
5. Antichrists are followers of the father of lies, Satan.
6. We must not allow ourselves to be deceived by this lie.
7. We have been anointed with the Holy Spirit.
8. Our anointing is Truth.
9. We must listen to the Truth, and cling to that which we have heard from the beginning; the Gospel of Christ.

### **1 John 4:1-6**

**<sup>1</sup>Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. <sup>2</sup>This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, <sup>3</sup>but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.**

**<sup>4</sup>You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. <sup>5</sup>They are from the world and therefore speak from the viewpoint of the world, and the world listens to them. <sup>6</sup>We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us. This is how we recognize the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood.**

### *Comments:*

**<sup>1</sup>Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.** Here, John returns to his theme contained in the first passage we have studied. He begins by telling his readers to "test the spirits" meaning that they should carefully weigh what is being taught (said) to determine if it is the truth that comes from God. The presence of false teachers and

prophets was nothing new. They were present in the Old Testament, and present in the first century; notably the Gnostics. In the Old Testament, the people were given a way to test the spirits in Deuteronomy 18:21-22...

<sup>21</sup> You may say to yourselves, "How can we know when a message has not been spoken by the LORD?" <sup>22</sup> If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the LORD does not take place or come true, that is a message the LORD has not spoken. That prophet has spoken presumptuously. Do not be afraid of him.

There are actually two tests inherent here: First, if the word spoken by the prophet does not come to pass then the prophet is not from the Lord (Is a false prophet or teacher) and second, if the word does come true but the teaching leads to false gods (idolatry) then the speaker is not of God. *This is a very important concept and we must bear it in mind as we go forward.*

John's message is that no spirit (teaching) should be accepted until it has been tested by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the final authority during the Christian age. Jesus promised us that He would come and "teach you all things" and "will remind you of everything I have said to you." (John 14:26) Ultimately, we have received the New Testament, which as the Word of God is the "mind of the Spirit". Any teaching that is inconsistent with the Word of God is not from God. Such teachings are found today in many areas; religious teachings, philosophy, politics and from our popular culture to name a few.

**<sup>2</sup>This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, <sup>3</sup>but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.** John here is directing his statement at the Gnostic heresy in particular, there can be no doubt about that. In so doing, he has directed his remarks at the heart of their philosophy: that Jesus was not God, because God would never lower Himself to take on mortal flesh, for all things physical are inherently evil. Clearly, the fact that a teacher, prophet or philosopher acknowledges that Jesus came in the flesh would not validate their teaching if their teaching was contrary to the Holy Spirit as recorded in Scripture, yet their refusal to acknowledge that Jesus came in the flesh would clearly discredit their teaching in any case. John goes on to once again identify that this person is antichrist. Note the use here of the definite article "the"... "the antichrist". The antichrist was already present in the world in the first century in the persons of the Gnostics who denied the divinity and humanity of Jesus; and the antichrist is present in our world today in the form of persons who deny the divinity and humanity of Jesus. In both cases, such people teach many things, but none of them are from God for they are liars; their teaching is from the Devil.

**<sup>4</sup>You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. <sup>5</sup>They are from the world and therefore speak from the viewpoint of the world, and the world listens to them. <sup>6</sup>We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us. This is how we recognize the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood.** John points out that the Christian has overcome these false teachers because we have the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. It may be that in our time, we tend to overlook this amazing fact. When we fill our hearts and minds with the Word of God, and follow the leading of the Spirit; when we allow our lives to change for Christ we become entirely different people that we were before. As we grow spiritually, our point of view changes from one centered on the

teachings, attitudes and philosophies of this world into a person who has the viewpoint of Christ. For such a person, the false philosophies of this world are not even to be taken seriously, for they are so obviously ludicrous.

### *Section Recap:*

Here are some things we have learned in this second section:

1. Anyone who denies that Jesus came in the flesh is the antichrist.
2. Anyone who is an antichrist does not teach the truth, and must not be followed.
3. A person who is indwelt by the Holy Spirit has the spirit of truth within him.
4. We overcome the false teachings of antichrists by our reliance upon the truth of God.
5. False teachers teach from the viewpoint of the world of men, not from the viewpoint of God.

## **2 John 7-11**

**<sup>7</sup>Many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist. <sup>8</sup>Watch out that you do not lose what you have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully. <sup>9</sup>Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. <sup>10</sup>If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take him into your house or welcome him. <sup>11</sup>Anyone who welcomes him shares in his wicked work.**

### *Comments:*

**<sup>7</sup>Many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist** Here begins the message which is the reason John wrote this letter; watch out for false teachers! John's warning that many deceivers have gone out into the world is interesting in our antichrist context, for the linkage between deceiver and antichrist is essentially linkage between their message and the Devil. Once again, John defines "antichrist" as being someone who denies the incarnation of Jesus. Pause a moment to consider how many people you know are deniers of the incarnation of Jesus; it is staggering in all of its implications.

**<sup>8</sup>Watch out that you do not lose what you have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully.** If someone denies that Jesus came in the flesh, he is also denying that the flesh can be the dwelling of the Holy Spirit, thus we cannot be indwelt by the Holy Spirit. If this is so, then human ethic is debased to the level of humanism (which modern culture teaches is a pinnacle) and thus we become our own god. From this point, consider what John is saying here: If you listen to and follow these deceivers, you can lose all that you have worked for! Of course, this is 'controversial' in many Christian quarters, especially among those who teach that a Christian cannot fall away. If a Christian cannot fall away, then one might ask what John was driving at here, and they won't get a very good answer. Falling away is warned against in various places in the New Testament (Heb. 2:1; Matt. 11:6; 26:31, 33; Mark 4:17; 14:27, 29; Luke 7:23; 8:13 and Heb. 6:6) and certainly the New Testament teaches that we must regularly examine ourselves to ensure that we are walking properly with the Lord. This would explain what John is warning against here, and would also provide excellent instruction for each of us to

follow. What cannot be argued is that if a person becomes essentially his own god, he is lost and will not receive reward as a servant of Jesus.

**<sup>9</sup>Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son** Someone who runs out ahead and deviates from the basic teachings of the faith must end up denying them (basic teachings of the faith) and no longer walking with the Lord. If one does not have the Lord, he is lost (1 John 5:12). Those who hang on to what they have heard from the beginning (the Gospel) will remain in God, and receive all of His blessings.

**<sup>10</sup>If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take him into your house or welcome him. <sup>11</sup>Anyone who welcomes him shares in his wicked work.** Remember that John is speaking of those who are engaged in the practice of leading Christians astray. Such false prophets or teachers who are engaged in leading Christians astray are not to be listened to or greeted by the Christian. This is not just to be nasty to them, but rather to avoid putting ourselves or other Christians in danger, for if we knowingly put ourselves or our brothers in danger, we have committed an evil act.

#### *Section Recap:*

Here are some things we have learned in this second section:

1. Antichrist =deceiver
2. A person who accepts the teachings of antichrist will be lost.

#### Conclusions:

We have now studied all of the passages in the New Testament where the word "antichrist" is found. At this point we may conclude the following:

1. Anyone who denies that Jesus is the Christ is an antichrist.
2. Anyone who denies that Jesus came in the flesh is an antichrist.
3. Antichrist is a liar and a deceiver of the saints.
4. The purpose of such a person is to pry Christians away from the truth.
5. The truth is from God, and the deceiver is not from God but from the father of lies; the devil, therefore
6. The antichrist is the agent of the devil whose purpose is to break us away from fellowship with God, and to wage war against God and God's people.

Now that we have reached some conclusions about "antichrist" what can we say about the beast of Revelation 13 and the man of lawlessness? Looking at the Beast as one single individual is problematic in the extreme, just as taking John's teaching about antichrist as one single individual is problematic. As the Beast is more likely a succession of anti-Christian world systems and governments that recur over the centuries of the Christian Age, they are definitely carrying the spirit of antichrist. This is because they deny the divinity of Christ, they seek to replace God with the supremacy of the state, or with some sort of Paganism, and they are the product of the devil's lies for the purpose of waging war against God and His people, just like antichrist.

*Antichrist: A sign of our time?*  
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The man of lawlessness has much in common with antichrist. Both are in opposition to God, both are lies, both wage war against God and His people, both attempt to pry God's people from the truth and into doom. To my mind, the man of lawlessness is more likely Satan himself; at minimum it's an agent of Satan. If it is a succession of systems and individuals working as Satan's agents in opposition to God, denying the divinity and/or humanity of Christ, then he (it) would qualify as spirit of antichrist at least.

## **Special Subject: Gnosticism**

John's occasion for writing his three letters seems to be centered on a heresy that had troubled the church as it grew through the Greco-Roman world of his day. This false teaching came under the loose label of "Gnosticism". The word comes from the Greek word for knowledge, and we can say that it means "doctrine of knowledge". It is generally thought that this teaching developed when Christian, Jewish and Greek philosophical concepts were merged together. The general concept that holds all branches of this system together is that salvation can only come if one acquires a "certain kind of knowledge".

The Gnostics had been around for quite some time before they ran into Christian teaching, and many of them quickly recognized that Christianity had much to offer. What ensued however was not an adjustment of Gnosticism to adapt to Christian teaching and practice, but rather they adapted Christianity to suit Gnostic ways of thinking, thus it became a heresy in the church. From mid first century onward the Gnostic problem grew, until the time of John's pastoral writings at the end of the century when it was quite a major problem for the church.

A complete discussion and history of this movement would be way too long for our purposes here, but what follows should give you a basic understanding of the two main branches of the heresy.

### **Ebionism**

This is the prototype for the Jehovah's Witnesses of today. They have no problem referring to Jesus Christ as God... it's just that they would use a small "g". They taught that Jesus was certainly a spirit-being, one of many in fact, but in no way would they equate Him as being eternally one with God the Father. They would take the statement that Jesus was the firstborn of creation (or of the Hebrews) as literally meaning that He had been born first. They had no problems with the concept of the virgin birth, but insisted that only in the sense that angels are sometimes called "sons of God" that Jesus could be called Son. As the first born, He would deserve high honor... but He was considered to have been a created being; the first of the created beings, as opposed to uncreated creator. In short, they agreed that Jesus was born in the flesh, but denied His divinity.

### **Docetism**

This branch of Gnosticism believed that Jesus was one with God, but denied that He came in the flesh. Their objection came from the classic Greek view that the body is inherently evil. This thought process follows that if the physical body is inherently evil, then Christ could not inhabit a physical body and be without sin. A more modern version of this thought process is the one involving the Doctrine of Original Sin which holds that we are "born in sin" and that from the moment of conception we are fit only for hell because the body *is* sin. With that said, let's be clear that I am not saying that modern Christians who believe and teach Original Sin are Docetist, rather that they share a philosophical presupposition. The Docetist would contend that the Gospel accounts of Jesus eating, sleeping and drinking were merely apparitions or visions, and not a literal act on His part, since He was not actually present in a real human body.

John made reply to both of these heresies in his writings. To the Ebionist he wrote 1 John 2:18-22, and to the Docetist he wrote 1 John 4:1-3. Both views were called antichrist. Note that in both cases, John wrote that the heresy came from within Christian ranks and went out from it. This is because the Gnostics had been around for a long time before they encountered Christianity, and they combined their previous views with a modified Christianity and ended up with a hybrid Christianity rather than the true teaching. It can be an interesting question to ask... are there other groups who do the same thing, and if so, are they antichrists too?

### **III. Antichrist: Building on our conclusions**

We have found that the term "antichrist" doesn't in and of itself have any special eschatological significance. That is not to say that there won't be "antichrists" active and participating in the events leading up to and going on at the very end of the age, but that this would be a function of their activities throughout the age, and ongoing at the time. Rather than concentrate on trying to force "antichrist" into Revelation 13, 17 or 19, it would make much more sense to concentrate our efforts on identifying "antichrist" in history and thus figure out what they are in our times than to speculate on the future without adequate evidence upon which to base our speculation. It may be that "antichrist" and the beast from the sea (Rev. 13) are one in the same, as so many teachers insist. However, at this point in our study that cannot yet be determined for certain. What is certain is that "antichrist" has been busy in the world for a long time already, and is at work today as well.

#### *Why look at history?*

"There's nothing new under the sun" the Bible tells us correctly; it's all happened before. President Truman, who was himself a scholar of history, had a slightly different take on the matter. He said, "the only thing that's new in the world is history you don't know." One of the important and foundational assumptions of classical higher education used to be that one could only understand the present if he understood the past. This is so very true, and it is a tragedy that so many young people go through school and are not taught their history, or at least aren't taught very well. Most people get the idea that history is dull, dusty and old. In truth it is exciting and full of warnings and hopes once you get past the school textbook!

If we are interested in trying to understand a concept like antichrist, we must do two things to get the basic understanding, and after that we can do a third if we want to. The first thing we must do is to study the passages of Scripture in which it is discussed and defined to get the Biblical meaning of the subject. Second, we need to look at the record of the ages to see if we can find the spirit of antichrist at work. Think about it: if antichrist is an ongoing thing, it must have been recorded by history! If we look at all of the history recorded since John's time, over 1900 years, there are many, many "antichrists" at work; in fact way more than we could do justice in our short time together. Our approach will be to look at religion and see if we can find antichrist at work, and then to see if we can find him at work in government and politics in the past. If we can, we should get a pretty good idea of what he looks like, and how he operates.

#### Criteria

We have already developed the antichrist criteria, so let's review our conclusions:

1. Anyone who denies that Jesus is the Christ is an antichrist.
2. Anyone who denies that Jesus came in the flesh is an antichrist.
3. Antichrist is a liar and a deceiver of the saints.
4. The purpose of such a person is to pry Christians away from the truth.
5. The truth is from God, and the deceiver is not from God but from the father of lies; the devil, therefore
6. The antichrist is the agent of the devil whose purpose is to break us away from fellowship with God, and to wage war against God and God's people.

These criteria will be the standards against which we will measure our case studies. By doing so, we will be able to determine if they fall into the biblical category of antichrist.

### From Religion

#### *The Jehovah's Witnesses*

The JW's are the church of community and purpose.

- A. They do not believe that Jesus is one with the Father. He is a "god" not God.
- B. They believe that Jesus was actually the angel Michael, and that after he completed his work on earth he was restored to his angelic duties.
- C. They believe that there is no Triune God. The Father, Son and Spirit are intended to teach three gods, not One.
- D. "Jesus" returned in 1914.

#### Conclusions:

- 1. The Jehovah's Witnesses are a perversion of Christianity.
- 2. The Jehovah's Witnesses are actively engaged in spreading a lie for the deliberate purpose of breaking Christians away from the body of Christ, in direct rebellion against God.
- 3. The Jehovah's Witnesses meet every definition of antichrist as written by John the Apostle. Watch out, lest you too are fooled!

Therefore: The Jehovah's Witnesses are antichrist.

#### *Islam*

Islam is the religion of peace.

- A. Islam teaches that Jesus is not the Christ, and that he was a prophet of Allah
- B. They thus do not accept that he was divine at all.
- C. God's major prophet, Muhammad will return again (not Jesus)
- D. Christians and Jews have special status as "people of the Book."
- E. Non-Muslims worldwide are to be given the opportunity to convert to Islam. If they refuse, they *must be killed*.
- F. Christians and Jews may be kept as slaves if they refuse to convert... *prior to being killed*.
- G. Any Muslim who converts to Christianity must be killed.

#### Conclusion:

- 1. Islam denies the divinity of Jesus.
- 2. They are engaged in the spread of a perversion of Christianity
- 3. Their perversion is a lie, deceit to tear believers from the truth, and to prevent others from ever coming into contact with the truth.

4. Islam, because of its emphasis on wholesale murder is little more than a cult of death.

Therefore: Islam is antichrist.

*Latter Day Saints (Mormons)*

LDS is the church of love, family and gentleness.

- A. Mormons believe that Jesus, whose brothers are named Adam and Satan, is not God.
- B. Jesus in the Savior, not the Lord, for he shows us the way to God.
- C. If you achieve the highest level of exaltation in this life, you will be assigned to another planet, where you can become the Savior of that planet.
- D. There is no hell. When non-Mormons die, they become the servants of Mormons in the afterlife.

Conclusions:

1. The LDS church, although it looks really nice from the outside, is a perversion of Christianity.
2. They deny that Jesus is the Christ.
3. They deny that Jesus is divine.
4. They are engaged in the spreading of deceit and lies to tear us from the truth, or to keep people from ever hearing the truth.

Therefore, LDS is antichrist.

To be fair, in each of the three cases mentioned, we could have included much more detailed information on their beliefs. However, their case would not get better, it would only become more obvious that they are antichrist. What is important to see, however, is that in each case, they look pretty good. In spite of the way they appear on the outside, all of these (and many we haven't mentioned) are rotten at the core, nothing more than the twisted work of Satan. With that said, it is vitally important to bear in mind that this does not mean that we as Christians should show them anything other than the love of Christ. What Muslims, Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses need more than anything is to enter relationship with Jesus Christ. It is not for us to scorn them, disrespect them or in any way to persecute them. The individuals within these groups have been deceived; lied to. We should approach them with love and compassion, even though we must reject their teachings: Jesus loves them and desires them to come to the truth!

## Government and Politics

### *The Roman Empire*

Rome was the greatest and most glorious empire of all time. It is a great source of inspiration for governments, historians and political philosophers to this day. In spite of this, the early church fathers wrote extensively that it was the Antichrist, and that Caesar was the man of lawlessness. Some of the reasons for this are:

- A. The Roman Empire denied the divinity of Christ
- B. They denied the truth of the Gospel
- C. They persecuted the church for more than two centuries.
- D. At various times, they carried out campaigns of extermination against the church.
- E. They worshipped pagan gods, but more importantly, they worshipped the Emperors: the embodiment of the state itself.
- F. They actively worked to tear believers from the truth of God, and to keep others from every hearing the truth.

Therefore: The Roman Empire was antichrist.

### *The French Revolution*

When the French Revolution began, it looked a lot like the American Revolution. It was all about Liberty, Equality and Justice for all men. That was not the result, however. We should consider the following facts:

- A. The French Revolution, when power was achieved, outlawed the church.
- B. They imprisoned or executed the clergy
- C. They engaged in a wide program of mass murder to solidify their power
- D. They created secular (pagan) holidays to replace the old church calendar.
- E. The State was the supreme authority in all matters, both legal and moral; all rights were granted by the State.
- F. When Napoleon became emperor, no authority in heaven or on earth was found to be higher than he, therefore at his coronation he crowned himself.
- G. Revolutionary France attempted to conquer the entire world, and launched a world war to do it.

Therefore: The French Revolution was antichrist.

### *The Soviet Union (Communism)*

In 1917 the Russian people revolted against the Plutocracy of the Czar. The reasons for the revolt were to free the people from oppression, establish liberty, equality and justice for all citizens without respect for ethnicity, religion or social position. Communism sounded pretty good for most people too. They would establish a new system where everyone pulled together for the common good. There would be no greed, not poverty, and nobody would take advantage of anyone else... and they would make peace with the whole world. Here's what really happened:

- A. Upon taking power, the government outlawed all religion

- B. They imprisoned and or executed all clergy
- C. They declared the Communist State to be the supreme authority on earth; the workers' paradise.
- D. They rounded up anyone who either opposed the Party or the State, or who held views that were in any way contrary to "the Party Line" including anyone who would not renounce their belief in Jesus Christ.
- E. Upon their consolidation of power, they began a program of exporting communism throughout the world, quietly subverting other nations to encourage revolution everywhere.
- F. During the regime of Stalin they murdered more than 25,000,000 people. (Hitler murdered 12,000,000.)
- G. Obviously, they denied the divinity, supremacy and incarnation of Christ, since they denied the existence of God at all.

Therefore, the Soviet Union was antichrist.

### *Nazi Germany*

The Nazis came to power in Germany after running an election campaign that promised the people full employment, equality, healthcare, education for all children, retirement pensions, a minimum wage and a host of other social programs that would be right at home here in the USA. Most importantly, they promised to give the people their national pride back. The amazing thing is that Hitler kept his promises... but not in the way most people expected. Below are some other things that they got in the bargain:

- A. The Nazis denied the divinity and humanity of Christ.
- B. They re-wrote the Bible to change it to match the Party Line.
- C. Churches and ministers who refused to follow the "New German Church" were closed and imprisoned and executed.
- D. The authority of God was replaced by the all-powerful State.
- E. Dissenters were exterminated by the millions.
- F. They created the ultimate police state.
- G. They fought genocidal wars of conquest ending in utter ruin and destruction of the nation.
- H. The Party replaced Christian practice with a major emphasis on paganism and the occult.

Therefore, Nazi Germany was antichrist.

### *Summing it up*

In looking at these few examples of nations as antichrist, we see a pattern very quickly. First, they all denied the divinity of Christ. Second, they all fought against the church, resorting to murder on a massive scale to eradicate the truth of God's Word. Third, all of them replaced the rightful power and authority of God with the power and authority of the State, and each one did the work of Satan in their attacks on truth and God. In advancing their lies and deceptions, they tried to replace God with government, and eventually, each came to ruin.

Will there be a great Antichrist at the very end of time? We can't be sure of that, but there is nothing to indicate that the spirit of antichrist is going to go away any time soon. As time marches on, this spirit seems to grow and become more and more

monstrous. Revelation 14 and 19 show this spirit being destroyed once and for all when Jesus returns. Consequently, it seems more than likely that it will continue. The saddest thing is that so many Christians are so concerned about what might come along in the future that they aren't paying attention to what is going on all around them. Should we fear for the future? NO! Jesus will be victorious in the end!

Should we fear for the present? Maybe! Right now is our watch, and most of us aren't doing a very good job of fighting off the antichrists around us. Remember, John wrote with the expectation that we would resist evil when it comes among us. We are Christ's ambassadors, and as such, it is our job to stand firm in Him, and not to allow ourselves to be fooled. The question is: How do we resist?

### *The Ball Game*

The spirit of antichrist is at work all around us. It is on the march, and we are caught up in a time and place where the battle needs to be fought against it. Remember that our enemy is not flesh and blood, but principalities and powers. (Eph. 6:10-13) We have been given a commission by Jesus (Matt. 28:18-20) and this sets forth our responsibilities in the army of Christ. We are to take the Gospel of salvation in Christ to the world around us, and to make disciples. Making disciples builds the church, and the building or not building of the church, the body of Christ is the ball game. Imagine if Satan could somehow destroy the body of Christ. That would destroy God's purpose in making man for fellowship with Him: God would lose, Satan would win. I don't think for a moment that Jesus will allow that to happen, for He has made promises to us, and He cannot break His promise. However, He has given each one of us a job to do in this conflict, and we must get that job done. He has given everything for us out of His boundless love for us, and we must be willing to give our all for Him, out of our love for Him.

The key is in making disciples. The time has come for each and every one of us to get into the ball game and make disciples. MCC will be moving forward in this great endeavor, and we will be calling on all of our people to join in. In the very near future, you will be asked to get involved in small groups here at MCC. These small groups will exist for the purposes of making disciples. This will involve growing spiritually, and sometimes in being a little uncomfortable. Nobody grows in their comfort zone, but tremendous growth will occur when we are willing to be a little uncomfortable every now and then. As you participate, you will find that you develop relationships with other Christians, making friends and growing yourself. The whole goal is that all of you will not only grow to discipleship, but that you will be equipped to lead your own small group so that you can take a leading role in bringing others to discipleship. If that in turn results in yet more people who can develop others to discipleship, who can then bring others into discipleship, then Milan Christian Church will be transformed from a little country church into a major movement for Christ. This is our vision, this is our commission, and in the over arching view of the struggle between Satan and Jesus, this is the ball game. Because this is the ball game, it is the key to resisting and eventually to destroying the spirit of antichrist.