

Hartford Bible Students

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The Antichrist – Bible Truth vs. Popular Fiction

The subject of Antichrist is one of great interest to most Christians. Many religious novels and movies present a sensationalized depiction of end time prophecy featuring this character. These fictional presentations portray a future rise of an Antichrist figure, and they take unjustified liberties, distorting the Scriptural definition and activities of this “mystery of iniquity.” Fiction it is... Biblical teaching it is not! What do the Apostles’ inspired writings really teach about the Antichrist?

What is the prophetic Antichrist?

The popular concept of the Antichrist is that of an individual who is against or opposed to Christ. But that is not how the Bible defines the term “The Antichrist.” The proper application of this term should be one who misrepresents — counterfeiting and taking the place of the true Christ. In other words, usurping the position of Christ as head of the Church.

The Apostle John clarified this proper definition in 1 John 2:18,19: “Ye have heard that The Antichrist shall come. Even now there are many antichrists.” The Greek distinguishes between The special Antichrist and the numerous lesser ones. John’s subsequent remarks show that he does not refer to all false christs, but to a certain group of individuals who, though professing to be of the true Church, had left the foundation principles of the truth, and were therefore not only misrepresenting the truth, but were taking the place of and name of the true head of the Church. John says of these, “They went out from us, but they were not of us...” Even though they may have deceived themselves and the world on this subject, they have not honestly represented the sincere followers of Christ who love the truth and who would never claim to be the head of the Church. See also 2 John 1:7.

When interpreted properly, prophetic passages in Scripture give a clear description of the beginning, prosperous rise, and decline of The Antichrist system. Other titles given in the New Testament for this ominous figure are: The Man of Sin, That Wicked One, Mystery of Iniquity, The Son of Perdition, and The Beast. Our Lord refers to this same character as “The Abomination of Desolation” spoken of by Daniel the prophet. (Matthew 24:15; Daniel 11:31; 12:11)

In Daniel’s prophetic vision, this same character was also prefigured by a “little horn” or power which grew out of a terrible beastly government and made war with “the saints” — the true children of God. (Daniel 7:8, 21)

The Apostle John in the book of Revelation details symbolic prophecies concerning this Antichrist figure — a cruel, beast-like character — subtle, hypocritical, deceptive, and oppressive. John explains the gradual development of The Antichrist in the midst of the Christian Church, ascending in power and influence until finally reaching the very pinnacle of earthly wealth and power — all the while falsely claiming authority and power from God.

It is important to fix the concept in our minds, therefore, that The Antichrist is not a single individual. It would be more accurately described as a position or office within the church, which ultimately gained tyrannical power, not only over the church, but also over many nations for centuries. Just as The Christ consists of the true Lord and the true Church, so The Antichrist is a counterfeit system consisting of a false lord and an apostate church. (1 Corinthians 12:12, 27)

This system counterfeits the authority and future reign of the true Lord and his Church and has intoxicated the nations with false claims of a God-given right to reign. A single individual could never

fulfill all the predictions made concerning The Antichrist. Only a corrupt system — an unholy union of church and civil government — could fulfill these predictions. As the Apostle Paul wrote: “the Mystery of Iniquity doth already work” and would be revealed before Jesus’ Second Advent.

Development of the Counterfeit Heavens

Jesus declared that his “kingdom is not of this world.” (John 18:36) He never intended for his followers to set up an earthly Kingdom long before his Second Advent. No, his Church was to remain apart from the world and earthly governments — holy, pure and, as stated in Scripture, a virgin betrothed to her bridegroom — waiting for his return. (Matthew 25:1-13)

For a short time after the death of the Apostles, the early Church remained separate from the world. Within two centuries, however, deflection from the Apostolic teachings gradually laid the groundwork for the worldly-minded church to endorse powerful lords of the flock — Nicolaitans. (Revelation 2:15)

In A.D. 313, the Roman Emperor Constantine adopted Christianity, and the next century witnessed an even further departure from faith — a self-serving, compromising, political church organization — a church-state system under powerful and dictatorial bishops. Instead of waiting for Christ to set up the Kingdom upon his return, this adulterous church united with the kingdoms of this world. This counterfeit system prepared the way for Antichrist to fully take the position as head of the church — usurping the rightful place of Christ. Successive bishops of Rome continued making grand claims for the developing church system, but it was not until circa A.D. 539 that the Roman Emperor Justinian decreed the Bishop of Rome as “the head of all the holy Churches and of all the holy priests of God.” Then, in A.D. 800 Charlemagne, the first Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, formally presented Papacy with the Papal States, and the reign of the Holy Roman Empire began with the Pope as its head.

As the centuries progressed, Papacy became more and more arrogant in its presumptuous claims: “The pope holds the place of the true God,” declared Pope

Innocent III (A.D. 1198-1216). The Lateran Council (A.D. 1123) acclaimed the Pope as “Prince of the Universe.” St. Bernard (A.D. 1090-1153) wrote that “none except God is like the Pope, either in heaven or on earth.” And Pope Nicholas (A.D. 858- 867) boasted, “What can you make me but God?” *Ferrar’s (Roman Catholic) Ecclesiastical Dictionary* states, “The Pope is, as it were, God on Earth...” These boasts have not been renounced to this day. Claiming authority from God, Papacy ruled for centuries with a heavy hand over the thrones of the earth, seeking to convert the nations by political intrigue and treachery, and the people by oppression and subjugation. This cruel, tyrannical system began to physically persecute those who opposed or even questioned its authority. The true disciples of Christ would not pledge their allegiance to the Man of Sin, and as a result, hundreds of thousands were tortured by means more horrible than modern minds can imagine.

“...Thy [True] Kingdom Come...”

Shortly, the true, peaceable Kingdom to come under Christ will be fully set up and he will rule with his Church in righteousness throughout the earth. Instead of oppressing and persecuting, Christ’s Kingdom will bless and bring life. Instead of fear and bondage to error will come lasting joy and the knowledge of a merciful God. Praise the Lord! Satan’s dominion through Antichrist shall be swallowed up in victory by the true Christ and his faithful Church!

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