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THE ANTICHRIST AND MANY ANTICHRISTS

"Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time," 1 John 2:18.

It should not surprise anyone that the devil wishes to keep his master stroke against the Kingdom of God in this age as secret as possible. However, he has not been able to keep his secret. The Lord has informed His Church of the future appearing of THE ANTICHRIST, who will be Satan's final and greatest attempt to supplant the Christ of God with his imposter.

The antichrist is a false Christ. It is of him and his like the Saviour warns in His Olivet discourse in Matthew 24. "For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; inso-much that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect," verse 24.

Since the devil has been unable to keep his attempt at a latter day coup secret, he seeks to do the next best thing. He has spread falsehoods and disinformation in order to deceive and confuse the people of God in an attempt to mislead them regarding the identity of this personage upon whom the devil is pinning his all, in his final endeavour to overthrow the cause and throne of God.

However, we can avoid this confusion if we simply embrace what the Word of God says on this subject rather than follow the schemes of men, which are in truth but the schemes of the devil to sow confusion as already mentioned.

In the verse we are looking at, I would like you to note that John states a simple fact.

I. THE EARLY CHURCH HAD HEARD ABOUT THE ANTICHRIST

"Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come . . ."

There can be no doubt that from these words we may correctly observe that the 1st century Church were aware of the appearing of a future antichrist. The word 'heard' means 'to give audience to'. The early believers had received and embraced what they were taught about the coming of antichrists.

1. Title. It is to be noted that this epistle is entitled: 'The First Epistle General of John.' John was not writing to any specific church or Christian community. His epistle was intended for the general use of the Church of Christ.

2. That being so, it must be noted that the early Church was generally informed and instructed in the coming of the antichrist. "As ye have heard that antichrist shall come." The first century was a time of spiritual enlightenment amongst God's people, most likely above any season of blessing and revival that has since been visited upon the Church. It is significant therefore that John was able to say: "Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come. . . ." There was no question of them NOT having heard and understood God's Word on this subject.

Many times I have said and written of the fact that Paul's writings to the Church at Thessalonica in like fashion demonstrate this same truth almost in an incidental way. By that I mean it is not something prominently declared. Rather, we are required to look closely at Paul's words to the Thessalonians to observe the fact that the events of the last days and the appearance of the antichrist just before the return of Christ were common knowledge amongst that first generation of believers.

Paul spent three Sabbaths in Thessalonica. "Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews: and Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures," Acts 17:1-2. If we maximise the time which could encompass three sabbaths we may calculate that there were fourteen days between those sabbaths, but should Paul have arrived six days before the first of the sabbaths he was in Thessalonica, we



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can add them to the fourteen days between the three sabbaths. We in like manner may add another 6 following the third sabbath and this would bring us to an absolute maximum period of twenty-six days that Paul could have spent amongst the Thessalonians.

Now, it would be unrealistic to believe that Paul was amongst these new converts for twenty-six days since he had to travel some one hundred miles from the last city in which he had preached, Philippi, and likewise he would have to travel another forty five miles to Berea, the next city he preached in where he began his evangelising in the Jewish synagogue. "And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming thither went into the synagogue of the Jews," Acts 17:10. His visit to the synagogue likely took place on the Jewish Sabbath following his final sabbath in Thessalonica and some of the intervening days would have been taken up with travelling.

We must also remember that while he was Thessalonica, there were days taken up with the awful persecution and riot created by his Jewish opponents, Acts 17:5-8. Thus, while the maximum period of time that encompasses three sabbaths is twenty-six days we must subtract an unknown number of days that would have been taken up in travel and the controversy that arose over Paul's preaching.

Please bear this in mind when we observe the significance of these words written by Paul to the infant church in Thessalonica. "Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things?" 2 Thessalonians 2:5. Here Paul refers to what it was he had taught the Thessalonians when he was amongst them in that period which comprised three sabbaths. The "these things" he is referring to are easily identified. I will quote the entire passage so that we may fully understand what it was Paul was referring to.

"Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God. Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things?" 2 Thessalonians 2:1-5.

It cannot be denied that the "these things" were an exposition of the events that would herald the approach of the return of Christ, namely the revealing of the 'man of sin' who would oppose and exalt himself above "all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God."

It is so important to understand that the early church was not confused or divided in its opinion as to the identification of the antichrist! Amongst all the vital doctrines of the gospel that Paul would have taught this infant church there were the matters related to the end of this age and the revealing of the antichrist.

How distressing therefore to note the division and confusion, the abominable ignorance of the subject and the silence of the modern pulpit on just what it is the Bible teaches on this obviously important subject!

There was no confusion in what the apostles taught for they but taught what the Saviour had taught in Matthew 24 and what the prophets before Him had taught.

Likewise there would be no confusion today IF WE BUT BELIEVED THE BIBLE AND DID NOT TRY TO FORCE UPON IT THE THEORIES OF MEN!

3. From the words of John we can learn that the early Church understood that even then there were 'many antichrists' but there was yet THE antichrist to come! "Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time." The 'last time' was to be marked by the appearance of 'many antichrists' but there was yet ONE antichrist to come and it was about him that Paul taught the Thessalonians.



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II. IT IS IN THE TEACHING OF THE LORD JESUS THAT WE LEARN GREATER DETAILS REGARDING THE MANIFESTATION OF THIS FINAL ANTICHRIST.

"When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand:) then let them which be in Judaea flee into the mountains: let him which is on the housetop not come down to take any thing out of his house: neither let him which is in the field return back to take his clothes. And woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days! But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the sabbath day: for then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be," Matthew 24:15-21.

1. The Saviour says that at the end of this age and just before His return there will come a period of unparalleled 'tribulation', or affliction, centred in Jerusalem. There have been many terrible persecutions suffered by the people whose city and longed for home Jerusalem is. In living memory, under the Nazi regime of Hitler there was the greatest of tribulations suffered by that ancient people but the Saviour says there is worse to come! There is 'worse to come' for whatever antichrists have arisen in the past and indeed at present may have raged against God and His redeemed people, the Church, and against His ancient covenant nation, Israel, there is to arise a greater antichrist. Surely we can see that is the teaching of the Bible when we consider the words of Christ, of Paul and of John?

2. The event that will spark off this great tribulation is identified clearly by the Saviour. "When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand:) For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be," Matthew 24:15, 21.

Paul tells us that this 'abomination of desolation' will be that "man of sin . . . , the son of perdition; who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped," who will "as God" set himself "in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God," 2 Thessalonians 2:3, 4.

Christ's reference to "the holy place", Matthew 24:15, and Paul's reference "to the temple of God" can only refer to one place - the Jewish temple in Jerusalem. That temple is not yet erected, but it exists in the hearts and plans of many Jews and may be seen in the many declarations of Jewish leaders and its anticipated form can be viewed in the plans and model exhibit in the 'Temple Institute' in Jerusalem. It is stated on **the internet site established by the 'Temple Institute'** that "you may view photographs of the actual sacred Temple vessels that have been produced by the Temple Institute. Each vessel has been created by accomplished craftsmen. These vessels and priestly garments are being fashioned today according to the exact Biblical requirements, specifically for use in the future Holy Temple. They await the day when they will be called into the Divine service of the Holy Temple."

But it has to be said that the building of this temple will be done in the same rebellious spirit as was manifested at Calvary, the same spirit that crucified the Lord Jesus. The temple will not be adorned with the Shekhinah Glory as was seen in the Tabernacle of Moses and the Temple of Solomon. No, this temple will be the stage upon which Antichrist will declare his glory. There it will be that he "exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God," 2 Thessalonians 2:4.

3. Those who have claimed that the Pope or, more correctly, the succession of popes, is the antichrist spoken of by Paul, cannot reconcile this claim with the teachings of the Scriptures. This particular prophetic view has its origins in the doctrines taught by Origen which were taken up and adapted to promote the prophetic view called "A-Millennialism".

EARLY BELIEF

Pastor James Payne wrote many years ago:



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"Gibbon, the Roman historian tells us that for the first three centuries of the Christian era, the assurance of the Millennial reign of our Lord Jesus Christ was the general belief of orthodox Christians. Justyn Martyr, early in the 2nd century says, "I and as many as are orthodox Christians in all respects do acknowledge that there shall be a resurrection of the body and 1000 years reign in Jerusalem".

For the first two and a half centuries Pre-Millennialism was the universal doctrine of the Church as it had been of the Apostles. No other doctrine was so much as known, far less received. A-Millennialism was not heard of in the Church during this period.

In the third century, however, Origen promulgated his false teaching. He contended that practically all Scripture, historic as well as prophetic, was allegorical and should be understood in a figurative sense with an underlying esoteric meaning, seen only by the initiated. He not only regarded the Revelation as mythical but also the records of Creation in the first two chapters of Genesis. He taught that the fires of hell were purgatorial and that the whole human race would eventually be saved and brought to glory. His teachings were then regarded by the Church as heretical and he was accordingly excommunicated and died a heretic. His doctrine had, however, laid the foundation for much of the Papal teaching which was subsequently to arise.

When the Roman Emperor, Constantine the Great, accepted Christianity in the year 307, the door was opened for a multitude of worldly men to enter the Church for the purpose of self-aggrandisement. The doctrine of Origen suited them well and all the glorious promises of Scripture both in the Old Testament and the New, relative to the reign of the Lord Jesus Christ, were applied to the Church at that time. This developed the Laodicean spirit, when the Church, no longer humble as her Lord, said 'I am rich and increased in goods and have need of nothing'.

Then followed the dark ages in which all Truth was obscured and the Papacy with all its persecution, became predominant. When, after centuries of darkness, the Reformation began to dawn, the Millennial teaching of the early Church was almost forgotten. This is the reason why it does not figure either in the doctrine of the Church of England or in the Westminster Confession. The fictitious glory of the Church in this age was never abandoned and the general teaching was that the promulgation of the Gospel would bring in the glory of Christ's kingdom." (<http://www.ivanfoster.net/pdf/Dec1002.pdf>)

ANTE-NICENE AGE

"Philip Schaff, an American church historian, who doesn't hold to 'futurism' (or Pre-millennialism) himself, gives this summary of the early church's view: "The most striking point in the eschatology [doctrine of last things] of the ante-Nicene age [Apostles to Council of Nicea 325AD] is the prominent chiliasm, ... that is the belief of a visible reign of Christ in glory on earth with the risen saints for a thousand years, before the general resurrection and judgment. It was indeed not the doctrine of the church embodied in any creed or form of devotion, but a widely current opinion of distinguished teachers, such as Barnabas, Papias, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Methodius, and Lactantius." (**Sound of an alarm**)

ALLEGORICAL OR LITERAL

There can be no denying that A-Millennialism teaches that prophetic scripture is to be understood as being allegorical and should be understood in a figurative sense.

Men replace the simple and straightforward literal meaning of the prophetic scriptures with their own views. Thus 'Jerusalem' becomes a mere symbol of the church as do 'Zion' and 'Israel' and has absolutely no reference to the geographical and literal places thus spoken of by the prophets.

CONFUSION AT CALVARY

A similar false method of exegesis lies behind the false conclusions of the Jews in the days of the Saviour, and indeed it continues amongst that nation to this day. It is that which caused the confusion amongst be-



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lievers at the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus. The false principle they applied to those scriptures such as Isaiah 53 blinded them to the truth of a suffering, rejected Saviour and filled them with confusion and desolation in the wake of Calvary. The Saviour addressed the cause of this despondency in Luke 24. "Then he said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory? And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself," verses 25-27.

The sin of which they were guilty was 'unbelief'! The Lord Jesus condemned them for being "slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken."

EXAMPLE

An example of this folly may be seen in many of the great commentators in the past who, when it came to the Prophetic scriptures did that for which they would have denounced anyone who followed their method when interpreting the scriptures regarding any cardinal doctrine!

Here is the comment of the great John Gill on Isaiah 2:1. "Concerning Judah and Jerusalem; the church and people of God, and what should befall them and their enemies in the latter day: this inscription stands for this and the three following chapters."

Thus, Judah and Jerusalem become "the church and people of God" without any explanation as to WHY Judah and Jerusalem should mean "the church and people of God"! This is taking liberties with God's Word. Often we may see the church 'typified' in the affairs of Israel and Jerusalem BUT that does not mean that we use in exchange the words "the church and people of God" every time God refers prophetically to "Judah and Jerusalem"! If we do, we destroy entirely the true meaning of what it is God is saying.

Another example of the same writer's exegesis may be seen in his comments on the next verse of Isaiah 2.

"[That] the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains; by "the mountain" of the Lord's house is meant, not Mount Moriah, on which the temple was built, as Kimchi interprets it; nor the temple itself, as the Targum; though in the last days of it, and at the first coming of the Messiah, that had a greater glory than ever it had before, through the personal presence of Christ in it; through the effusion of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles there, on the day of Pentecost; and through the Gospel being first preached here by Christ and his apostles, from whence it went forth into all the world, as is afterwards predicted it should; but the kingdom of Christ . . ."

Here again we are asked to forgo the simple meaning of what God says and replace it with an allegorical understanding.

This same procedure may be seen in the writings of many great expositors when it comes to the prophetic scriptures and is the reason why so many are misled on this vital subject.

WESTMINSTER CONFSSION OF FAITH

I beg those who hold to A-Millennialism to see that their methodology entails a denying of the simple truth spoken by the Lord through His prophets. Their adopting of Origen's 'allegoricalism' causes them to look upon the plain words of God with unbelief and then to deny the simple truths they proclaim and then to apply their own meaning to God's Word and call the whole improper process 'an exposition'!

With regards to the view that the "pope is the antichrist", it should be pointed out that the Westminster Confession of Faith does not make the claim regarding the pope that many would have us believe it does. In this I believe it bears the mark of the influence of many within that assembly who held to the Pre-millennial view of Christ's return. (See Rev Brian McClung's **article on this subject**)

The Westminster Confession states: "There is no other head of the Church, but the Lord Jesus Christ; nor can the Pope of Rome, in any sense, be head thereof; but is that Antichrist, that man of sin, and son of perdition,



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that exalteth himself, in the Church, against Christ and all that is called God." (Chapter XXV, Paragraph VI.)

The pope is that man who "in the Church" "exalteth himself . . . against Christ and all that is called God."

As John says in our text, "Even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time." The last times were to be marked by many antichrists, even as it is today. The pope is but one of many Christ-deniers and usurpers. Unquestionably, he is at the top of the heap of such. But notice what John says of these "many antichrists". "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us," verse 19. These antichrists had their origins within the professing church. That is what the Westminster Confession of Faith says of the pope. He is within professing Christendom.

That is not from where THE ANTICHRIST EMERGES.

DANIEL'S WORDS

All the features of the final antichrist as set forth in Daniel chapters 7 and 8 and Revelation 13 indicate a person who makes no profession of Christianity of any form!

The antichrist is one who wars against the saints and overcomes them for a season. The Antichrist is described as "that horn that had eyes, and a mouth that spake very great things, whose look was more stout than his fellows. I beheld, and the same horn made war with the saints, and prevailed against them," Daniel 7:20-21. The period of his prevailing against the saints is given in verse 25 of that chapter. "And he shall speak great words against the most High, and shall wear out the saints of the most High, and think to change times and laws: and they shall be given into his hand until a time and times and the dividing of time."

The period termed "a time and times and the dividing of time" is a period often referred to in the prophetic scriptures. Just what length of time it refers to may be established by the terminology God employs of this period of time in other places. The parallel passage in the Book of the Revelation says this. "And there was given unto him a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies; and power was given unto him to continue forty and two months," Revelation 13:5. There the period is termed forty and two months. Another measure of this period of Antichrist's dominance is seen in Revelation 11:3. "And I will give power unto my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and threescore days, clothed in sackcloth." Forty and two months and a thousand two hundred and threescore days amount to three and half years and that is what "a time and times and the dividing of time" refers to.

The popes have been around for a lot longer than forty two months and while they were great persecutors of the church at no time could it be said that they were able to "wear out the saints of the most High," or that they were "given into his hand," Daniel 7:25.

Glorious Reformation

Have we not, on a world wide basis just been celebrating the glorious Reformation of the 16th century! Has there not been a widespread confronting and confusing of popery across the globe ever since that date, despite the many counter attacks on its part?

That does not fit with what the Scriptures say of the days of the antichrist.

"And there was given unto him a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies; and power was given unto him to continue forty and two months. And he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme his name, and his tabernacle, and them that dwell in heaven. And it was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them: and power was given him over all kindreds, and tongues, and nations. And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. If any man have an ear, let him hear," Revelation 13:5-9.

It matters not how men may stretch the English language, these verses do not describe the pope of Rome



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today or at any time in the past.

Yes, the Pope of Rome is that antichrist "in the Church" but the final antichrist will not be in any way one who belongs to Christendom or who masquerades under the guise of a 'Christian' as others have done!

From his first appearance he will be seen as a cruel 'beast' and will be revered and worshipped on a wide basis, especially within the territories of the old Roman earth. In his day will be performed "great wonders, so that he maketh fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men, and deceiveth them that dwell on the earth by the means of those miracles which he had power to do in the sight of the beast; saying to them that dwell on the earth, that they should make an image to the beast, which had the wound by a sword, and did live. And he had power to give life unto the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak, and cause that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed. And he causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads: and that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name," Revelation 13:13-17.

No amount of linguistic gymnastics can make these words wholly and exclusively fit the pope or the succession of popes.

It occurred to me as I was meditating upon the words of John in our text, that when John said: "even now are there many antichrists" he was speaking of INDIVIDUALS. There never has been a system that is blasphemous in character which was termed 'antichrist'. No, we can look back on individuals such as John is speaking of individuals, such as Cain, Nimrod, Pharaoh, Goliath and many other INDIVIDUALS but never was there a system so termed. John, when he speaks of those who in his day were antichrists and when he speaks of the antichrist that shall come is speaking of INDIVIDUAL PERSONS!

Those who claim the Bible's ANTICHRIST is the system of popery or the series of popes would need to consider this fact!

While the popes have been antichrists, some much worse than others, there is yet to come a man of sin who exceeds all the popes in their wickedness and blasphemy. He will be manifested and be seen as THE ANTICHRIST three and half years before the Saviour's return. During his time of triumph in Jerusalem, the two witnesses will exercise their most unique ministry in that city, "the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified." See Revelation 11:3-12.

Even they will be overcome by the Antichrist, when they "have finished their testimony." But their demise will herald the near approach of the destruction of the Antichrist at the return of the Saviour in power and great glory. See the verses that follow those we have just quoted. "And the same hour was there a great earthquake, and the tenth part of the city fell, and in the earthquake were slain of men seven thousand: and the remnant were affrighted, and gave glory to the God of heaven. The second woe is past; and, behold, the third woe cometh quickly. And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever," Revelation 11:13-15. The sounding by the seventh angel, the last angel, is the sounding of the 'last trump', I Corinthians 15:52 and 1 Thessalonians 4:16.

I repeat: no amount of linguistic gymnastics can make these words wholly and exclusively fit the pope or the succession of popes.

All this lies in the future - the not too distant future I am inclined to believe.

III. HOWEVER, HOW UNREADY IS THE CHURCH OF GOD PRESENTLY FOR THOSE DAYS!

There is complacency and indifference regarding prophetic matters and where there is any mention of the topic there is invariably the setting forth of the errors of A-millennialism.



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For many years, a large section of the people of God were taken up with the 'any moment rapture' theory. It reached its peak in the second world war, when many preachers declared that Hitler was THE ANTICHRIST and that soon the 'secret rapture' of the church would take place!

Well it hasn't happened, (nor will it ever happen). This has led to a disheartening of many who were misled by this false notion. I believe it even gave rise to a strengthening of A-millennialism! It is wonderful when one error is seen to be false, the disappointed devotees invariably turn to another error!

AN AWAKENING

I am hopeful however, that there will yet be an arousing of the Church of God to the truth of Holy Scripture on the last days. The Saviour does tell us that the sleeping Church will be aroused near the midnight hour by a shout. "While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him. Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps." Matthew 25:5-7. The aroused saints then return to their first love and first duties - bearing testimony to the Saviour's return and fervently awaiting that event.

Daniel was told that he was not to be granted an understanding of many of the things shown to him but they would be revealed to those who would live in the days of the accomplishment of the prophecies. "And he said, Go thy way, Daniel: for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end," Daniel 12:9.

As the "time of the end" draws near, I have no doubts about the King and Head of the Church revealing these matters to His people for He is the "God in heaven that revealeth secrets, and maketh known . . . what shall be in the latter days," Daniel 2:28.

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