

What Does the Bible Say about the Antichrist?

Introduction:

- I At this time we are engaged in a series of lessons in which we are exposing Dispensational Premillennialism as a false doctrine. Our approach is to set up and then knock down the major tenets of Premillennialism. So far we have seen that the Bible says nothing about the rapture, nothing about a seven year period of tribulation and nothing about a millennial kingdom. Now this morning we want to see what the Bible says about the Antichrist.
- II. The Antichrist plays a major role in the premillennial program, especially in the period of time they call the Tribulation. So, in this lesson we will pretty much follow the same pattern that we have in the previous ones, that is, we will look at what the Premillennialists believe from their own words and then we will show that the passages they use to promote their theory do not teach what they think and need them to teach.

Lesson:

I. What Do Premillennialists Believe about the Antichrist?

Premillennialists believe that the Antichrist is a specific person. Some believe that he is living somewhere in Europe right now, others are less dogmatic about that, but all premillennialists believe that the Antichrist is going to be a specific person who becomes the ruler of the world. Listen to them:

“The reality of a future leader known as the Antichrist is well attested in the Bible; no serious reader of the Bible can deny his existence. He is more than a symbol of evil or an impersonal force—his entire existence and being opposes the plan of God and the Son of God” (Thomas Ice & Timothy Demy, Prophecy Watch).

Really! Listen: it may be true that the serious reader of the Bible won't deny the existence of the Antichrist, but a serious studier of scripture will. You see, the truth of the matter is this—the Bible nowhere speaks of the so-called Antichrist as a specific person. The fact is the word antichrist only appears four times in scripture, all from the inspired pen of John. Notice what the Bible says about antichrist.

1 John 2:18

Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour.

1 John 2:22

Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son.

1 John 4:3

And every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already.

1 John 1:7

"For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist."

The first thing that one notices upon investigation of these antichrist passages is that John does not use the term in any kind of eschatological way. The antichrist is not restricted to the future from John's perspective, but was something that was already working in John's day (1 John 2:18).

The second thing that is clear about the term antichrist is that John was not referring to just one specific person. First of all, John speaks of antichrists, suggesting that there were many of them. Second of all, in referring to antichrist, John doesn't use a proper name. He doesn't speak of the Antichrist. John uses the term antichrist, not to denote a specific person, but to identify a false way of thinking, specifically, a false view of Christ.

Here is what we need to know whenever studying the epistles of John, John is speaking against the false system or doctrine of Gnosticism. Gnostics were those who believed that salvation was based on a special kind of knowledge (the Greek word for knowledge is *gnōsis*) that only they possessed. While the doctrinal system of Gnosticism did not develop fully until the second century, there is no doubt that at the least the seeds of Gnosticism were being planted in the first century. Both Paul and John recognized the threat of Gnosticism in their writings. There were many different doctrinal manifestations of this false doctrine, but John deals with its two most common forms. There were the Cerinthian Gnostics and the Docetic Gnostics.

The Cerinthian Gnostics denied the deity of Christ. They believed that there was a distinction between Jesus and Christ. Jesus, they believed was just an ordinary man born of Mary and Joseph. According to the Cerinthians, Christ descended upon Jesus at His baptism and departed from Him sometime just before He was crucified. The Cerinthian Gnostic, then, denied that Jesus was the Christ (**1 John 2:22**).

The Docetic Gnostic denied the humanity of Christ. Most forms of Gnosticism believed in dualism. They believed that matter is completely evil and that spirit is inherently good. Thus, the Docetics denied the possibility of God (Spirit) taken on a body (matter). This form of Gnosticism, then, denied the incarnation of Christ and suggested that the body of Christ was just an illusion. When Christ was here on earth, He wasn't really flesh and blood, it just seemed that way. So while the Cerinthians denied that Jesus was the Christ, the Docetics denied that Christ was Jesus (**1 John 4:3; 2 John 1:7**).

Both of these forms Gnosticism, as well as their advocates, is what John refers to as antichrist. Anti simply means against. Those denying the deity or humanity of Christ are against or opposed to Christ. So then, when John refers to antichrist, he is not referring to a specific person, but rather he is speaking of a spirit of error.

1 John 4:6

We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us; whoever is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

Now, while John was combating a specific false doctrine in his epistles, any spirit of error is antichrist, i.e., is against or opposed to Christ. Anyone who hinders the cause of Christ in anyway can be referred to as antichrist. All false prophets or false Christs, like Theudas in **Acts 5:36** and the Egyptian referred to in **Acts 21:38**, were antichrist. Saul of Tarsus, before his conversion to Christ, was antichrist (**Acts 8:3; 9:5; 26:9-10**). Elymas the magician was antichrist (**Acts 13:7-11**). The Jewish Sanhedrin was antichrist (**Acts 5:27-30**). It's no wonder that John said that "even now are there many antichrists."

This is the only way that the term antichrist is used in the Bible. Not one time do we find the term antichrist used as a proper name in reference to one specific person who will someday rule the world as diabolical dictator.

II. Passages Premillennialists Believe Refer to the Antichrist.

- **Dan 7:7-8**

The premillennialists see in this passage a revived Roman Empire. The Empire, they believe, is made up of ten countries, referred to in this passage as ten horns. Now, from within this Empire the Antichrist is going to arise. He is, they say, the other horn, that is, the little horn in this text. Here again is what they say.

"The prediction that there will be a ten-kingdom stage of the revival of the Roman Empire is one of the important descriptive prophecies of the end time. This prophecy anticipates that there will be ten countries originally related to the Roman Empire that will constitute the Roman Empire in its revived form. The names of these countries are not given, but it can be presumed that Italy, the capital country, would be included, along with major countries in southern Europe and possibly some countries of western Asia and northern Africa which were included in the ancient Roman Empire. Since the names of the countries are not given and there are many more than ten countries in the ancient Roman Empire, it leaves some flexibility in the fulfillment. The prediction, however, requires a political union and then a dictator over the ten countries" (John F. Walvoord, Major Bible Prophecies: 37 Crucial Prophecies That Affect You Today)

Now again, this is another case where a key passage for the millennialists is not referring to what they say it is. You notice that nothing is said here about the so-called Antichrist. They have to speculate and assume that figurative language is referring to their Antichrist. Now, this is clearly figurative language in Dan. 7 so we all have to do some speculating. But the problem with the premillennial speculation is that it contradicts the Bible. In fact, their interpretation contradicts the very text from which it is taken.

Know this: In all of his writings, Daniel had nothing to say about a person who would rise to power out of a renewed Roman empire and who would rule the world for seven years. All the passages cited by premillennialists are perverted. For example, they refer to Daniel 7:7-8 as a reference to a revived Roman empire from which the antichrist arises. That's a perversion of Daniel 7. Daniel's night vision recorded in

Daniel 7 involved four beasts that represented four kingdoms (the same four kingdom's revealed by Nebuchadnezzar's dream in Daniel 2. The kingdoms were Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome. The fourth beast, then, represents the ancient Roman Empire (27 B.C. - 476 A.D.). Where is the evidence that Daniel spoke of a fifth empire? There is none. Premillennialists claim that the reference to the Roman kingdom in Nebuchadnezzar's dream as having "feet partly of iron and partly of clay" (2:40-43) is a reference to the "second phase of the Roman empire." The context won't allow that. Nebuchadnezzar did not see five kingdoms. He only saw four. He did not see two different Roman empires. He just saw one. Read Daniel 2 and 7 for yourself and see how many kingdoms are under consideration. Daniel called the Roman kingdom the fourth kingdom and that's what it was (2:40). This fourth kingdom corresponds to the fourth beast in Dan. 7:7.

Not only do dispensationalists claim that Daniel saw a fifth kingdom in Daniel 7, they assume the "ten horns" of Daniel 7:7 are ten separate nations that are combined to make the revived Roman empire, and that the "little horn" that comes up among them is the antichrist. This is all speculation. The horns are said to be kings, not kingdoms (Daniel 7:24). Could not the horns represent ten kings that ruled over the same kingdom (the fourth kingdom of Daniel's vision) over a period of time? That is sure what Daniel 7:24 sounds like to me. Second, the "little horn" arises out of this same kingdom (vers. 8, 24). Whoever the "little horn" is, he lived during the time of this fourth kingdom. That means that he has long since come and gone. Who is the "little horn" under consideration in the text? I'm not sure. Some say that Domitian makes sense. He did everything Daniel seven said he would do (ver. 25). Others believe the little horns symbolically represents of the Emperors who persecuted the saints during the reign of the Roman Empire. That too makes sense and does away with the chore of having to identify a specific person in history which is always a precarious task. But the point is this, the little horn, whoever it represents, was a person or group of people who lived during the time of the fourth kingdom. The premillennial view of the Antichrist contradicts this truth.

Dan 9:27

And he shall make a strong covenant with many for one week, and for half of the week he shall put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall come one who makes desolate, until the decreed end is poured out on the desolator.

This is the passage where they find the Antichrist making a covenant with Israel. This is again pure speculation. The truth is the "he" of Daniel 9:27 points back up to the Messiah of ver. 26. The one making a covenant is not some future Antichrist, but the Lord Jesus Christ. What is Dan. 9 all about anyway?

In this vision Daniel learns the fate of Israel and the holy city Jerusalem. This is the vision of the seventy weeks found in Daniel 9:24-27.

- The 70 weeks cover a period of time beginning with the restoration of the Israel in 536 BC and ending with the destruction of Israel in AD 70, except a brief mention of the fall of Rome in ver. 27b.

- The prophecy is broken down into three periods of 7 weeks, 62 weeks, and 1 week for a total of 70 weeks. The first 7 weeks is the time it would take to rebuild Jerusalem, accomplished when the Jews returned from captivity (ver. 25). The 62 weeks is the time elapsed between the completion of Jerusalem to the time of the Messiah (ver. 25). The 1 week or 70th week is marked by the Messiah being cut off (notice the Messiah is cut off AFTER the threescore and two weeks, which would be into the 70th week).
- In the midst of the week Jerusalem is destroyed and so the sacrifices and oblations cease (ver. 26-27a).
- Finally, the end of the prophecy indicates that Rome because of her evil deeds would be punished as well. In the ESV the last part of ver. 27 reads as follows: "And on the wing of abominations shall come one who makes desolate, until the decreed end is poured out on THE DESOLATOR."ESV

There is no doubt about Daniel 9:24-27 being a difficult passage. However, there is nothing in the text whatsoever about a so-called Antichrist. Everything mentioned in this prophecy has been fulfilled in connection with the Messiah and the work He came to accomplish.

Well obviously we do not have time to look at every passage the premillennialists believe refers to the Antichrist but let's look at one more.

2 Thess. 2:3

Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition,

The millennialism say that this lawless one is the Antichrist. Once again, however, the text doesn't allow for such a conclusion. Now let me say up front that without question identifying the lawless one of this passage is one of the most difficult tasks a Bible student can do. It is easy to interpret Old Testament prophecies that have their fulfillment in the New Testament because we have the inspired words of the apostles to tell us to what those prophecies were referring. For example, we know that the prophecy of Joel 2:28-32 was fulfilled in the first century because Peter tells us so in Acts 2:16-21. However, when you have a New Testament prophecy that is fulfilled sometime after the New Testament era, finding that fulfillment is much more difficult. That is what we have with this prophecy of the coming of this lawless one. The best we can do is look at all the points of description that Paul gives and see if there has been any man, or group of men, that fit the description. Now when we do that, one thing is clear, the lawless one doesn't fit the description of the premillennialist's Antichrist. We may not be able to be dogmatic about our conclusion, but we can be dogmatic about it not being the Antichrist. Now let's look at the description that Paul gives.

- **He comes out of religious apostasy (ver. 3).**

2 Thess. 2:3

*Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless **the falling away comes first**, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition,*

This would give the impression that he is primarily a religious figure, not a political one.

- **He becomes an object of worship (ver. 4).**

2 Thess. 2:4

*Who **opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god** or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, **proclaiming himself to be God**.*

Not only will this lawless one demand to be worshiped, he will oppose the worship of idols.

- **He sits in the temple as God (ver. 4).**

2 Thess. 2:4

*Who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that **he takes his seat in the temple of God**, proclaiming himself to be God.*

The temple is a reference to the church. The word for temple here is from the Greek word *naos*. Paul uses this word in reference to the church at least 4 other times (1 Corinthians 3:16-17; Eph. 2:21). He also uses it figuratively referring to the body of the Christians (1 Corinthians 6:19; 2 Corinthians 6:16). Only twice does Paul use this word in reference to a physical edifice (Acts 17:24; Acts 19:24), and never in reference to the Jewish temple. In reference to the Jewish temple, usually the word *hieron* is used and Paul used that word in reference to the temple in Jerusalem five times (Acts 22:17; 24:12, 18; 26:21; 1 Cor. 9:13).

- **His coming is made possible by the “mystery of iniquity” which was already at work in the first century (ver. 7).**

2 Thess. 2:7

*For the mystery of lawlessness **is already at work**. Only he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way.*

Whatever was behind the “falling away” that Paul referred to in ver. 3, it was the impetus for the lawless one being revealed. In other words, and this is important, the force behind the falling away was already at work in Paul’s day.

- **The man of sin would be living when the Lord returns (ver. 8).**

2 Thess. 2:8

*And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the **Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming**.*

Here is another important key—the lawless one will be present on earth when the Lord comes back.

- **Signs and lying wonders would characterize the reign of the man of sin (ver. 9).**

2 Thess. 2:9

*The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan **with all power and false signs and wonders**,*

Now again, this cannot be the so-called Antichrist of the premillennial theory for several reasons.

- 1) Antichrist is, according to them going to be a political figure. The lawless man of Paul's text is going to be a religious figure.
- 2) The lawless one would be a member of the church. Now, let me quickly point out that it would be the apostate church, but it is still called the temple of God in our text. This is not the case with the premillennial Antichrist.
- 3) The force behind the coming of the lawless one was already at work in Paul's day. Again, that wasn't the case with the premillennial Antichrist. So far as we know that force still isn't in the world today.

So clearly the Antichrist is not what Paul is talking about. Who is this lawless? I'll be honest with you, I'm not sure. I do know this: the best fit of Paul's description is the papacy (the role of the pope) of the Roman Catholic Church. The Papacy did arise out of religious apostasy (ver. 3). It took five hundred years to fully develop, but the Papacy is a perversion of God's plan for a plurality of elders to rule over the flock that is among them (1 Peter 5:2). Furthermore, He sits in the temple of God, that is, the apostate church of Roman Catholicism, showing Himself as God. There is no question but that the long line of Popes has claimed for themselves titles of deity and has accepted the worship of men. At the coronation of Innocent X, the following words were addressed to him:

"Most holy and blessed Father, head of the church, ruler of the world, to whom the keys of the kingdom of heaven are committed, whom the angels in heaven revere, and the gates of hell fear, and all the world adores, we specially venerate, worship and adore thee."⁶

In 1890 Pope Leo XIII made the following statement:

"The supreme teacher in the Church is the Roman Pontiff. Union of minds therefore requires, together with a perfect accord in the one faith, complete submission of will to the church and to the Roman Pontiff, as to God Himself."⁷

On April 30, 1922, Pope Pius XI had these remarkable words to say to a room full of cardinals, bishops, priests and nuns who were kneeling before him:

"You know that I am the Holy Father, the representative of God on earth, the Vicar of Christ, which means I am God on the earth."⁸

It might also be noted, that the error that paved the way for the Papacy was already at work in Paul's day (3 John 9). It was a desire for preeminence in the church that got the ball rolling toward the great apostasy of which Paul spoke of in 2 Thessalonians 2. Finally, wickedness was a familiar characteristic among the early Popes. I'll not take the time now to list all of the crimes committed by the Papacy over the years, but as one writer said, "the pages of history are black and bloody with the record of their exploits and deeds." If you would like a detailed account of these crimes, Albert Barnes chronicles them in Barnes Notes (2 Thessalonians, pg. 81-82).

Conclusion:

The Antichrist theory is not biblical. It was conjured up in the minds of dispensational premillennialists. The passages they refer to prove nothing because they are twisted and taken out of context. There is nothing in the scriptures said about a world dictator rising up out of a ten nation revived Roman Empire. There is nothing said of a future Führer that terrorizes the world during a period of great tribulation. Antichrist is a spirit of error that is opposed to Christ, not a specific person.