

THE ANTICHRIST - AN OVERVIEW

Definition

The word "antichrist" is comprised of "anti" ("against" or "instead of") and "Christ." In the Bible, it refers to a person who is an opponent of Jesus Christ. This opponent may simply be *against* Jesus Christ, perhaps denying who he is (substituting the truth with a lie, as in 1 John 2:22). Or he may claim to *be* a "Christ." (In this case, we could also call him a "false Christ.")

A "Christ" (the Greek word) or a "Messiah" (the Hebrew equivalent) comes from the idea of being "anointed" or "chosen." It refers to a person who has been selected (or at least claims to have been selected) for a special purpose or cause. In times of crisis, people tend to look for someone to lead them, who appears to have answers for the problems which are at hand. During the end-time catastrophes, a counterfeit "Christ" will claim to have the solutions for all the world's needs - and most of the world will go after him.

Where this concept occurs

The Word "Antichrist" - emphasizing *present-day* opponents of Christ

The word "antichrist" is used *only* by the apostle John. It can be found in: 1 John 2:18, 22; 4:3; and 2 John 1:7. Although John acknowledges the coming of a *future* antichrist, this is not his main focus in these verses. Rather, he emphasizes *present day* antichrists - people who are similar in nature to the *future* one. He also writes about the spirit that controls them.

When the *future* antichrist finally arrives, these verses about the *present* antichrist will apply. At that time, the verses which describe how *we* should respond will also apply.

Related Concepts - emphasizing a *future* opponent of Christ

Other concepts are found in Scripture, which appear to have some of the same connotations as the word "antichrist." Most of these have a reference to a world leader, or perhaps an entire "world system" lead by such a leader, at the end of this age.

1. The "little horn" of Daniel 7:7-8, 24-25.
2. The cruel, "stern-faced king" of Daniel 8:23-25.
3. The "abomination of desolation," described in Daniel and referred to by Jesus, are probably a reference to something that the future antichrist will do. Daniel 9:27; 11:31; 12:11; Matthew 24:15; Mark 13:14.
4. The "man of lawlessness" (or "man of sin"), mentioned in 2 Thessalonians 2:3-10.
5. The "beast" in Revelation chapters 13 and 17; also 19:19-21, etc. [Possibly also the rider on the white horse - Revelation 6:1-2.]
6. Jesus refers to *false* Christs, or people who claim to be the Christ, in Matthew 24:5, 23-24; Mark 13:6, 21-22; and Luke 21:8. (This term is *not* necessarily used as a synonym for the word "antichrist.")

Present-Day "Antichrists" - According to John

John tells us that we are not to become preoccupied with enemies of Christ who may come at some indefinite time in the *future*. Instead, we need to deal with enemies of Christ who are *already present* - and to stand guard, lest we ourselves be led astray by them.

1 John 2:18 - Antichrists - now here - are characteristic of the "last hour."

The characteristics of "the last hour" are here, even now. Though there will be a coming antichrist, at some point in the future, we need to be aware that many antichrists are *already present* - people who have the same character as the future one. So rather than viewing "the last hour" as a time that will occur in the distant future, we should view it as being already here! [This is why we need to reject the ways of the world and carefully follow the ways of God. See the previous verses in 1 John.]

A word of caution (v. 19): These antichrists may have looked "Christian," at one time or another. For a while, they may have looked like they were some of God's people. But the fact that they ultimately turned against Jesus Christ proves that they *never* truly belonged to God. They were counterfeits.

How should we respond?

(See the next section - v. 24+.)

1 John 2:22 - The contrast between antichrists and God's people.

We must remember the incompatibility between truth and lies (v. 21): Lies do not originate in the truth. They do not belong to it in any way.

God's people are the truth-bearers (v. 20-21):

They have been anointed ("set apart") by God.

- The N.T. Greek word for "anointing" is "chrism." It is related to the word "Christ" ("someone who is anointed"). A person who was set apart for a special purpose (a "christ") was often *anointed* with oil ("chrism"), to symbolize that special calling.
- Originally, the word "Christian" (Acts 11:26; 26:28; 1 Peter 4:16) meant "a little Christ," and referred to those who followed the ways of Jesus, the "ultimate Christ." They were "anointed" (set apart) by God, for this special purpose.

Those who are called (and "set apart") by God know the *truth* - not merely as an academic fact, but in a way that results in changed perspectives, values and conduct.

- This is something that the opponents of Christ (antichrists) do not know.
- NOTE: Many people *claim* to be God's people, even though they do *not* meet the qualifications given in the book of 1 John. The apostle warns us that such people are *not* truly God's people - even though they may strongly insist that they are (and may actually *believe* that they are). Instead, John simply calls them liars (examples - 1 John 1:6, 8; etc.).

The antichrists are the liars - people who deny/reject the truth (v. 22-23):

This would include *all* who do not accept who Jesus is.

- Note that, when a person rejects who Jesus is, he is, in essence, rejecting who the Father is. Our attitude toward Jesus has a direct impact on whether or not the Father is present in our lives. Jesus himself commented on the association between "knowing" (accepting) Jesus for who he is, and "knowing" the Father - John 8:19; 16:3; and 17:3.

The *gospel* of John frequently emphasizes the *deity* of Jesus Christ. Here in 1 John, the apostle is affirming Jesus' *humanity*, for these specific antichrists were denying that this Jesus actually took on human flesh.

- There are other ways that people distort the truth about Jesus Christ - such as denying his deity, or the nature of his mission - and these are addressed elsewhere in the New Testament.

How should we respond (v. 24+)?

We need to make sure that the truth we received from the apostles (now recorded in the Bible) remains in us. If it does, the Father and the Son (who are the source of that truth) will also remain with us - along with all the blessings that come from God (such as eternal life).

- Receiving the truth" includes the application of that truth to the way we live. The entire book of 1 John (as well as the rest of the Bible) shows us how to do this. Our response to that truth will show (better than our claims do) whether or not God's Word has *remained* in us.

1 John 4:3 - The "antichrist spirit" empowers those who deny the truth about Jesus.

Identifying the false teachers:

Many false teachers (false prophets) are in the world, and they will *claim* to be from God. Many people will actually believe them. Because of this, we need to be able to distinguish between teachers who are actually empowered by God's Spirit, and those who are empowered by a counterfeit "antichrist spirit." We can do this, by paying attention to what the person says - for his teaching will be directly influenced by the spirit that controls him.

- *The spirit that acknowledges who Jesus Christ is (v.2):* This spirit (or Spirit) is from God.
- *The spirit that fails to acknowledge who Jesus Christ is (v.3):* This spirit is not from God, for it is an "antichrist spirit." A failure to acknowledge this truth about Jesus is characteristic of an "antichrist." (Note the connection of 4:3 to 2:18.)

How should we respond (v. 4+)?

We need to remember that the Holy Spirit (who is in *us*, God's people) is greater than the "antichrist spirit" who is in the false teachers of the world. Because of this, we have *overcome* them and their ways. (If we have the Holy Spirit in us, we do not have to be afraid of them.)

The world will pay attention to those who have this "antichrist spirit" (the false teachers or false prophets). They will not pay attention to what the Spirit of God says (what he has spoken through the

apostle John and others). In contrast, the people of God will pay attention to those who are influenced by the Holy Spirit (the apostle John and others like him); *and when they do so, it will influence their conduct* - according to what John says, both before and after this passage.

2 John 7 - More warnings about deceptive antichrists who, even now, are present in the world.

An expression of joy (v. 4-6):

The apostle John expresses his joy that the believers had their lives based on the truth, and he wants them to continue doing so. *How* are they to do so? By living lives that are characterized by love and obedience - two things which are inseparable.

A warning (v. 7):

Having said this, he warns them against people (false teachers) who do not acknowledge who Jesus really is. The emphasis in this passage is on their denial that Jesus came as a *human*. John warns us that *anyone* with such a view can be described as both a deceiver and an antichrist.

How should we respond (v. 8+)?

We must watch out for such people, for they do *not* have God in their lives - even though they may claim they do. Anyone who fails to accept Jesus Christ for who he really is, fails to have God. If we accept their teachings, all our love and obedience will have no eternal significance for us. It will all have been done in vain. In contrast, those who accept the truth about Jesus will continue to have both the Father and the Son (and all the blessings that are associated with them).

This is such a serious matter, that we are *not* to even welcome such a person (a deceiving antichrist) into our midst. Specifically, we are *not* to receive and encourage him as a "spiritual brother" - or we will be sharing in the guilt of his sin.

The "Antichrist" of the Future

Each of the following concepts has a focus on the future. Some have had a limited fulfillment in historical events of the past; but when is this so, the past events stand as a guarantee (and a warning) that the future fulfillment will also come to pass.

All of these passages tell us about a ruler who will do horrible things. Some of them indicate that God's people will suffer intense persecution or death. But those who do experience such things can look forward to the coming Day of Justice. God will destroy this ruler and will bring his "reign of terror" to an end. He will bring peace to the earth; and justice will be given to all, even to those who have died. (They will be brought back to life - Revelation 20:21+.)

1. The "little horn" - Daniel 7:7-8, 24-25.

The "little horn" of Daniel 7 represents a boastful ruler (7:8) who will do much evil and will persecute God's people (7: 24-25). Eventually he will be destroyed and thrown into the "blazing fire" that is described as flowing from the throne of God (7: 9-11, 26). Immediately following this judgment, one who is "like a son of man" (compare to Revelation 1:13) will come from heaven and will set up an eternal kingdom (7:13-14, 27).

How should God's people respond? Remember that the day of justice will come (v. 9-11), and so will the Son of Man (v. 13-14). In the end, God (and God's people) will be the victors (v. 18, 27).

[Interestingly, though *fire* flows from God's throne for his enemies, *living water* flows from the throne for his friends (Revelation 22:1)!]

2. The cruel, "stern-faced" king - Daniel 8:23-25.

Daniel 8 mentions a cruel, "stern-faced king" who will do horrible things (8:24-25a), but who will then be destroyed, "but not by human power" (8:25b). This prophecy was partially fulfilled in 168 BC, by Antiochus Epiphanes, a conquering king from the area of modern-day Syria. However, Daniel was also told that these visions were related to the time of "the end" (8:8). How does this work? Prophecies often had a partial, "near" fulfillment during the lives of the readers, or soon thereafter. The "near" fulfillment would serve as a sign (a reminder and a guarantee) that the ultimate, "distant" fulfillment would eventually take place. In this case, the actions of the historic king could be said to "foreshadow" (point to) the actions of an even worse ruler (the antichrist), who is yet to come.

How should God's people respond? In this passage we are told that this evil ruler will be destroyed, but there is very little to instruct us (God's people) on how to respond. Perhaps the most important "instruction" is the implied message that we need to trust God, regardless of what happens (and whether or not we understand it). When God tells us about the future (such as through Daniel's prophecy) he gives us what we *need*, not what we might simply *want*, to satisfy mere curiosity. As with many of the other prophecies given to Daniel, there are details here which are not fully revealed, so that even *Daniel* did not fully understand the significance of what he was told (8:26-27). He was even told that some of the visions were to be *sealed* until later (compare with 12:4,9)!

Today we have more revelation about the future, because of what we have been given in the New Testament. Yet even now we don't have *all* the details about *everything*. (See Revelation 10:3-4 for an example in which certain information is not fully revealed to us.) Just like Daniel, we also must put our

trust in God, and not in our understanding of prophecy. We need to trust the one who *does* understand all things, for he is the one who has promised to deliver his people through these horrible times.

3. The one who causes the "abomination of desolation" - Daniel 9:27;11:31; 12:11; Matthew 24:15; Mark 13:14.

The "abomination of desolation," described in Daniel, and referred to by Jesus, are probably a reference to something that the future antichrist will do. Though these verses were partially fulfilled by the actions of Antiochus Epiphanes, in 168 BC (see the comments about Daniel 8, above), Jesus indicated a *future* fulfillment, in the days just prior to his return. We could describe what happened in 168 BC as a "foreshadowing," a limited illustration, of what will happen in the future.

How should God's people respond? We are reminded that the leader who is responsible for this "abomination of desolation" will come to his end in a devastating judgment (9:27b). But before it happens, God's people will oppose this evil ruler (11:31), and they will instruct many about the truth (11:33a). There will be a temporary time of tribulation, trial and persecution (11:33b). Some of God's people will stumble during this time of tribulation, but God will use what happens to accomplish good in their lives (11:35). Though this time may be difficult for God's people, they are reminded that the end *will* come at its appointed time; this evil king will come to his end (11:45). Those who are willing to be patient and to wait until the end will be blessed (12:12).

Jesus, referring to the same situation, tells his people (the Jews) to flee to the mountains (Matthew 24:16+ and Mark 13:14+). He warns them to not follow those who claim to have the answer, or who claim to be the "Christ" (Matthew 24:23+ and Mark 13:21+).

Terrible times may lie ahead, but God's people can take courage. Jesus tells us that these days of crisis will be shortened; he will not allow everything (and everyone) to be destroyed (Matthew 24:22 and Mark 13:20).

4. The "man of lawlessness" (or "man of sin") - 2 Thessalonians 2:3-10.

Paul warns us that this "man of lawlessness" (or "man of sin" - KJV) will be revealed during the time of rebellion that precedes the coming of the Son of Man. This evil person will oppose everything that pertains to the true God, and will attempt to take God's place. When Jesus returns, he will destroy this evil leader.

How should God's people respond? The response God's people should have, when the *future* antichrist arrives, is the same as what they should have during *present day* trials and difficult circumstances.

The apostle Paul was writing to people who were *already* experiencing persecution and trials. They were *already* persevering faithfully (1:4). He encouraged them to look forward to the time Jesus would return. God had called them to salvation (1:11 and 2:13) and he would consider them worthy of his kingdom (1:5). They would share in Jesus glory (2:14).

In contrast, God's enemies will be destroyed - punished and shut out from his presence (1:8). This man of lawlessness is also doomed to destruction (2:3); he will be destroyed when Jesus returns (2:8).

5. The "beast" - Revelation chapters 13 and 17; also 19:19-21, etc. [Possibly also the rider on the white horse, Revelation 6:1-2.]

The "beast" is a political leader, perhaps representing an entire political system, who will gain power over the entire world. (This is the ruler who is associated with the number "666.") He will receive his power from the "dragon" (devil). His leadership will be promoted by a second "beast" (or "false prophet" - a major religious leader). In the end, he will be thrown into the "fiery lake of burning sulfur" (Revelation 19:20).

During his rule, the "beast" will demand supreme loyalty from everyone. Those who do *not* belong to God will worship him and will do whatever he says. God's people will refuse to follow him, and because of that, the "beast" will oppose and persecute them.

The rider on the white horse, found in Revelation 6:1-2, might also be identified as the antichrist. However, the passage does not give enough details about this rider, to be definite. Some suggest that it could be a forerunner to the final antichrist. It is not Jesus Christ, who is described as riding on a white horse, in Revelation 19:11. (Other than the color of the horse, there is nothing else in common between these two riders. Also, the context in which each of the riders is described is radically different.)

How should God's people respond? It seems that people always want an escape from difficult circumstances. But the Bible tells us that, since we live in a sinful world, horrible things can, and will, occur. When talking about the events at the end of the age, Jesus says that such things *must* happen (Matthew 24:6b). We must remember that genuine peace will not come until the Prince of Peace, who is Jesus, returns.

In the end, when the "beast" has control of the world, Jesus does not tell us that his people will *escape* trials. Rather he encourages them to be patient and faithful *through* them (Revelation 13:10). Even if the trials result in death, they are but temporary. The end will come, and the Day of Justice will arrive. Those who die in the Lord are blessed, and Jesus will reward them appropriately (Revelation 14:13). Remember that death is *not* the end of the story.

It is important to note that the entire world - those who do not belong to God - will worship and follow the "beast." This will be a time of horrible deception, and the only way we can avoid being deceived is by remaining faithful to God's Word, and submitting to it - allowing it to control our hearts and minds. (All genuine disciples will do this. Those who *claim* to be disciples, but to *don't* do this, are actually counterfeits. In the end, they will follow the "beast," *all the while thinking that they are doing what is right.*)

6. False Christs - Matthew 24:5, 23-24; Mark 13:6, 21-22; and Luke 21:8.

Jesus refers to *false* Christs and to people who *claim* to be the Christ. Such people will increase in number, as the end approaches. Many of them will actually perform signs and miracles, and they will gain many followers.

How should God's people respond? When others are being deceived, when they turn away from the truth, when they become filled with hate, and when their love grows cold (Matthew 24:10-12), we are to stand firm to the end (Matthew 24:13; Mark 13:13b; Luke 21:19). Though they may oppose us, we are to be witnesses to them, testifying to the truth (Matthew 24:14, implied; Mark 13:10-11; Luke 21:13-15). Even if we are betrayed, persecuted, or killed (Matthew 24:9; Mark 13:9, 12-13; Luke 21:12, 16-17), it is but temporary. In the end, we will be saved - and our salvation will last forever.

As for rumors that the Christ has returned, Jesus tells us to *not* go out looking for him. We should not pay attention to such rumors, for *all* of them will prove false (Matthew 24:26). When Jesus, the *genuine* Christ returns, it will be obvious to *all*. We, his people, will not have to go out looking for him; for he will come looking for us! All nations will see him and will recognize that he alone is the Christ (Matthew 24:27-28, 30-31).

How Should People Respond to Antichrists and False Christs?

Our main duty isn't to become preoccupied with the *future* antichrist and *future* false Christs. We are to deal with those who are present *now*. If we have this attitude, we will be ready for anything that may come our way in the future. People who are not willing to carefully follow God's word *before* the end-time antichrist arrives, have no guarantee that they will start to do so, if he does appear during their lifetimes. It is for good reason that Scripture warns us to be ready *now*, rather than planning to get ready at some indefinite point in the *future*. We need to be ready *now*, regardless of the opinions we may have about how the end time events will occur.

When we look at the various passages which focus on the *future* Antichrist, we find a strong emphasis on the need for faithfulness, patience, and a willingness to remain steadfast, when threatened with persecution or death. Such character traits are required of God's people at *all* times - even when we are *not* being threatened with persecution or death.

QUESTIONS PEOPLE OFTEN ASK

Who will the future antichrist be?

Down through the ages many people have speculated about who the antichrist might be. They have come up with many different kinds of schemes to try to calculate his identity, or cryptic codes by which they could somehow prove that this person or that person was the antichrist.

God, however, does not tell us. So it is not our duty to worry about who the antichrist will be. If we are being faithful to God in our day-to-day life, we will be ready for whatever happens in the future.

What is the mark of the "beast"?

Just as many people have speculated as to the identity of the future antichrist, they have also speculated as to the meaning of his mark: the "mark of the beast." All God tells us is that it has something to do with the number "666," and that it will require wisdom and insight to understand (Revelation 13:18). This does *not* mean that we must have a high intellectual capacity, in order to understand what 666 is all about. Rather we must have wisdom and insight *as God defines them* - which begins with an attitude of reverential fear toward God, and a humble submission to all that he says. If we do not have this type of attitude, then all the intellectual capabilities in the world will not prepare us for the future.

When the time comes that it is needed, those who truly follow God will recognize this number (the "mark of the beast") for what it is. Until then, we don't have to worry about it.