

Preliminary

[Kim Riddlebarger, *Herald of Revival: The AntiChrist*, 67:22] – “Perhaps no subject broached by contemporary Bible prophecy teachers engenders more speculation and less sound Biblical exegesis than does the subject of Antichrist. This is certainly due to the mysterious nature of the subject itself, as well as to the fact that no other aspect of Bible prophecy lends itself so nicely to speculation regarding the identification of one specific individual who will become the very personification of evil and the archenemy of Jesus Christ and his gospel.”

Background

- Jewish expectation: A personage of consummate evil in the last time was part of the Jewish expectation [New Dictionary of Theology] – “The concept of antichrist, if not the word, was well known. Jewish apocalyptic had developed the expectation of a final human embodiment of evil, a political ruler who would set himself up as divine and lead the pagan nations in a final assault on God's people. This figure was modeled especially on Daniel's descriptions of Antiochus Epiphanes, who set up the ‘abomination of desolation’ in the Temple (Dn. 8:9-12, 23-25; 11:21-45; cf. Mk. 13: 14). Jewish expectation sometimes also included the idea of a false prophet of the last days, who would perform miracles and deceive the nations (cf. Mk 13:22).”
- Christian interpretation: The tendency was to debate about identification with a specific individual or institution
 - The individual approach is saddled with limited historical perspective... e.g. Napoleon, Hitler, Bill Gates
 - The institutional approach limits the reach of the antichrist spirit throughout the church age
 Point: The individual/institution proposed may, in fact, be antichrist – but not the *only* antichrist

Terminology

- “AntiChrist” = Gk: ἀντίχριστος (*antichristos*)
 - 1 John 2:18, 22 = *you have heard that the AntiChrist is coming, even now many antichrist have come, by which we know it is the last hour... Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is the antichrist...*
 - Note: There is no article to the ‘last hour’ = *a last hour*... This denotes the *general* character of the time... [United Bible Society: *New Testament Handbook Series*] – “The phrase the last hour (in the Greek without the article) occurs only here in the New Testament. Yet, it must have been a well known expression or technical term, which the Greek can use without the article. The noun may refer to a period of time, or to a moment in time. The latter is the meaning here. The phrase designates the final and decisive moment in the history of mankind. Comparable expressions are found in the Gospel of John, for example, ‘the hour’ (5:25, 28, in the Greek also without article), and ‘the last day’ (6:39f, 44, 54).”
 - Point: There is a culminating appearance of the AntiChrist, while already its presence is experienced
 - 1 John 4:3 = *every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world*
 - Context: The particular teaching that John is combating here is the early form of *docetism* = Jesus is not truly human...
 - 2 John 7 = *deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess that Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist*
 - There is a present reality of the coming Antichrist in plural antichrists...
 - The antichristian character/spirit is revealed in false teachings concerning Christ...
 - Note: The Greek ἀντί (*anti*) means ‘in the place of;’ ct. Latin *anti* = ‘against’
 - Point: The antichrist method is not denying Christ, as such, but a false teaching concerning Christ...
 - (C) The antichrist presence is an eschatological sign = *we know it is the last hour*
- “The Beast from the Earth” Revelation 13:11-18
 - This beast has primarily religious functions... cf. ‘the false prophet’ (16:13; 19:20; 20:10)
 - The churches of John’s day are assumed to have been contending already with this beast [GK Beale, *NIGNTC*, 708] – “This imagery and background suggest deception within the covenant community itself. Whereas the first beast speaks loudly and defiantly against God, the second beast makes the first beast's claims sound plausible and persuasive. False teachers in the church are encouraging compromise with the culture's idolatrous institutions... Therefore it takes a discerning Christian to detect the evil inherent in the second beast.
 - The ‘mark of the beast’ has spawned all kinds of speculations
 - This appears to contrast with an earlier sealing of mark on the servant of God (Rev 7)
 - This ‘mark of the beast’ is equated with the ‘number of his name’ (13:17; 14:9, 11, 15:2)
 * Common understanding: Some scholars today, believe that 666 is a reference to the following personalities:
 - Hebrew Numerals:

			Nero	WWW	Computation of: Papacy Vicarius Fili Dei (Roman Numerals)
			"Neron Caesar" in Hebrew		
א 1	י 10	ק 100	נ Nun 50		
ב 2	כ 20	ר 200	ר Resh 200		
ג 3	ל 30	ש 300	ו Waw 6		
ד 4	מ 40	ת 400	נ Nun 50		
ה 5	נ 50	ך 500	ק Quph 100		
ו 6	ס 60	ם 600	ס Samekh 60		
ז 7	ע 70	ף 700	ר Resh 200		
ח 8	פ 80	ק 800			
ט 9	צ 90	ך 900			
			666		

- (c) The number 666 is not the starting point of calculation but the result of any calculation that can be made of the beast – it will always come out 666...

[EBC, XII, 535] – “Wherever there is blasphemy, there the beast's name is found. The number 666 is the heaping up of the number 6... ‘Because of its contrast with 7 we may be content with an interpretation which sees in 666 an allusion to incompleteness, to the demonic *parody* the perfection of 7, to the deceptiveness of the almost perfect, to the idolatrous blasphemy exemplified by false worshippers, or to the dramatic moment between the sixth and seventh items in a vision cycle of seals, trumpets, bowls and kings.”

Parody: a feeble or ridiculous imitation (Merriam Webster)

4. “The Man of Lawlessness” 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12

- There is ‘mystery’ form of this lawlessness already present... as a counter to the mystery form of the kingdom...
- Before the parousia, the human culmination of this lawlessness will be revealed...

[Cornelius Venema, *The Promise of the Future*, 170-71] – “This sign may not be relegated to some brief and unusual period just prior to the end of the age. The references to the antichrists... all refer to figures contemporary with the writing of the NT. They are figures of the past time, so far as the church of today is concerned, though of course they continue to be typical of new figures who arise throughout history to deny the gospel of Jesus Christ. These passages clearly teach that we live in that period of history known as the ‘last hour,’ characterized by opposition to the gospel and the emergence of figures hostile to the gospel, even at times from within the fellowship of the church itself. Thus, any teaching about the Antichrist that misses this emphasis cannot be said to be faithful to the teaching of the Scriptures.”

Present in Principle (Mystery): Forces (persons, institution, ideas and teaching; etc.) of False Christianity

Point: Where falsehood about Christ is taught and perpetrated, there the AntiChrist principle exists... cf. Mt 24:23f

Outstanding manifestations today: Romanism, Ecumenism; Liberalism; Cults; etc.

Church Duty: Our battle with the AntiChrist is a commitment to doctrine and its faithful teaching to the Church.

- 2 Cor 11:2-4 = the true Christ in the genuine gospel vs. another Jesus of a different gospel
- 2 Thes 2:11f = the lie of Satan vs. the truth of the gospel

[Riddlebarger, 25] – “But if anything is clear from John's use of Antichrist terminology, it is that his focus is certainly on the present danger facing the church from heretical false teaching and not on the rise of a nebulous future tyrant, And so while this series of Antichrists that John describes may indeed culminate in an Antichrist, the biblical evidence demonstrates that the primary thrust is doctrinal (the Antichrist is primarily a false teacher) and only incidentally political and economic (i.e., people being prevented from buying and selling). Perhaps the Church would be better served if there were fewer books written trying to identify the Antichrist and speculating about geopolitical intrigue, and if instead there were more exegetical works treating what Scripture actually says about these men of evil, It is a shame that so many Christians can quite readily dialogue about the latest theory as to the Antichrist's identity, when at the same time they are often unable to defend the deity and humanity of Christ from the pages of Holy Scripture.”

Human Culmination: A Final AntiChrist-Man

Identity: Leader of the final rebellion against all law = ‘Man of Lawlessness’

Agency: Culmination of the combined forces of all false Christianity and religion... 2 Thes 2:5-12

- He will himself be an object of worship
- He will use deceptive miracles and false teaching...
- Destruction: At the time of his revelation, the Lord will appear to destroy him completely

[AA Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, 161] – “Though the appearance of the man of lawlessness will bring about unspeakable sufferings for the church, the people of God have nothing to fear, since Christ will crush him. Hence the predominant mood in the thinking of the church about the antichrist must be one of optimism rather than pessimism.”

Issue: Will not the Christians of the generation of the AntiChrist know him? Therefore know the time of the 2nd Coming?

Answer: Human ignorance of the time of Christ's coming includes the generation-period of His coming... Mt 24:36

- (a) When the AntiChrist is revealed, Christians are expected to be aware... 2 Thes 2:2f
- (b) The time of the AntiChrist revelation is also the time that he will be destroyed by the appearing of Christ
- (c) It does not suggest a period that allows for time-calculation of the parousia

Challenge: The church must now take seriously the AntiChrist battles already in existence – a battle of the truth of Christ versus falsehood about Christ...

[GC Berkouwer, *The Return of Christ*, 281] – “In every transformation of the ‘anti,’ the call to endurance remains the constant. All forms of futurism are excluded. The eyes must be focused on the true future, the coming of God. The constant reinterpretation necessitated by the ongoing course of history is not evidence of contradiction, but is proof of the fact that no single moment of the ‘last days’ is excluded from the eschatological proclamation. In the tensions of our expectation of the end, we must keep an open ear to the sounds produced by history. Wherever the traces of opposition occur, the antichrist can be found, its form differing from time to time, but the outlines of the figures are fundamentally the same.”