

Study Guide #7: The Antichrist Prophecies, Part I

Introduction

The vast majority of today's Christians believe that the Antichrist will be an end-time *individual* who will be openly hostile to Christianity and persecute Christians. This is the 1st of 3 Study Guides examining what the Bible teaches about the Antichrist. We must test all truth claims by the Holy Scriptures.

Question #1: Where in Scripture does the word “Antichrist” appear, and what does that tell us about the Antichrist?

Answer: Although the term “Antichrist” is a very appropriate word to describe the end-time global persecuting power, it might surprise you to know that the word only appears 5 times in the New Testament, in I and II John. The principal passages with the most detail is in I John 2 and 4, as follows:

¹⁸Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour. ¹⁹They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us. ²⁰But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things. ²¹I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and that no lie is of the truth. ²²Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist who denies the Father and the Son. (I John 2:18-22, NKJV).

and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world. (I John 4:3, NKJV).

The specific issue in John's day was that certain Christians taught that Jesus wasn't really human, but that He only *appeared* to be human. This is called the heresy of Docetism, which was based on the pagan Greek idea that matter was inherently inferior and even evil. But the real point here is that these antichrists (plural) were false teachers within the Church—not outsiders who were overtly hostile to Christianity until they left the Church.



The Apostle John

Question #2: But doesn't the prefix “anti” mean “against”?

Answer: It does. But there's 2 ways that one can be against something or someone: (1) he can be openly hostile; or (2) he can be against in the sense of taking the place of someone and *misrepresenting* him while claiming to speak for that person. The context in John's writings clearly means that the “**antichrists**” (plural) were taking the place of Christ by taking His name and assuming authority to speak for and about

Him. Note that in I John 2:18, the apostle relates “**antichrists**” (plural) to “**the Antichrist**” (singular). Therefore, the nature of the Antichrist is of a similar nature as the antichrists in John’s day. In other words, this points to the Antichrist as being a counterfeit Christian power that claims to represent Christ. But in actually *misrepresenting* Christ, the Antichrist is against Him. [NOTE: This truth about the Antichrist is illustrated in the remainder of this Study Guide.]

Question #3: What concern did the apostle Paul address in II Thessalonians 2?

Answer: According to II Thessalonians 2:1-4, Christians at Thessalonica apparently had been falsely told that Paul was teaching that the final events prior to the 2nd Coming of Jesus had already begun. Paul assured them that this was not true because “**the falling away**” and the revealing of “**the man of sin**” must occur first, and that hadn’t happened yet (NKJV).

Question #4: What did Paul mean by “the falling away”?

Answer: The Greek word for “**falling away**” is “*apostasia*,” meaning “*apostasy*.” *First*, note the presence of the definite article “**the**,” which makes it a specific apostasy, that Paul had apparently told them about in a previous personal meeting (v. 5). *Second*, “*apostasia*” in classical Greek was a word used to describe a political or military coup. More importantly, in the Biblical context, the Septuagint (Greek translation of the Old Testament) frequently and consistently applied this word to a spiritual rebellion against God by His own professed people (Joshua 22:22, for example). Therefore, Paul was referring to a then-future spiritual rebellion among God’s professed people, who were Christians in his day. All this means that he was predicting a *major, specific* spiritual rebellion within the Christian Church before the return of Jesus.



The Apostle Paul

Question #5: Who or what is “the man of sin”?

Answer: Futurists generally teach that the apostasy in this chapter and the work of “**the man of sin**” (NKJV) are 2 different and unrelated events. But the more natural way to read this passage suggests that “**the man of sin**” is the leader of the apostasy. Also, the titles used for him lead to this conclusion. *First*, the better translation is “**the man of lawlessness**,” as most modern English translations render it. The Greek word for “*lawlessness*” means a state of being in opposition to law or being without law, which certainly is consistent with the concept of the apostasy being a rebellion. *Second*, he is called “**the son of perdition**” (v. 3, NKJV). That title is used only 1 other time in the New Testament, in John 17:12, where it’s applied to Judas Iscariot, the traitor to Jesus within the inner circle of Jesus. *Finally*, he’s described as sitting in “**the temple of God**,” claiming the status of God. Whatever one interprets the reference to the temple here, the language makes it obvious that it’s from his position in the temple that he makes his lofty claims. From the description in verse 4 as the one who opposes and exalts himself above God, he’s almost certainly the Antichrist, as nearly all scholars agree.

Question #6: What is “the temple of God” in this chapter?

Answer: The term “**temple of God**” is used in 4 different ways in Scripture: (1) the Jerusalem Temple; (2) the heavenly sanctuary (see Hebrews and Revelation); (3) individual Christians (I Corinthians 6); and (4) the Christian Church (I Corinthians 3:16-17). *First*, no earthly temple after the crucifixion of Jesus can be called “the temple of God” because His death put an end to the sacrificial services, which are an integral part of the earthly sanctuary/temple. Moreover, no Christian leader would select a Jewish temple as his headquarters if he were going to claim to speak for Christ. *Second*, as a “**man**,” he couldn’t literally reside inside any human being. *Third*, no mere man can enter heaven itself and use the heavenly sanctuary as his headquarters. However, as a professed Christian leader, he *can* be said to make his headquarters within the Christian Church. This fits the context perfectly. By claiming divine prerogatives, “**the man of sin**” may be said to think of himself as figuratively sitting on God’s throne in the heavenly temple. Therefore, by a process of elimination, “**the temple of God**” in this chapter must be the Christian Church. This evidence confirms what we learned under Questions #4 and #5—that the Antichrist is a counterfeit Christian leader who claims God’s authority, but who deceives the world in actual but deceptive opposition to Christ.



Question #7: What is the nature of the restraining power?

Answer: In II Thessalonians 2:6-7, Paul speaks about a power which was then restraining the work of the Antichrist and preventing him from being revealed: “**And now you know what is restraining, that he may be revealed in his own time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains will do so until He is taken out of the way**” (NKJV). Interestingly, Paul uses the neuter gender in referring to “**what is restraining**,” while in verse 7, he uses the masculine gender pronoun “**he**” (NKJV). His use of 2 different genders to describe the restrainer strongly suggests that it’s an institutional power headed by a man. In addition, this power already existed in Paul’s day, for it “**is restraining**” (v. 6) and “**now restrains**” (v. 7, both NKJV). [NOTE: The same double gender usage is applied by Paul to the Antichrist. Note that “**the mystery of lawlessness**” (v. 7) is interchangeable with “**the lawless one**” (v. 8), and thus with “**the man of lawlessness**” as well (all NKJV). The Greek word for “**mystery**” is in the neuter gender, while the noun “**man**” and the pronoun “**he**,” of course, are masculine. Therefore, like the restraining power, the Antichrist appears to be an institutional power headed by a man.]

Question #8: Isn’t the restraining power the Holy Spirit?

Answer: No. Some futurists identify the restraining power as the Holy Spirit, who see His removal as constituting the removal of the Church in the Rapture. But the use of the neuter gender for the restrainer in verse 6 dispels this theory; God isn’t an “**it**,” but is consistently referred to in Scripture as “**He**.” Furthermore, it’s difficult to see how God the Holy Spirit could be “**taken out of the way**” (v. 7, NKJV), an expression implying that a hostile power would remove the restrainer.

Question #9: Who or what is the restraining power?

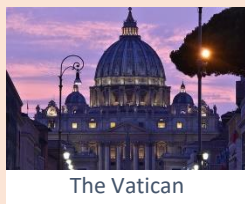
Answer: We have learned that the restraining power (1) is an institutional power headed by a man; (2) that it existed in Paul's day; and (3) that fairly early in the Christian Era, it would be removed by one or more hostile powers. Moreover, according to verses 5-6, Paul had already identified the restraining power orally when he had earlier visited the Church at Thessalonica—but he didn't seem comfortable with identifying it in writing here. All this evidence points to the Roman Empire. After all, the only institutional power headed by a man (i.e., emperor) in existence in the Christian part of the world capable of having any significant impact on the Church was the Roman Empire.

Question #10: When will the Antichrist make its/his appearance?

Answer: According to II Thessalonians 2:7, **“the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains will do so until He is taken out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed...”** (NKJV). Thus, the Antichrist was taking shape in some form already in Paul's day, albeit behind the scenes and therefore not recognizable as this power yet. But it would be revealed as soon as the restraining power **“is taken out of the way.”** This means that the Antichrist should begin its counterfeit Christian work fairly early in the Christian Era. [NOTE: Sometimes the objection is made that verse 8 means that very soon after the Antichrist is revealed, Jesus' 2nd Coming would occur and destroy it. But verse 8 doesn't necessarily mean that Jesus will return immediately after the Antichrist is revealed, but only that the same Antichrist will continue until the 2nd Coming of Jesus.]

Question #11: So who or what is the Antichrist?

Answer: From the evidence uncovered in this Study Guide, we should look for a highly significant developing institutional power, headed by a man, within the Christian Church, which claims divine prerogatives, and which arises about the time of the fall of Rome. Moreover, it's at least suggested by verse 7 that the Antichrist takes the place of the restraining power (Rome) since the latter must be **“taken out of the way”** for the Antichrist to become fully operational.



Does history record the rise of such an institutional power within Christianity at that time, one which in some way replaced the Western Roman Empire? Yes. The only such power which meets all these specifications is the institution of the Papacy, the organizational heart of the Roman Catholic Church. No other institution comes remotely close to fitting the prophecy.

[NOTES: (1) The conclusion *and* the major arguments presented in this Study Guide are an echo of essentially the same as those made by several of the 16th-century Protestant Reformers. But in the 19th century, the vast majority of Protestants adopted either the preterist liberal paradigm regarding the end-time prophecies or the futurist conservative paradigm. (2) This prophecy is not a warning against individual Catholics, but it's aimed at the Roman Catholic hierarchy headed by the Pope. We expect that millions of good, honest Catholics will be in heaven because they never understood this and certain other Bible truths.]