

Perspective

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Who and What is Antichrist?

Sometimes people write to the United Church of God asking whether we know who is the Antichrist spoken of in the Bible? Their questions often reveal they have not thoroughly studied the subject for themselves in Scripture. Recently, some have suggested that figures ranging from the Pope to Donald Trump, Emmanuel Macron, or Elon Musk could be the Antichrist. This question is not new. It has been debated since the first century. Some early Christians believed the Roman Emperor, Nero, who began his reign in A.D. 54, might be the Antichrist. Historical sources portray Nero as a ruler responsible for acts of violence, persecution, and moral corruption. Later, with the rise of Muhammad and Islam, some viewed Muhammad as the Antichrist. Throughout history many other prominent figures have been identified by various groups as the Antichrist, including Emperor Frederick II, Pope John XXII, Martin Luther, Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin, and Benito Mussolini. Clearly, while many of these individuals were powerful and, in some cases, deeply destructive leaders, history has shown that none of them was the Antichrist. Often people are unfamiliar with the biblical criteria the Scripture provides for identifying the Antichrist. Many also do not understand how to distinguish between the Antichrist and the broader "spirit of antichrist" described in the Bible. Let us examine what the Scriptures reveal about the Antichrist and the spirit of antichrist so that we can better understand who and what they are.

What is antichrist?

The last surviving apostle, John, said a lot about the subject of antichrist. John warned the early church in II John 1:7: *“For many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist.”*

I John 2:22 states: *“Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist who denies the Father and the Son.”*

Many heretics over the centuries have proclaimed that Jesus Christ was not the prophesied Messiah. The word, “Christ,” comes from the Greek term *Christos*, which literally means “anointed one” or “chosen one.” It is derived from the Greek verb “*chrío*,” meaning “to anoint.” In Hebrew, the equivalent term is *Mashiach* or *Messiah*, which carries the same meaning of one set apart for a divine purpose (Matthew 16:16; Luke 1:31).

In I John 4:3, the apostle John wrote the spirit of Antichrist existed in his time: *“and every spirit that does not confess ^[a]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.”*

There has been a wrong spirit of the coming end-time Antichrist which has been around since Jesus Christ began preaching the true gospel of the kingdom of God (Mark 1:14-15).

I John 2:18 states it again: *“Little 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.”*

These verses plainly show there is a spirit of the coming Antichrist which has been around for centuries. That spirit has come in different deceptive ways.

Preaching a false gospel and another Jesus

There is only one gospel, one Jesus and one spirit, and anything else is of the antichrist spirit. In Galatians 1:6-7, the apostle Paul rebukes the Galatians for turning to a false gospel by saying, *“I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ.”*

Note as well, II Corinthians 11:4: *“For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted—you may well put up with it!”*

Most professing Christians do not know the church was stolen and highjacked in its early history by those who preached another Jesus, another gospel, and it had another spirit which was of the coming Antichrist who will be led by Satan the Devil. It is shocking most to hear, but it is true. History bears this out!

In his 1918 book, *The Story of the Christian Church*, clergyman and author, Jesse Lyman Hurlbut, described a period in early church history he called the “Age of Shadows.” He writes in his book, “For fifty years after St. Paul’s life a curtain hangs over the church, through which we strive vainly to look; and when at last it rises, about 120 A.D. with the writings of the earliest church-fathers, we find a church in many aspects very different from that in the days of St. Peter and St. Paul” (Hurlbut’s *Story of the Christian Church*, 1918, p. 41).

The churches of Christianity today are not of the church which Jesus founded in Jerusalem in AD 31. The true church of God, which Jesus said would never die, and it exists today (Matthew 16:18). However, it disappeared into the proverbial wilderness, and there are scant references to it in history. It is a longer history than we can cover here, but if you read *Foxe’s Book of Martyrs*, first published in 1563, you will be reading about the documented persecutions and martyrdoms of some who were true saints of the church.

Who is the coming Antichrist?

Many students of prophecy connect the apostle John's references to a coming Antichrist with the "beast" in Revelation, the "man of lawlessness" in II Thessalonians 2, and the ruler described in Daniel 11. Using this understanding tells us a unique future world leader will arise before Christ's 2nd coming.

There are at least 10 criteria to look for, which will be apparent, when the man called the Antichrist comes on the scene:

1. He is also known as the Beast in the Bible, and he will facilitate the rise of the 7th and final resurrection of the Holy Roman Empire.
2. He will implement global economic control. He will assert authority over a ten-nation confederation (Revelation 17:12).
3. He will be a charismatic individual and have no desire for women (Daniel 11:37).
4. He will demand to be worshipped (Daniel 11:36, Revelation 13:15).
5. He will persecute the saints of the church. (Revelation 13:7)
6. He will be a genius military tactician and defeat many nations (Revelation 13:4; Daniel 11:40-42).
7. Antichrist will reject the religions of the fathers, and he will make war with the saints (Daniel 11:37).
8. He will regard no other god, and he will magnify himself above all-- sitting in the Temple as God (Daniel 11:37, II Thessalonians 2:4).
9. He and the ten nations will fight Jesus Christ at His second coming (Revelation 17:14).
10. He will be arrested and put to death along with the False prophet (Revelation 19:20).

It is apparent at this time the Antichrist is not yet on the scene, but we know the criteria the Scriptures give us to identify him when he steps onto the stage for the end-time events described in the Bible. When the Antichrist comes on the scene, you will know unless you are a part of this world and deceived; so, it is important we remain alert and watch our spiritual condition.

Jesus both warns and admonishes us in Luke 21:34-36, *“But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly. For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man.”*