

The Antichrist

Hello Dear Listeners;

The last two times on this program we've busied ourselves with exploring what the bible means with, " the signs of the times." It's important for us to be able to 'read' these signs that we might be the better prepared for the return of the Lord Jesus Christ on the clouds of heaven.

Not only that but that we might not lose our way into unfruitful speculation, putting our trust in horoscopes and other wild and unfounded 'straws' that people grasp at and promote. The bible itself says, " *Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God.*" And why? " *Because many false prophets have gone out into the world*" (1 John 4: 1).

Now of all the "signs of the times", perhaps none is better known nor more often the subject of speculation than the sign of the Antichrist. That speculation is not something that in modern times is "dead in the water". Not that long ago a horror film was made entitled *Antichrist*. In the past rulers as well as theologians labeled their opponents 'antichrists'. They often put names to those they thought fitted biblical teaching concerning this personage: "It's the pope," said the reformer Martin Luther. "Its Vladimir Putin" says one. " No it's the current President of the United States" argues another.

Now someone has said

The temptation to go beyond the clear teaching of Scripture and to fall prey to an unbiblical curiosity about the signs of the

*times and the unfolding of God's purposes in history is nowhere more acute than in respect to this particular sign of the Antichrist.*¹

It is so that only in a few places in the bible are the terms 'antichrist' or 'antichrists' used. There are only four and these are found in the letters or epistles of John. In what is perhaps a more familiar passage, namely that of Matthew 24 the term used is that of 'false' or 'pseudo' Christs. For example, in the verses 23 and 24 of that chapter we read where Jesus in speaking about the great distress that will be experienced by people at the end of days saying,

At that time if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or, 'There he is!' do not believe it. For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect - if that were possible.

Those words of Jesus were, and are, a solemn warning to all that the coming of Christ will be preceded by the appearance of false Christ's.

When we come to 1 John 2:18 we find the first place where the actual term 'antichrist' is used. There John speaks about what he calls "the last hour", which, with John as well as with other New Testament writers refers to the whole period of Christ's first coming even to the end as "*the last hour*" or "*the last days*." Then John says,

And as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists's have come.

¹ Cornelis P. Venema, The Promise of the Future p. 167

Then he asked the question, “ *Who is the liar*”? And answered, “ *It is the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a man is the antichrist*” 1 John 2: 22. A few chapters on John warns against believing every spirit. It is then that he encouraged his readers to “*test the spirits*”. To do so in the knowledge that only that “*spirit who acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come “in the flesh” “ is from God*”,

But every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God, “ This” says John, “ Is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world (1 John 4: 2, 3).

Dear listeners, what does this mean but we really don't have to look very far afield to be able to recognize an antichrist or a spirit of antichrist. For we live during a time when more and more people deny the very existence of God and His Son. Atheism is on the rise and evil spirits may be said to be on the prowl. There is mounting opposition to the gospel and at times this opposition is found within churches themselves!

O yes when I say that, I don't forget, (I better not) that in many parts of the world the Gospel of Jesus Christ is being embraced wholeheartedly. Even in places where heathen religions have kept people 'in chains' for ages, the bright light of the gospel of Jesus Christ is breaking through. Nevertheless, antichrists and the spirit of antichrist appear to be having a field day in countries which not that long ago might rightly be called Christian. False, and anti-Christian teaching and a twisting of scriptural truth into a lie are but all too common today. This too is telltale evidence of the presence of the spirit of antichrist.

Yet we can't avoid recognizing that the bible does speak about a particular person, one who may be considered to be **the** Antichrist. We've already mentioned 1 John 2: 18 while another passage that makes us think of such an individual is 2 Thessalonians 2: 1-10 where the apostle Paul speaks about the coming of " *a man of lawlessness.*"

This passage surely has a close connection to the Old Testament. There, in the book of Daniel there are two passages that speak of an " *abomination that makes desolate*" or " *causes desolation.*"² Both these passages have been seen by serious bible scholars to refer to what a ruler called *Antiochus Epiphanes* did to profane God's temple in Jerusalem. He was a Greek ruler from the Seleucid empire. who conquered the Jews in 167 AD massacring many women and children in the process. Not only that but he forced the Jews to abandon the customs of their ancestors and live no longer by the laws of God. He desecrated the temple, dedicating it instead to the heathen Olympian god Zeus.

We may take the mentioning of the abomination of desolation in Matthew 24 to have been an initial fulfilment of Daniel's prophecy at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem and the burning of the temple by the Roman emperor Titus and his legions in 70 AD.

Yet those events involving both Antiochus Epiphanes and Titus may themselves be a foreshadowing of an event that is yet to come. One in which the temple of the Lord, or, we may say, Christ's *church* today, will be invaded and profaned by another person, the one Paul calls " *the man of lawlessness.*" In that 2 Thessalonians 2 passage Paul calls him

² Daniel 11:31, 12:11

the man doomed to destruction who will oppose and exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshipped so that he sets himself up in God's temple proclaiming himself to be God 2 Thess. 2: 3, 4.

A few verses on Paul also speaks of a “*secret power*” or “*mystery*” of lawlessness that is already at work. He mentions as well “*one who holds it back*” (v. 7) at least for a time, for, Paul continues, “*till he is taken out of the way.*”

Dear listeners, we do not know the identity of this antichrist, this “man of lawlessness” who will make his appearance felt in the period immediately before the return of Christ. Who knows but that he is already at work, seeing the proliferation of evil and the intensified challenges to the faithfulness of the church in our days. Certainly the language of 2 Thess. 2 suggests that the Antichrist will be a particular person in history.

He certainly will be a terrible blasphemous power. In the Book of Revelation he is identified as “*The Beast*”. One who utters all kinds of proud words, blaspheming God. He will make war against faithful Christians, and he will conquer many. In fact The Holy Spirit reveals that *All inhabitants of the earth “will worship the beast.”* (Rev. 13:8). That is all except those whose names are written in what is called “*The book of life belonging to the Lamb*”.

Dear listeners, may you and I, and yes, whoever hears God's infallible Word, believe in this Lamb of God, “*who takes away the sins of the world.*”³ May we cling to him, who does hold on to the reins of history

³ John 1: 29, 36

and will not let go of those who make, and maintain the good confession. Then storms will come as the end approaches, yet faithful Christians will be secure in the knowledge that Christ Jesus is King Triumphant, and in him, that is, in close *fellowship* with him they too are “more than conquerors.’

Amen and thanks so much for listening.