

Who Is *the* Antichrist?

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Standing against Christ

Who is the Antichrist? Bible prophecy of the end time talks about this mysterious figure. Is he the one identified as the “man of sin” and the “false prophet”? Or is there more to the story than that? The answer is deeply personal and forces Christians to examine the very core of their relationship with Jesus Christ.

“Antichrist” is shown as appearing before the second coming of Christ. But there’s more to the story and the term “antichrist” than just one man.

The meaning of the term *antichrist* encompasses more than just the end time. It literally means “against Christ” and is variously defined as “adversary of Christ” or “opponent of Christ,” and as a designation for a specific individual who rises on the world scene to defy Christ and His work. In fact, such an enemy will arise, but there have been and are *many* antichrists who oppose Jesus and His message (1 John 2:18).

The Greek-English Lexicon of the

New Testament Based on Semantic Domains by Louw and Nida offers a more comprehensive definition: “The term . . . appears to have become increasingly equivalent to a proper name as the personification of all that was opposed to and contrary to the role and ministry of Christ.”

According to the apostle John’s writing, there is a *spirit of antichrist*, which is a spirit of opposition to the identity and nature of Christ and His ongoing work in His people. Specifically, John was writing to warn of the heresy that denied Christ’s coming in the flesh (1 John 4:3; 2 John 6-7). To deny

such central biblical truth is to be *against Christ* and His message.

Like a lamb but speaking as a dragon

In 2 Thessalonians 2, Paul prophesied of a “man of sin,” a liar and deceiver supernaturally empowered by Satan the devil to confuse people in the end time.

Christ inspired John to write of a “false prophet” to come at the end time (Revelation 13:11-18; 16:13; 19:20). The prophecy describes a great religious leader: “He had two horns like a lamb and spoke like a dragon” (Revelation 13:11). That is to say, he takes on the semblance of (or imitates) Jesus Christ (the Lamb of God) but is empowered by Satan (see Revelation 12:9). Historically, a counterfeit version of Christianity fulfills what is described in the prophecies of Revelation.

Heresies denying Jesus as God in the flesh

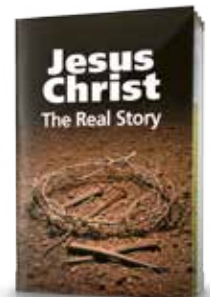
One influential and diabolical heresy was gnosticism, which was starting to form in the late New Testament period. The gnostics taught the lie that spirit is always good, and matter (including the human body) is always evil. Docetism, one branch of gnosticism, taught that Christ only seemed to have a body. Cerinthianism, another variant, taught that the divine Christ joined the man Jesus at baptism and then left him before he died.

Furthermore, some among the Ebionites, or “poor ones”—referring to early Jewish Christians—reportedly taught the heresy that Jesus was only a man and not God.

All these ideas rejected the truth that God actually came “in the flesh” (became a physical human being capable dying) and then actually died. But the only way the death of Jesus could pay for the sins of all mankind is for

Christ to have been both God and man when He died. You need to know the truth about Jesus Christ—

who He was and what He taught. Read our free study guide *Jesus Christ: The Real Story* for this important information (available free online at www.ucg.org/booklet/jesus-christ-real-story).





A man who would make himself as **GOD**

The apostle Paul issued a warning about the spirit of antichrist that would infiltrate the Church. In his letter to the Thessalonians, speaking about the return of Jesus Christ to the earth, he writes, “Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first” (2 Thessalonians 2:3). He then proceeds to explain this “falling away” or apostasy from the truth in greater detail.

Paul writes that it will involve the revealing of “the man of sin . . . the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God” (2 Thessalonians 2:3-4). Some man is going to put himself in the place of God, effectively claiming to be God—and people will believe him. Why? Because: “The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie” (2 Thessalonians 2:9-11).

The “man of sin,” posing as divine, will be performing supernatural acts with the help of the devil, deceiving all those who have rejected God and

setting himself up to be worshipped by the world.

Revelation 19:20 describes this powerful religious leader as “the false prophet who worked signs” in connection with the political leader called the “beast.” The False Prophet is the same as the one called “another beast” in Revelation 13:11, who performs miraculous “signs” (verses 14-15). He is also the leader of the false church (“the harlot”) in Revelation 17:1-5. He is also referred to as “another horn” who will “persecute the saints of the Most High, and shall intend to change times and law” in Daniel 7:8, 20-22, 24-25.

What should you do? We’re told there’s one thing that can save you from being deceived: Have the love of the truth. That means knowing the Bible, understanding what it says and obeying the law of God out of love. If you’re going to avoid being deceived by this man of sin, you’d better know the law—and do it!

The coming “Abomination of Desolation”



The False Prophet who exemplifies the spirit of antichrist in the last days will usher in a time of great trouble. Both Daniel and Jesus pointed to a specific event that will point to the start of this time of Great Tribulation.

In His most detailed prophecy of the end time, Jesus said, “When you see the ‘abomination of desolation,’ spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place . . . then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains” (Matthew 24:15-16). What was He

talking about?

He was referring to Daniel 11, which foretold what would occur in the political powers vying for control of the Holy Land for centuries to come. For much of the prophecy these kingdoms were Syria to the north and Egypt to

the south, both under Greek rulers following Alexander the Great. Eventually the prophecy describes one of these rulers from Syria, Antiochus IV, also known as Antiochus Epiphanes. He would “act deceitfully” by a false peace agreement with the Jews and later come “in rage against the holy covenant, and do damage” (Daniel 11:23-24, 30).

The apocryphal book of 1 Maccabees, although not Scripture, provides us with history of the period. It describes how Antiochus set himself against the Jews, massacred many of them and plundered the temple at Jerusalem (1 Maccabees 1:20-33).

The temple defiled

Then came the worst. Daniel’s prophecy warned of Antiochus: “And they shall defile the sanctuary fortress; then they shall take away the daily sacrifices, and place there the abomination of desolation” (Daniel 11:31).

The book of 1 Maccabees gives us details: “Antiochus now issued a decree that all nations in his empire should abandon their own customs and become one people. All the Gentiles and even many of the Israelites submitted to this decree. They adopted the official pagan religion, offered sacrifices to idols, and no longer observed the Sabbath.

“The king also sent messengers with a decree to Jerusalem and all the towns of Judea, ordering the people to follow customs that were foreign to the country. He ordered them not to offer burnt offerings, grain offerings, or wine offerings in the Temple, and commanded them to treat Sabbaths and festivals as ordinary work days.

“They were even ordered to defile

the Temple and the holy things in it. They were commanded to build pagan altars, temples, and shrines, and to sacrifice pigs and other unclean animals there. They were forbidden to circumcise their sons and were required to make themselves . . . unclean in every way they could, so that they would forget the Law which the Lord had given through Moses and would disobey all its commands. The penalty for disobeying the king’s decree was death” (1 Maccabees 1:41-50, Good News Translation).

Then it happened: In about 168 or 167 B.C. the abomination of desolation referred to by Daniel took place (1 Maccabees 1:54). This appears to have been a pagan altar, probably with an image representing the Greek chief god Zeus, as 2 Maccabees 6:2 tells us that Antiochus defiled the Jewish temple “by dedicating it to the Olympian god Zeus” (GNT). After all, to the Greek mind the God of the Hebrews simply equated to the chief god in the Greeks’ pantheon.

We are further told: “Pagan sacrifices were offered in front of houses and in the streets. Any books of the Law which were found were torn up and burned, and anyone who was caught with a copy of the sacred books or who obeyed the Law was put to death by order of the king . . . On the twenty-fifth of the month, these same evil people offered sacrifices on the pagan altar erected on top of the altar in the Temple” (1 Maccabees 1:55-59, GNT). Indeed, pigs, declared unclean in God’s law (Deuteronomy 14:8), were offered over His own altar.

The account in 1 Maccabees 1:60 continues: “Mothers who had allowed their babies to be circumcised were put

to death in accordance with the king's decree. Their babies were hung around their necks, and their families and those who had circumcised them were put to death" (GNT).

Yet, as horrible as this was, some still resisted. In fact, 1 Maccabees 1:62-63 reports: "But many in Israel stood firm . . . They chose to die rather than to be defiled by food or to profane the holy covenant; and they did die. Very great wrath came upon Israel" (New Revised Standard Version).

Yet many in the resistance lived. The account continues with the rise of the Hasmonean priestly family of Mattathias, including his son and successor Judas Maccabeus, who would not compromise with paganism. In the end, the efforts of these patriots and their followers were in large measure responsible for eventually pushing out the Greek Syrians.

Later prophetic fulfillment

Now, with the history in mind, consider Christ's warning about the abomination of desolation. When He gave it, this part of Daniel's prophecy had been fulfilled almost 200 years ear-

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lier. So Daniel's prophecy, according to Jesus, must be dual—that is, it must be a prophecy with both a historical and future fulfillment.

Jesus revealed to us the time for this prophecy's ultimate fulfillment in Matthew 24:21 when He explained what would immediately follow it: "For then there will be great tribulation,

such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time."

This recalls another part of Daniel's prophecy—that in the end time "there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, even to that time" (Daniel 12:1). So this period of tribulation occurs at the end of this age, just before Christ's return.

Lessons from the first fulfillment

We can learn a great deal about this end-time prophecy from the original abomination of desolation Daniel foretold. Antiochus Epiphanes was a forerunner of the end-time king of the North, the world dictator the Book of Revelation refers to as the "beast." No doubt this end-time ruler will employ the same deceitful and underhanded methods that marked the reign of Antiochus.

Furthermore, it appears from what Antiochus initially did and other scriptural indications that the end-time ruler will feign overtures of peace to the Jews of the modern nation of Israel.

What other parallels do we see? Part of the "abomination" of Antiochus involved the halting of the daily temple sacrifices (verse 31). Yet Daniel's prophecy makes it clear that sacrifices will again

be ended in conjunction with the abomination of desolation to come (Daniel 12:9-13). For this prophecy to be fulfilled, it appears that an altar will be rebuilt and sacrifices will again be instituted before the return of Jesus.

In another parallel, as noted earlier, Antiochus defiled the ancient holy temple when he erected an idol of the

pagan god Zeus and sacrificed swine there. The end-time abomination may also involve an idolatrous image at a new temple, but this is all speculation. What we know for certain is that at the "temple of God" there will be an actual person effectively claiming to be God in the flesh (2 Thessalonians 2:1-12).

Christ will destroy this religious figure at His second coming (2 Thessalonians 2:5-8), but not before many have been deceived with "power, signs, and lying wonders" (verses 9-12).

Also, just as the original abomination of desolation marked the beginning of a period of unparalleled horror and misery for God's people, so will the final one begin the time of the greatest horror ever, the coming Great Tribulation.

We can be thankful that God promises to send His Son back to the earth to save mankind from self-annihilation in this coming horrible time of mass deceit and destruction. Indeed, as world events march ever closer to the fulfillment of these prophecies, let us draw closer to God in faith, trusting Him to see us through even the worst of times, knowing that we aren't left without foreknowledge to help us better understand end-time events.

Jesus Christ is coming as conquering King

In the first century, most people of Jewish background anticipated a Messiah who would come to the earth as a conquering king to establish the Kingdom of God. But they failed to understand that He would first come as a man who would become the sacrifice for the sins of mankind. They refused to accept Jesus as the Messiah. (This word, Messiah, from the Greek form of the Hebrew *Machiach*, has the same meaning as the Greek word *Christos* or Christ—"Anointed One," signifying the promised King who would rule over Israel and the entire world.) Their denial of Him was an example of a spirit of antichrist.

Today, there are some mainstream Christian churches that accept Jesus as the Christ who became the perfect sacrifice for sin, but they reject His coming return to the earth as conquering King to rule over all nations—which is central to what His being Christ means. So one can claim to believe in Christ, and even accept certain aspects of His life and mission, but still be classified as "antichrist."

End-time prophecies show that religious people—including professing Christians deceived into accepting a counterfeit Christianity—will oppose many of the teachings of Christ. In that real sense, even today, many professing Christians actually have been deceived by a spirit of antichrist. To learn more about the Kingdom that Jesus will establish on the earth, read *The Gospel of the Kingdom* (available free online at www.ucg.org/booklet/gospel-kingdom).



What the Bible really says about antichrist

With the historical background in mind, and the prophecies made by Daniel and Jesus pointing to a future time that will signal the Great Tribulation, need we be concerned about the Antichrist only in terms of the coming Beast and False Prophet?

What's important is that we read the Bible for what it actually says and believe it—and not make a big issue of whether the word antichrist must be applied to a specific prophesied figure. We need to keep focused on the big picture here.

In the Bible the word “antichrist” (Greek *antichristos*) is used in only four places, all in John’s epistles. The prefix *anti* means “against” or “adversary of” or “in place of.” John wanted to make clear that any teaching contrary to Christ and His purposes is antichrist—and that false teachers are antichrists, meaning enemies of Christ.

Not long after the New Testament Church began, heretical deceivers began trying to inject their own ideas into it. These false teachings crept into the Christian congregations and influenced mainstream Christianity permanently.

In 1 John 2:18, John says, “Many antichrists *have [already] come*” (emphasis added throughout), indicating that already “it is the last hour”—that the age of false teachers and

counterfeit Christianity was already well under way. Jesus had warned, “For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect” (Matthew 24:24).

John also speaks of the singular word “antichrist.” When antichrist is singular, the original Greek gives us no indication as to whether or not, in English, we should capitalize the word antichrist.

Also in 1 John 2:18, John said, “You have heard that the Antichrist is coming.” John gives no indication as to how this idea got started. Did one or more apostles specifically teach it?

The idea does harmonize with the prophecy in Daniel 7:8, 20 and 25 that speaks of a “little horn” who will speak “pompous words against the Most High.” And perhaps, as seems likely, “antichrist” had become the popular terminology for what Paul had prophesied in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-6. Paul wrote that “the day of Christ . . . will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of



sin . . . opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God” (verses 2-4). The Greek verb translated “opposes” is *antikeimai*—literally, “be against.” In Galatians 5:17 and in 1 Timothy 1:10, it is translated “contrary to.”

Denial that leads to lawlessness

In 1 John 2:22, we learn that any liar who denies the central truth that Jesus was and is the Christ—the prophesied Messiah and Savior—is *an antichrist*, an enemy of both the Father and the Son.

In 1 John 4:3, John again acknowledges that “you have heard [the Antichrist] was coming.” But he goes on to say that antichrist is “already in the world.” John’s main point is that “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”—the spirit from Satan that is in the “false prophets” (verse 1). It is evil to deny either Jesus’ deity or His full humanity during His earthly ministry and at the time of His death (see also 1 John 1:1-3).

Many mainstream Christians today accept that Jesus was God in the flesh, but by this they imagine that, while human in appearance, He was infinite, omnipotent and omniscient God hidden behind a veil of flesh—just not using His total power and knowledge while a man. That it was this that kept Him sinless—that it was impossible for Him to even be capable of sin. This is a denial of His truly

The ultimate antichrist

The ultimate antichrist is, of course, Satan the devil. He has tried many schemes to destroy Christ and to thwart God’s plan of salvation for mankind. He was the tempter of Eve and Adam and still “deceives the whole world” (Revelation 12:9). He led Herod to try to kill Jesus while He was a baby. He tried to tempt Jesus to sin. He stirred up hostility toward Jesus and finally succeeded in getting Him killed. (God and Christ allowed that because it was a part of God’s plan of redemption for mankind.) And it will be Satan who possesses the Beast and the False Prophet at the end of the age and lures the world’s great armies to fight against Christ (Revelation 13:4; 16:13-14).

Please read *Is There Really a Devil?* to get much more detail about this evil spirit and his war against humanity (available free online at www.ucg.org/booklet/there-really-devil).



being made flesh—a form of gnosticism and the doctrine of antichrist. In fact, Jesus made it clear that He had no supernatural power of Himself while a man. He said it all came from the Father (John 5:30; 14:10). And His ability to resist sin in the face of temptation came from His constant closeness to the Father. The doctrine of antichrist promotes lawlessness, as it maintains that Jesus was able to obey God because He was an omnipotent being while flesh and that it is impossible for us to obey so we shouldn’t even try. The truth, however, is that we can succeed in obedience by following the example Jesus set of always staying close to God.

The power that Jesus Christ received through staying close to the Father is the same power available to us—the

The power that Jesus Christ received through staying close to the Father is the same power available to us—the Holy Spirit.

Holy Spirit. God offers us this great gift when we repent and commit our lives to Him (Acts 2:38-39). By His Spirit, God gives us more spiritual understanding and insight (1 Corinthians 2:11-12), gives us peace and joy (Romans 15:13), and makes us into His very children, heirs of the Kingdom of God (Romans 8:14).

To read more about the gift of the Holy Spirit, read our free *Beyond Today* Bible study aid *The Power of the Holy Spirit* (online at www.ucg.org/booklet/power-holy-spirit).

In 2 John 7, John says: “For many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming [present tense] in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist.”

In this case, John is not referring to accepting Jesus’ past incarnation in having come in the flesh—but to His presently coming in the flesh, living in His flesh-and-blood followers through the Holy Spirit to help them live obedient lives. Note the words just before this in verse 6: “This is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, that as you have heard from the beginning, you should walk in it.” Of course, we cannot do this in our own strength. We can continue to walk in obedience only through staying close to God and, as Paul elsewhere explained, having Jesus live in us (Galatians 2:20). The teaching of antichrist is that we simply can’t obey God. For it denies that we have help to actually overcome sin—as Jesus Himself had help from the Father.

The teaching of antichrist is thus a doctrine of lawlessness. Indeed, the man of sin

(of disobedience)—or “the lawless one” in 2 Thessalonians 2—is the head of what Paul refers to as “the mystery of lawlessness” (verse 7).

We don’t have to fall to deception. Know what your Bible teaches and be prepared. Those who fall for the deception of the antichrist are described as those who “did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved” (2 Thessalonians 2:9-10). Do you know the truth? Do you *love* the truth? Does your life show that you are *living* the truth?

Revelation 12:17 describes God’s true people as those who love and live the truth—“who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.”




Stand strong with Christ


God's Word tells us to pay close attention, open our eyes, scrutinize our religion. Does it match with the authentic Christianity Jesus taught?

Does your church teach the need to strive to obey the commandments of God with His help through Christ? Does it urge you to understand His plan for all mankind that He is working out through Christ? There are so many counterfeits out there that trick people into supporting false religions that oppose biblical truth and the true God. Don't buy into it.


The spirit of antichrist is not something restricted to the future. Even now Satan has corrupted the true teachings of God. Now is the time to really get to know your Creator. Follow Jesus Christ, study carefully and know God's true Word—so you won't be deceived!


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