

# ASSOCIATED BIBLE STUDENTS

"WEEPING MAY ENDURE FOR A NIGHT, BUT JOY COMETH IN THE MORNING." PSALMS 30:5

WINTER/SPRING 2015

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"...THAT DAY SHALL NOT COME, EXCEPT THERE COME A FALLING AWAY FIRST, AND THAT MAN OF SIN BE REVEALED, THE SON OF PERDITION; WHO OPPOSETH AND EXALTETH HIMSELF ABOVE ALL THAT IS CALLED GOD... SO THAT HE AS GOD SITTETH IN THE TEMPLE OF GOD, SHOWING HIMSELF THAT HE IS GOD... FOR THE MYSTERY OF INIQUITY DOETH ALREADY WORK... UNTIL HE BE TAKEN OUT OF THE WAY. AND THEN SHALL THAT WICKED BE REVEALED, WHOM THE LORD SHALL CONSUME WITH THE SPIRIT OF HIS MOUTH, AND SHALL DESTROY WITH THE BRIGHTNESS OF HIS COMING..." 2 THESSALONIANS 2:3-8

Prophetic passages in Scripture give a clear description of the beginning, prosperity and decline of *The Antichrist*. Other titles given in the New Testament of this ominous character are *The Man of Sin*, *That Wicked One*, *Mystery of Iniquity*, *The Son of Perdition* and *The Beast*. Our Lord refers to this same character as *The Abomination of Desolation* spoken of by Daniel the prophet. (Matthew 24:15; Daniel 11:31; 12:11) In Daniel's prophetic vision, this same character was also prefigured by a *little horn*, or power which grew out of a terrible beast and made war with *the saints* - the true children of God. Daniel 7:8, 21

The book of Revelation details symbolic prophecies concerning this same *Antichrist* figure. It portrays a cruel, beast-like character-subtle, hypocritical, deceptive, and tyrannical. The Apostle John shows a gradual development of *The Antichrist* in the midst of the Christian Church, ascending in power and influence until finally reaching the very pinnacle of earthly wealth and power—all the while claiming authority and power from God.

## ANTICHRIST DEFINED

The word antichrist has a twofold significance. The first is against (i.e., in opposition to) Christ: the second significance is instead (i.e., a counterfeit) of Christ. In the first sense the expression is a general one, which would apply to any enemy opposing Christ. In this sense all the Pagan emperors and all non-Christian religions have been antichrists—opposers of Christ. However, it is not in this sense that the Scriptures use the name *The Antichrist*. They pass over all such enemies of the faith, and apply the term Antichrist in the sense of its secondary meaning—misrepresenting, *counterfeiting*, taking the place of the true Christ. In other words, usurping the position of Christ.

The Apostle John points out this twofold significance in 1 John 2:18,19: "Ye have heard that *The Antichrist* shall come. Even now there are *many antichrists*." The Greek distinguishes between *The* special *Antichrist* and the numerous lesser ones. John's subsequent remarks show that he does not refer to all opposers of Christ and his Church, such as Islam, but to a certain class who, though professing to be of the true Church, had left the foundation principles of the truth, and were therefore not only misrepresenting the truth, but were, in the eyes of the world, taking the place of and name of the true Church. John says of these, "They went out from us, but they were not of us..." They do not represent the sincere

followers of Christ who love the truth, even though they may deceive themselves and the world on this subject. See also 2 John 7.



It is important to fix the concept in our minds that this *Man of Sin*, this *Antichrist*, is **not** a single individual. The *Man of Sin* is more accurately described as a **system** which began its gradual development in the early Church (as the Apostle Paul wrote the *Mystery of Iniquity doth already work*) and would be revealed before the Lord's Second Advent. Just as *The Christ* consists of the true Lord and the true Church, so *The Antichrist* is a *counterfeit* system consisting of a false lord and an apostate church. (1 Corinthians 12:12-28) This system, which for a

time has been permitted to counterfeit the authority and future reign of the true Lord and his Church, has intoxicated the nations with false claims of a God given right to reign. A single individual could never fulfill all the predictions made concerning *The Antichrist*. Only a corrupt system—an unholy union of church and civil government—could fulfill these predictions.

## DEVELOPMENT OF THE COUNTERFEIT HEAVENS

Jesus declared that his "*kingdom is not of this world*." (John 18:36) True Christianity was not meant to be a religion, i.e., a sect to be set up as a *Kingdom* now, but it was simply a gracious opportunity for one to develop as a disciple of Christ—to know the mind of the Lord, to emulate his character and ultimately to reign with him at his second coming. And, thus, the Church was to remain apart from the world and worldly governments—holy, pure and, as stated in Scripture, a virgin betrothed to her bridegroom. Matthew 25:1-13; John 15:19

The early Church remained sanctified, set apart from the world, for just a short time after the death of the Apostles. Within three short centuries, however, defection from the Apostolic teachings had gradually molded the now worldly-minded church to take on the role of *The Antichrist*. Finally, in A.D. 313, Constantine embraced Christianity, and the next century witnessed an even further development—a self-serving and politically controlled church organization. *Antichrist* was transforming into a church-state system instead of waiting for the true Kingdom to be established by our Lord upon his return.

Between A.D. 413-426, Augustine wrote in his book, *The City of God*, that Christians were wrong to wait for the second advent of Christ before establishing the Kingdom of God on earth. Rather,

he advanced the idea that the Christian Church, united with imperial Rome, was in reality the Kingdom of God now reigning on earth. Many leaders of the Church readily embraced Augustine's theology that the Kingdom of God had begun. They united with the kings of the earth to set up their own kingdom—*Christendom*—a counterfeit of God's true Kingdom.

### ANTICHRIST'S LOUD BOAST

Succeeding bishops of Rome made grand claims for the Church, but it was not until A.D. 533 that the Roman Emperor Justinian officially decreed the Bishop of Rome "...head of all the holy Churches and of all the holy priests of God." In A.D. 800 Charlemagne formally presented Papacy with the Papal States, and the reign of the *Holy Roman Empire* began. This transfer of power from Pagan Rome to Papal Rome was seen by many of the faithful to be a fulfillment of the prophecy in Revelation 13:2 where the *Dragon* [civil Rome] gives the *Beast* [Antichrist] "power and his seat and

great authority."

As the centuries progressed, Papacy became more and more arrogant in its presumptuous claims: "The pope holds the place of the true God," declared Pope Innocent III (A.D. 1198-1216). The Lateran Council (A.D. 1123) acclaimed the Pope as "Prince of the Universe." St. Bernard (A.D. 1090-1153) wrote that "none except God is like the Pope, either in heaven or on earth." And Pope Nicholas (A.D. 858-867) boasted, "What can you make me but God?" Ferrar's (Roman Catholic) Ecclesiastical Dictionary states, "The Pope is, as it were, God on Earth..." Boasting authority from God, Papacy ruled with a heavy hand over the thrones of the earth, seeking to covert the world. Soon this cruel, tyrannical system began to physically persecute those who opposed or even questioned its authority. The true saints of God would not pledge their allegiance to the *Man of Sin*, and as a result, hundreds of thousands were tortured by means more horrible than modern minds can imagine. Revelation 17:1, 2, 6

### WHAT DID THE PROTESTANT REFORMERS TEACH ABOUT THE IDENTITY OF ANTICHRIST?



John Wesley, 1703 - 1791 (Founder—Methodist Church): "He [Papacy] is in an emphatical sense, the Man of Sin, as he increases all manner of sin above measure. And he is, too, properly styled the Son of Perdition, as he has caused the death of numberless multitudes, both of his opposers and followers... He it is... that exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped... claiming the highest power, and highest honor... claiming the prerogatives which belong to God alone." Taken from "Antichrist and His Ten Kingdoms" by John Wesley, page 110



Martin Luther, 1483 - 1546, (Founder—Lutheran Church): "We here are of the conviction that the papacy is the seat of the true and real Antichrist. ...personally I declare that I owe the Pope no other obedience than that to Antichrist." August 18, 1520 Taken from "The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers" Vol. 2 Page 121 by Froom



John Calvin, 1509 - 1564 (Founder—Presbyterian Church): "Some persons think us too severe and censorious when we call the Roman pontiff Antichrist. But those who are of this opinion do not consider that they bring the same charge of presumption against Paul himself, after whom we speak and whose language we adopt... I shall briefly show that (Paul's words in II Thess. 2) are not capable of any other interpretation than that which applies them to the Papacy." Taken from "Institutes" by John Calvin.



Cotton Mather, 1663 - 1728 (Congregational Theologian): "The oracles of God foretold the rising of an Antichrist in the Christian Church: and in the Pope of Rome, all the characteristics of that Antichrist are so marvelously answered that if any who read the Scriptures do not see it, there is a marvelous blindness upon them." Taken from "The Fall of Babylon" by Cotton Mather in Froom's book "The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers." Vol. 3, Page 113



Roger Williams 1603 - 1683 (First Baptist Pastor in America): He spoke of the Pope as "the pretended Vicar of Christ on earth, who sits as God over the Temple of God, exalting himself not only above all that is called God, but over the souls and consciences of all his vassals, yea over the Spirit of Christ, over the Holy Spirit, yea, and God himself...speaking against the God of heaven, thinking to change times and laws; but he is the son of perdition (II Thess. 2)." Taken from "The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers" by Froom, Vol. 3, pg. 52.



John Knox, 1505 - 1572 (Scottish Presbyterian) Knox wrote to abolish "that tyranny which the pope himself has for so many ages exercised over the church" and that the pope should be recognized as "the very antichrist, and son of perdition, of whom Paul speaks." Taken from "The Zurich Letters" page 199 by John Knox.



Thomas Cranmer, 1489 - 1556 (First Archbishop of Canterbury, Anglican Church): "Whereof it followeth Rome to be the seat of antichrist, and the pope to be very antichrist himself. I could prove the same by many other Scriptures, old writers, and strong reasons." Taken from "Works" by Cranmer, Vol. 1, Pages 6-7.

## PROTESTANT REFORMATION

This persecuting spirit was evidence to the Reformers that Papacy had an improper spirit—born of an impure doctrinal foundation. It was never taught by Christ that a Christian should use force of any means to gain converts or to compel allegiance to a church dictate. Matthew 10:16; 26:52; John 18:36

It was also evident to the Reformers that the Papal system fit the description found in 2 Thessalonians 2:4: “...who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God...” This boast of Papacy was a key factor to the Reformers in identifying the Papal system as a counterfeit—*The Antichrist*.

Another evidence to the Reformers in confirming the identity of Antichrist was the doctrine of the Mass. The ritual of the Mass claims to recreate and sacrifice over and over Christ’s actual flesh (bread) and blood (wine). Known as the *Eucharist*, it became a requirement that each believer must receive this fresh sacrifice of Christ to cover his daily sins. Daniel 11:31 refers to this as *the abomination that maketh desolate*. The Mass *makes desolate* or negates the full merit of Christ’s blood which was shed once for all. Hebrews 7:27; 10:10

It is important to note that the Protestant Reformers were careful not to condemn any individual Catholic believer as *Antichrist*—recognizing that no man is *The Antichrist*. Popes, bishops, priests and others have been only parts of, and, possibly, innocent members of the corrupt *Antichrist* system.

## THE PAPAL COUNTER ATTACK

Soon after the Reformers broke their ties with Rome, Papacy saw that it must counteract its identification as *Antichrist*—or stand condemned. Jesuit scholarship rallied to the cause by providing alternatives to the definition of *Antichrist*. The most successful tack was taken by Francisco Ribera (1537-1591) of Spain, founder of the *Futurist* system of prophetic interpretation. Ribera proposed that *Antichrist* would appear in the distant future, and stated: “*Antichrist would be a single evil person who would be received by the Jews and would rebuild the temple in Jerusalem.*” Amazingly, this *erroneous* teaching has become the popular view in our day, even with members of Protestant Churches!

## THE LURE OF UNITY

Papacy now wants to mend old wounds, and the Church of Rome beckons to its *separated brethren*, (the Protestant Churches) to reunite with the *Mother Church*. Have the Protestant Churches forgotten why they separated? Have issues of substance changed to let them reunite? Are they ready to submit to Papacy as having *universal primacy*, the *supreme authority*?

In November of 1993, Moody Bible Institute in its periodical said: “*Today... the lines that separate evangelicals and Roman Catholics are fading.*” Charles Colson wrote, “*It’s high time that all of us who are Christians come together regardless of the difference of our confessions and our tradition...*” Today the ministries of Billy Graham, Luis Palau, World Vision and charismatic groups such as YWAH involve activities with the Roman Church.

In May of 1995 Pope John Paul II issued an encyclical on Christian unity, “*Ut Unum Sint*” (“*That They May be One*”). The encyclical was an unprecedented call for Protestant and Orthodox denominations to dialogue on a Christian unity *that would accept the authority of the Pope*.

On May 12, 1999, the co-chairman of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission issued the document “*The Gift of Authority*.” The commission agreed, “*the Pope has overall authority*

*in the Christian world ...*” and there is “*need for a universal primacy exercised by the Bishop of Rome [the Pope] as a sign and safeguard of unity within the reunited Church*” (cf. Authority in The Church 11, 9).

In October 1999, the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation issued *The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*. Roman Catholics declared the conflict between them and Martin Luther in 1517 had been just a *misunderstanding*, and the matter should not be an issue to deter unity.

## HAS THE “LEOPARD CHANGED HIS SPOTS?”

Many are making enormous efforts at reunification, and contend that the Papacy today is not the same as that system of the dark ages. They point out that the Popes today have been instituting reforms and great humanitarian efforts. But, are these claims valid? Has Papacy changed its stance on the issues that first caused the Protestant Reformers to identify it as *The Antichrist* system? Has Papacy retracted its claim of being God’s divine channel, on which was bestowed divine authority over the Christian world?

- **Fact** - The Church of Rome states that the Pope has overall authority in the Christian world, and, when the other Churches unite with them, the Pope will exercise universal primacy. The Vatican Website states: “*The Roman pontiff exercises supreme, full, and immediate power in the universal Church ...he holds a primacy of ordinary power over all the churches.*”

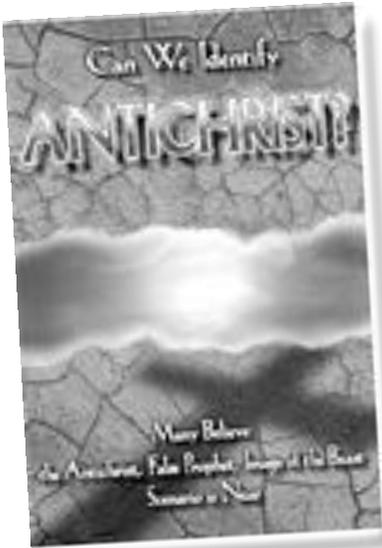
- **Fact** - Infallibility is still taught by the Roman Catholic Church. From The Catholic Encyclopedia, Vol. VII: “*In general, [the Roman Pontiff has] exemption or immunity from liability to error or failure... “Infallibility is attributed to the Roman Pontiff’s ex cathedra teaching. For an ex cathedra decision it must be clear that the Pope intends to bind the whole Church, to demand internal assent from all the faithful...*”

- **Fact** - Papacy still expects heads of State to court her favor. Diplomatic protocol dictates that dignitaries of Protestant nations wear black in the Pope’s presence to acknowledge that they are mourning separation from the Mother Church. BBC News, October 17, 2000.

The rallying cry of the Reformation must not be forgotten. The Reformers acted on their beliefs to stand free from the tyranny and false teachings of *Antichrist*, and many died for their convictions. By their love for truth, they clarified the doctrine of justification by faith in the blood of Christ alone, the personal relationship of a believer to his Lord, and the responsibility of each individual Christian as a minister of the gospel of Christ.

The Apostle Paul assures us that the inglorious saga of the *Man of Sin* will finally have a fitting conclusion: “*And then shall that Wicked [The Antichrist system] be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his [Christ’s] coming [Greek, parousia, presence].*” (2 Thessalonians 2:8) There can be no doubt that *The Man of Sin, The Antichrist*, has been completely revealed to the Christian Church as a necessary prerequisite to the second advent of Christ. Shortly, the true Kingdom of God will be fully set up and will rule in righteousness throughout the entire earth. Instead of oppressing and persecuting to death, Christ’s Kingdom will bless and bring life. Instead of misrepresenting God’s character, Christ’s Kingdom will vindicate it in love and mercy. Instead of replacing and opposing God’s plan, Christ’s Kingdom will fulfill it.

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