

outreach

The Newsletter of the Churches of God, UK

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Antichrist - Who is it?

It is often assumed that 'the Antichrist' is a single entity, focused by many Protestants on the Church of Rome - specifically the Pope and his church. The apostle John, however, cites 'many antichrists' in his day. It may be worth considering that the end-time may produce more than one such anti-Christian person.

Take a look at some of the 'marks' of Antichrist, gleaned from the Scriptures:

- denies the Father and the Son
- denies the incarnation
- exalts himself above the one true God revealed in the Christian Bible
- claims personal divinity
- a man of sin, lawless - inherently worthy of destruction
- a false prophet producing lying wonders and false miracles
- author of a great apostasy from the 'faith once for all delivered to the saints'
- defiles the Temple holy place
- desolates the land of Palestine
- sets up a kingdom, small to begin but spreading widely - ultimately worldwide
- uses force to propagate his belief system
- hates Christianity and Judaism by any name
- arises after demise of Roman Empire
- still powerful at Christ's return
- and only destroyed by the returning Christ

History shows us that some who occupied the Papal throne fulfilled some of these criteria. But certainly not all - witness the late John Paul II. Such, however, will in contrast be the marks of the end-time 'man of sin', the Antichrist.

Man of Sin

In other words, the 'man of sin' (the *lawless one* - II Thessalonians 2:8) heads an assembly of nations which is opposed to the Father God and denies that Jesus is God's Son and His Messiah - the Anointed One. His dominion arises to prominence sometime after the restraining

influence of the Roman Empire is taken away (in the mid-sixth century AD), when the Empire shattered into ten divisions - and continues until destroyed by the returning King of kings.

The seeds of his belief system were sown in the first century. The apostle John points to him as the Antichrist, '*against [and instead of] Christ*'. The Antichrist, a false Messiah, claims superiority over Jesus, as do his followers - he '*blasphemes the God of Heaven*'. He is, personally, a debauched 'man of sin' and fit only for destruction. He acts through the energy, false miracles and deceptive methods of Satan - who now has a stranglehold on our world.

The Antichrist considers himself superior to all other faiths - even his own - and takes to himself divine authority.

The 'man of sin' and his system is not peaceful but violent. He is a warrior and gains followers by the sword or the threat of the sword. The especial objects of his wrath are Christianity by any name and Judaism - though his religion is based on a perversion of both, on spurious revelations' and on false miracles. Down the centuries his successors have had the same violent tendency. In the end-time he acts '*... according to the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders*'.

This evil end-time despot - who echoes Antiochus the Illustrious of ancient Syria - arises from the same eastern portion of the old Grecian Empire - which included greater Syria and Iran (Daniel 8:21-25), and later was also part of the Roman Empire

In the end-time he will be supported by an alliance of Middle Eastern nations: Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Turkey, Lebanon and the Palestinians (Psalm 83), aided by Iran. (There may be ten allied nations sharing his aims.)

Second 'Beast'

However, a power wielding universal religious authority - also arising from Roman territory - is predicted to influence the world to support this 'Beast', the 'King of the North'. It will, *cont'd p.4*

ALIEN INVASION

The tv series *Invasion* is another of the genre that portrays a take-over of 'earthlings' by alien forces. So far, the goodies win. But the fiction hides a reality that should concern all of us. For, in fact, the invasion has been influencing mankind since our beginning.

Beings from another part of the universe entered Earth's atmosphere - and have indeed on occasion taken control of individuals. The ultimate goal, however, is to enthrone their leader as ruler - not only of Earth but also of the Universe, and to dethrone God.

Just like the evil men behind Communist ideology these invaders work by undermining all human institutions. Family, education, business, music and art, government, sexuality - even religion - all have by them been subverted from foundation principles.

Cunning, subtle, deceptive would describe the evil being hell-bent on world domination. He is a master of presentation and spin, and truth is a word he understands only in the context of blatant lies.

The Invader is, of course, Satan, the Adversary of the Creator and of mankind. He is a created being - not immortal - which *'left his first estate'*. It was a position of high responsibility at the very throne of God. He lost his high status and he and his cohorts are destined to be cast beyond the bounds of the material Universe: *'For if God did not spare sinning angels, but delivered them to chains of darkness, thrust down into Tartarus, having been kept to judgment'*.

God is *'bringing many sons to glory'*, and Satan's aim has always been to frustrate the divine plan. Satan opposes this, hence his war against Christians. Those he cannot conquer he seeks to destroy. In the years ahead, and for a brief time, he will gain worldwide acclaim through the 'man of sin', before being restrained by the King of kings - Jesus the Messiah.

This is the 'alien invasion' that has already been present on our planet. It has been successful in leading mankind to the place when *'nothing shall be restrained'* from us. Only the awesome power of God hinders man's total destruction.

When these events will take place remains in the hands of God. Mankind has in the past lived through awesome times many believing their era was 'the end'. It's for each of us to 'be prepared'. Ω

Spring Festivals

Lord's Supper: Tuesday evening 11th April

Passover/Unleavened Bread: April 13*-19*

Pentecost: June 4*

* begins previous evening

'THERE IS NO GOD...'

...So said a correspondent on the BBC PM programme. The Psalms tell us: *"Only fools say in their hearts, "There is no God." They are corrupt, and their actions are evil; not one of them does good!"*

In our cosy - and somewhat arrogant - Europe over 30% of the populace would reject the Psalmist's view (although half say there's an after-life!). But in the wider world the so-called 'atheist' is a figure of derision. Maybe 95% of Earth's six billion have a firm belief in a 'God'. The demise of Communism in Russia uncovered a residual deep-seated underground faith clung to through the dreadful decades of that atheistic ersatz faith. 87% there are 'believers'.

China, too, with its billion plus population despite sixty years of suppression, has its vast 'underground church' and even more who subscribe to the 'superstition of a deity'. Then there are those billion believers in India - Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, Moslem, Christian - and the multiple millions throughout South East Asia. Skip an ocean and there are teeming millions of believers in a God in the Americas.

So, tell that (*'There is no God'*) to the billions of believers around the world.

Europe is very much out of step. The past couple of centuries has seen the decline of a live 'Christianity' - replaced by attempts to forge a humanist secular, federal United States of Europe.

Professed atheists (they are due for a surprise!) such as Richard Dawkins, however, confuse the varieties of belief with the true faith of Jesus Christ and the Bible.

Religion as we know it has indeed been responsible for myriad violent deaths. Christianity has spawned the Crusades. It provided us with the murderous Inquisition and the multitude of deaths under early Protestantism. The 'Hundred Years War' was largely a European religious war. Out of Christianity came the Irish Republican death squads and the massacres in Christian Serbia.

But this is not real Christianity!

Said Jesus, *"My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence"* (John 18:36).

Further, few Christians today are willing to follow the Scriptures in how they worship. Pre-Christian practices - as Christmas, Easter, Sunday, All Hallows - are substituted for the Biblical observances. Many church leaders even reject the foundation of the faith - the resurrection of Jesus. It's no wonder Christians are seen as hypocritical.

If God does not exist then Jesus - a proven historical figure - is just bones and dust. He could not have been resurrected. Yet the empty tomb is an incontrovertible witness that God raised him from among the dead.

You are invited to request the free articles: *The Empty Tomb and The Resurrection of Jesus - just a sham?* Ω

The Christian Synagogue

It is assumed by many brethren that the church of God is modelled on the Temple service. There derives from this the notion that 'the ministry' reflects the Priesthood (their work is 'spiritual') and 'deacons' were mere Levites - fit, it is considered, to move chairs, distribute hymnals - the physical work. And, of course, these folk received the 'tithes'. There is, in other words, the ministry and there is the laity.

This view doesn't stand scrutiny. Rather, the church was modelled on the Synagogue.

The synagogue system in Israel - especially post-exilic - was a system of para-Temple opportunity for divine service. Certainly the Temple in Jerusalem was the centre of corporate worship with continuous praise, sacrifice, annual holy convocations. But most Jews worshipped in their local synagogue on the weekly Sabbaths. It was there they were taught the Scriptures. There they brought their alms for distribution to all who needed assistance - and not to Jews only. There in the synagogue the children were taught the Hebrew language. And in the synagogue they listened to the ministry of visiting skilled exponents of the Scriptures (called 'apostles'). These latter ensured the scattered congregations were updated on the views of the Sanhedrin.

Each synagogue had its own administration. It was not under external authority. *Except by its submission*

to the Scriptures. Every leader of the synagogue - wherever they were scattered throughout the world - was responsible to faithfully teach the written Word of God revealed in the Scriptures (Old Testament). This was the 'glue' binding together all Jews.

Church Model

The first century Christians used the synagogue model for their assemblies. Paul, for example, addressed greetings to the leaders of several Christian 'synagogues' (then meeting in houses) in the city of Rome - *see Romans 16.*

Throughout the Diaspora, the Jews welcomed non-Jews to their synagogues. This, too, was the pattern accepted by the early church, a pattern foreign to some contemporary churches! The Christian assemblies included many who were merely curious, as well as the seriously interested. Paul in Ephesus, for example, '*...went from house [church] to house [church] testifying repentance...and faith to both Jews and Greeks*' (Acts 20:20-21). Not just to brethren. We see the same pattern at Corinth (I Corinthians 14:23-25).

The Scriptures not tradition should be our guide. Ω

Laodicean?

"When we see a man playing half one part and half another we are accustomed to saying, 'He is not a Jew but he is playing the Jew'" Epictetus

The Church of God in Rome

The Church of Rome - the 'Roman Catholic Church' - with its one billion adherents continues to dominate the Christian scene. It may be a surprise to learn that the first century church of God in Rome had a British connection!

The Roman Catholic church, of course, claims the apostle Peter as its first bishop and bases its claim to universal authority on that premise. It's a claim much disputed. Consider, though, that - whatever input Peter may have had in the fledgling church in Rome - an apostle is most unlikely to settle down as a bishop, *ie* overseer, of a local church.

Contemporary history and tradition gives a different insight. Certainly, the New Testament doesn't support the claim. Indeed it is the apostle Paul who is recorded as having responsibility for its general oversight. Certainly he had many friends and relatives there, and was a citizen of Rome. *See Romans 16.* He also taught in Rome for two full years (Acts 28:30, 31). So how does Britain feature?

In the Roman Catholic calendar the second 'pope' - the term is an anachronism - was a man called Linus. He is mentioned in Paul's second letter to Timothy, along with Claudia his sister and her husband Pudens, a friend of Paul. Claudia, renamed by the Emperor after his dead daughter, was a Celtic (British) princess. They were at that time with

Paul in Rome. Given that it's unlikely Peter was an overseer of a local church, let's look at Linus.

The records tell us he was a son of the British King Caractacus. The latter was betrayed to and captured by the Emperor Claudius, and his entire family deported to Rome in chains. Before the Senate he persuaded them to spare him and his family, and they were quartered in the palace.

The family was converted, reportedly through the preaching of the apostle Paul. Linus became the lead member of the fledgling churches in the city of Rome (c.65-78AD). Reportedly, his coffin was found in a catacomb (though Peter never has been located), now under the Vatican.

The iron fist of Imperial Rome had paved the way for easy travel throughout their Empire. Roads were carved out and piracy quelled. Trade routes by sea and land were established in safety. This facilitated the preaching of the Gospel, and Christianity reached Britain within a decade of the resurrection of Jesus.

Churches were established and British missionaries went throughout Europe centuries before the arrival of Augustin towards the end of the sixth century. It's a history that has long been fudged by the apostate English - and Roman - church. Ω

HOW LOW MUST YOU GO...?

As Christians we are willingly committed to the concept of becoming '*perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect*'. To this end we are constantly alert to examine ourselves '*whether we be in the faith*'. The Spirit in us prompts us to walk in the steps of the Saviour, Jesus, to follow his example in worship and in behaviour.

But what would you need to do to '*quench the Spirit*'? The apostle provides insight: "*Dear friends, if we deliberately continue sinning after we have received knowledge of the truth, there is no longer any sacrifice that will cover these sins*". That sounds final. And he goes on to spell out the dire consequences of such abandonment of the faith. (Hebrews 10: 26-36).

There is no other way that sin may be forgiven except through Jesus, God's Messiah. Unless there's personal heart-felt change there's no future. There's no solace in any other system of belief. To totally cast aside our calling is as low as we can go.

It's unlikely - but not impossible - that a truly converted person will commit murder or be adulterous. But what if I ate a pork meal? Or became angry? Or cut short the Sabbath? Or 'told a white lie'? What if I looked too long at my neighbour's wife? Will activities like these bar me from the Kingdom? Do such, and the holy Spirit in us will flag up our error. And if we are heedful of that prompt we will quit. Our sin will be covered by the sacrifice of our Saviour. Our Father is ever merciful and He is patient and rejoices when we turn from our sin.

Ignore the promptings of the Spirit, however, and we will be on the slippery path to '*the terrible expectation*

of God's judgment and the raging fire that will consume his enemies'. For eventually those promptings of the Spirit will fade.

The outcome? Writes Peter: '*And when people escape from the wickedness of the world by knowing our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and then get tangled up and enslaved by sin again, they are worse off than before. It would be better if they had never known the way to righteousness than to know it and then reject the command they were given to live a holy life. They prove the truth of this proverb: "A dog returns to its vomit." And another says, "A washed pig returns to the mud"*' (II Peter 2:20-22).

The Lord's Supper

Because of our tendency to thus neglect '*such great salvation*', Jesus instituted an annual memorial, at this time of year (early Spring, when he died and was resurrected), of his betrayal, suffering and death. By this means God the Father - the all holy - reconciles sinful humanity to Himself. The symbols of 'bread and wine' represent our total reliance on Jesus for our forgiveness and for all the benefits of the 'New Covenant'. It's an annual potent reminder (I Corinthians 11:24).

The Lord's Supper is a reverent and restrained reminder of those awesome events. The Corinthian brethren, because of division caused by false teachers, had turned the solemn memorial into a party more akin to the *Passover* which celebrated freedom - an event held the next evening at the beginning of the seven day *Unleavened Bread* festival. Ω

Request the free article:
Passover - is it for Christians?

Noble Descent?

Three monkeys sat in a coconut tree
Discussing things as they are said to be. Said one to the others, "Now listen, you two, There's a rumour goin' round that cannot be true! That man descended from our noble race The very idea is such a Great Dis-grace.

"No monkey has ever deserted his wife Starved her babies and ruined her life And, you've never known a mother monk To leave her babies with others to bunk! Or, pass her baby from one to another Till they scarcely knew who is their mother.

"Here's another thing a monkey won't do Leave her baby and pole dance at Stu's Or, use a gun or club or knife To take some other monkey's life Yes, mankind descended, the ornery cuss But, brother monkey, he didn't descend from us!" *Author Unknown*

The Antichrist... cont'd

briefly, gain support from believers of many religions, including Christianity.

The 'Man of Sin' and the 'False Prophet' are the two leaders of the great apostasy - from the eastern and from the western areas of the old Roman Empire. They will in the end join forces to conquer the world. Both claim roots in the Bible but 'blaspheme' - distorting the clear words of Scripture and adding contrary teachings snatched from human reasoning.

Be sure to check out the CGOM website with its numerous free-to-download articles

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