

Eschatology

Who is the Antichrist?

By Dr. Paul M. Elliott

From *The Church and the Last Things* by Dr. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones

Part three of a series. Read [part two](#).

Editor's note: We receive frequent inquiries about Biblical eschatology in general and the Antichrist in particular. To answer some of those questions, we've been presenting a three-part series drawing from chapter eleven of *The Church and the Last Things* by Dr. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones (Crossway Books, 1998, pages 115-118). Today's installment is part three.

In previous installments we presented Lloyd-Jones' [brief survey of Bible prophecy concerning Antichrist](#), and his [discussion of the circumstances of the revelation of Antichrist](#).

As I noted before, I especially appreciate the fact that his treatment of this subject focuses entirely on Scripture. Absent are the references to the latest world developments that so often overshadow objective exposition of Bible prophecy. In today's final installment he discusses major schools of thought on the identity of Antichrist, with particular emphasis on the view held by most of the 16th-century Protestant Reformers, but always with resort to Scripture as our authority. — *Paul Elliott*

Schools of Thought on the Identity of Antichrist

To what, then, do these descriptions of the Antichrist refer? Three main explanations have been given. One is that this has already happened: that it refers to the Jewish apostasy and rejection of Christ. Others say that it is entirely in the future and refers to a Jewish or Gentile person who will set himself up in the restored Temple in Jerusalem and make war against the saints.

The third explanation is that the Antichrist passages refer to the papacy. This was the view of the Protestant Reformers. To support their argument, they pointed to the words, 'He as God sitteth in the temple of God' (2 Thess. 2:4) which they said refer to the pope's seat in the Church among God's people. They pointed out that papal power began after the downfall of the Roman Empire, which corresponds with the biblical account of the origin of the Antichrist. The politico-religious element, they said, is also present in the papacy, as is the demand for worship, and they further maintained that there is an opposition to the gospel, to be seen most subtly in the denial of the doctrine of justification by faith only and in the exaltation of the Church. This view also compares the 'lying wonders' with the large number of supposed miracles upheld by the Roman Catholic Church and as far as 'believing a lie' is concerned, they pointed to the faith in miracles, for example, and to the fact that the Council of Trent anathematized the true faith.

The Reformers further suggested that the 'restrainer' refers to the Roman emperors, whose power was then removed...¹

Those, then, are the possible interpretations of this tremendous subject of the Antichrist. So much remains uncertain, and objections can be raised against all three views. Of some things, however, we can be certain. As we have shown, the Antichrist was already at work in the days of the apostles Paul and John, but it is very clear that though there may have been many imitations of him, he will reach his fullest power immediately before the end of this age. Furthermore, while Daniel shows the political

aspect, Paul emphasizes the ecclesiastical aspect of his rule, and you find both in Revelation 13, with the beast from the sea symbolizing political, and the beast from the earth ecclesiastical, power. Possibly those two aspects may follow one another, with a terrible ecclesiastical power coming after an equally terrible political power.

Finally, we can, I think, be certain that the Antichrist will ultimately be concentrated in one person, who will have terrible power and will be able to work miracles and do wonders in a way that will almost deceive the elect themselves.

Now this, it seems to me, is the sense of their teaching and we must realize that we ourselves are confronted by such a power. We must not be guilty of oversimplification but we can be sure that from the beginning of the Church until the very end an evil power is at work within the Church. As Paul wrote to the Ephesians, 'We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers...against spiritual wickedness in high places' (Eph. 6: 12).

1. Editor's note: At this point Dr. Lloyd-Jones also mentions the fact that some of the Protestant Reformers saw the 16th century Reformation itself as the fulfillment of 2 Thessalonians 2:8. He also mentions that some later men saw the French Revolution as a fulfillment of Revelation 1:13. These were not widely-held or long-held views, and of course the latter quickly fell into disrepute as developments unfolded. In both cases we see men falling into a trap that is of the same nature as the reading of prophecy through the matrix of news headlines, so prevalent in recent generations. No one is impervious to that temptation. However, I do not believe these two aberrations decrease the credibility of the general view that the papacy is the Antichrist.

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