

## ANTICHRIST BIBLE TRUTH VS. POPULAR FICTION

“...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... he as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God... 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

The subject of *Antichrist* is one of great interest to most Christians. Many religious novels and movies present a sensationalized depiction of end time prophecy featuring this character. These *fictional* presentations portray a future rise of an *Antichrist* figure, and they take unjustified liberties, distorting the Scriptural definition and activities of this “*mystery of iniquity*.” **Fiction it is... Biblical teaching it is not!** What do the Apostles’ inspired writings really teach about the *Antichrist*?

### PROPHETIC ANTICHRIST DEFINED

The *popular* concept of the *Antichrist* is that of an individual who is *against* or *opposed* to Christ. But that is not how the Bible defines the term “*The Antichrist*.” The *proper* application of this term should be one who *misrepresents* — *counterfeiting* and *taking the place* of the true Christ. In other words, usurping the position of Christ as *head* of the Church.

The Apostle John clarified this *proper* definition 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 *false christs*, but to a certain group of individuals 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 *taking the place of and name of the true head of the Church*. John says of these, “*They went out from us, but they were not of us...*” Even though they may have deceived themselves and the world on this subject, they have not honestly represented the sincere followers of Christ who love the truth and who would never claim to be the head of the Church. See also 2 John 1:7.

When interpreted properly, prophetic passages in Scripture give a clear description of the beginning, prosperous rise and decline of *The Antichrist system*. Other titles given in the New Testament for this ominous figure 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 *beastly* government and made war with “*the saints*” — the true children of God. Daniel 7:8, 21

The Apostle John in the book of Revelation details *symbolic* prophecies concerning this *Antichrist* figure — a cruel, beast-like character — subtle, hypocritical, deceptive, and oppressive. John explains the 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 *falsely* claiming authority and power from God.

It is important to fix the concept in our minds, therefore, that *The Antichrist* is **not** a single individual. It would be more accurately described as a position or office within the church, which ultimately gained tyrannical power, not only over the

church, but also over many nations for centuries.

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, 27) This system counterfeits the authority and future reign of the *true Lord* and his Church, and 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. As the Apostle Paul wrote: “*the Mystery of Iniquity doth already work*” and would be revealed before Jesus’ Second Advent — over two millennia later.

### DEVELOPMENT OF THE COUNTERFEIT HEAVENS

Jesus declared that his “*kingdom is not of this world.*” (John 18:36) He never intended for his followers to set up an earthly Kingdom long before his Second Advent. No, his Church was to remain *apart from* the world and earthly governments — holy, pure and, as stated in Scripture, a virgin betrothed to her bridegroom — waiting for his return. Matthew 25:1-13

For a short time after the death of the Apostles, the early Church remained separate from the world. Within two centuries, however, deflection from the Apostolic teachings gradually laid the groundwork for the worldly-minded church to endorse powerful *lords of the flock* — *Nicolaitans*. (Revelation 2:15) In A.D. 313, Constantine adopted Christianity, and the next century witnessed an even further departure from faith — a self-serving, compromising, political church organization — a church-state system under powerful and dictatorial bishops. Instead of waiting for Christ to set up the Kingdom upon his return, this adulterous church united with the kingdoms of this world. And no wonder, for by A.D. 426, Augustine had written in his book *The City of God* that Christians were wrong to wait for the Second Advent of Christ. He advanced the idea that the church, united with imperial Rome, was in reality the Kingdom of God *now* reigning. Many church leaders readily embraced Augustine's philosophy and eagerly united with earthly kings to set up their own kingdom — *Christendom* — a *counterfeit* of the true Kingdom on earth. Thus, this counterfeit system prepared the way for *Antichrist* to fully take the position as head of the church — *usurping* the rightful place of Christ.

Successive bishops of Rome continued making grand claims for the developing church system, but it was not until circa A.D. 539 that the Roman Emperor Justinian decreed the Bishop of Rome as "*the head of all the holy Churches and of all the holy priests of God.*"

Then, in A.D. 800 Charlemagne formally presented Papacy with the Papal States, and the reign of the *Holy Roman Empire* began with the Pope as its head. This transfer of power from *Pagan Rome* to *Papal Rome* was seen by many of the sincerely 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...*" These boasts have not been renounced to this day.

Claiming authority from God, Papacy ruled for centuries with a heavy hand over the thrones of the earth, seeking to convert the nations by political intrigue and treachery, and the people by oppression and subjugation. This cruel, tyrannical system began to physically persecute those who opposed or even questioned its authority. The true disciples of Christ 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?



**Martin Luther, 1483 - 1546**, (Launched the Protestant Reformation): "*We are convinced that the papacy is the seat of the true and real Antichrist... of whom the entire Scripture speaks, whom the Lord... will very soon destroy and slay with the brightness of his coming, for which we are waiting.*" — "*What Luther Says*," ed. Ewald M. Plass, 1:34, 36, 38



**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.*" — "*Works*" by Cranmer, Vol. 1, pages 6-7



**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.*" — "*Institutes*" by John Calvin



**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.*" — "*The Zurich Letters*" page 199 by John Knox



**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).*" — "*The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers*" by Froom, Vol. 3, page 52



**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



**John Wesley, 1703 - 1791** (Founder—Methodist Church): "*He [Papacy] is in an emphatical sense, the Man of Sin... 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... which belong to God alone.*" — "*Antichrist and His Ten Kingdoms*" by John Wesley, page 110

## THE PROTESTANT REFORMATION

This persecuting character of *Antichrist* was an evidence to Protestant 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 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 Papacy fit the description of one who “*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...*” (2 Thessalonians 2:4) This presumptuous boast of Papacy was a key factor to the Reformers in identifying the *Papal system* as a counterfeit — *The Antichrist*.

The doctrine of the Mass also served to identify *Antichrist*. During the ritual of the Mass, Roman Catholics have improperly claimed that the bread and wine (Eucharist) did not just *represent*, but *actually became* the substances of the body and blood of Christ (transubstantiation) — a ritual Papacy continues to claim is necessary to cancel *new sins*. Protestant Reformers pointed to this as the *abomination that maketh desolate* in Daniel 11:31, because the Mass *makes desolate* or negates the full merit of Christ’s blood which was “*shed once for all.*” (Hebrews 7:27; 10:10; 1 Timothy 2:6) The Mass thereby became a *counterfeit* of the true sacrifice of Christ.

It is important to note here that Protestant Reformers were careful not to condemn any individual Catholic as *Antichrist* — they recognized that *no man is The Antichrist*. Individual popes, bishops, priests and others have been only parts of and possibly innocent members of the man-made Papal hierarchy — the *Antichrist* system.

## THE PAPAL COUNTER ATTACK

Soon after the Reformers broke their ties with Papal Rome, Papacy saw that it must counteract its identification as *Antichrist* — or stand condemned. Jesuit scholarship rallied to the cause by providing alternate definitions of *Antichrist*. The most successful tack was taken by Francisco Ribera of Spain (1537-1591), founder of the *Futurist* system of prophetic interpretation. Ribera proposed a Roman Catholic *Counter Reformation* stating that *Antichrist* would appear in the distant future: “*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!

This redefinition by Ribera paved the way for some Protestant leaders to mend old wounds and reconsider their stand on Papacy. And now, the Church of Rome beckons to its “*separated brethren*” (Protestants) to reunite with the *Mother Church*. Have the Protestant Churches forgotten why they separated? Have Papal doctrines substantially changed to justify reunification? Are Protestants 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.*” Today, popular evangelical leaders continue to voice enthusiastic cries for unity with the Roman Church. “*It’s high time that all of us who are Christians come together regardless of the difference of our confessions and our tradition...*” — Evangelical, Charles Colson

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: Authority in The Church II.*” 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.*” 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 that the matter should not be an issue to deter unity.

## CAN A “LEOPARD CHANGE HIS SPOTS”?

Were centuries of persecution just a “*misunderstanding*”? Those who are making enormous efforts at reunification, contending that the Papacy today is not the same as that system of the Dark Ages — are they correct? They point out that the Popes today have been instituting

reforms and great humanitarian efforts. But, has the system of 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 entire 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.*”

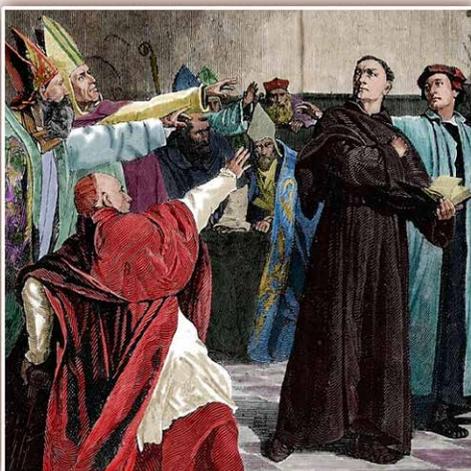
**Fact**—*Infallibility* is still taught by Papacy. From *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. VII: “*In general, [the Roman Pontiff has] exemption or immunity from liability to error or failure... Infallibility is attributed to the Roman Pontiff’s ex cathedra teaching. For an ex cathedra decision it must 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 its 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

Although physical persecutions have stopped, doctrines and policies remain intact. 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 bravely 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.

## “...THY [TRUE] KINGDOM COME...”

Shortly, the true, peaceable Kingdom to come under Christ will be fully set up and he will rule with his Church in righteousness throughout the earth. Instead of oppressing and persecuting, Christ’s Kingdom will bless and bring life. Instead of fear and bondage to error will come lasting joy and the knowledge of a merciful God. Praise the Lord! Satan’s dominion through *Antichrist* shall be swallowed up in victory by the true Christ and his faithful Church!



*Martin Luther defends himself against charges of heresy before the Papal assembly.*



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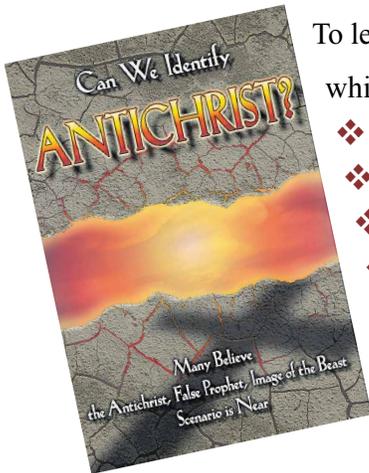
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