



The *Pulpit Exchange*

It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe (1 Corinthians 1:21). So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading (Nehemiah 8:8). Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend (Proverbs 27:17).

Special Edition # 5

SE # 5

A Scriptural View of the Anti-Christ System

The subject before us now is one on which I very seldom preach. Possibly it ought to be that way. Perhaps more of us ought to feel like the minister who said, "I see so much beauty in the Lord Jesus Christ that I cannot find much time to preach about the anti-Christ. Currently however, talk about an endtime anti-Christ does draw great deal of interest, possibly more than any other phase of eschatology.

One preacher made this observation: "I find many people whose consuming passion is to know more and more about the Antichrist. If it is advertized that Christ will be presented to the congregation the audience may be small. However, if the preacher is to identify the Antichrist, there may be hardly room in the building." That observer was not merely grinding an axe, for he himself is an ardent student of

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prophecy.

While we deplore this lopsided interest, we should not ignore the subject entirely for it is a part of the Biblical revelation. I want to recognize too that the subject assigned to me, if I understand it correctly, was not the Antichrist, but a Scriptural view of the anti-Christ system.

Before going any further let us get in focus the basic meaning of the term anti-Christ. It is derived from the Greek word *antichristos*

[Strong's # 500], *christos* being Christ. The prefix *anti*, means either "against, or instead of." Therefore, anything that is opposed to Christ, or threatens to take His place, or robs Him of the honour due Him, whether it be a teaching, a person, or a movement deserves this label *antichrist*.

It is interesting to observe that one can read through nearly the entire Bible before they find this term *antichrist*. Nevertheless,

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already in the early chapters of Genesis one learns that the triune God has an enemy. It is noteworthy however that the Bible does not teach a dualistic worldview. Satan, in the Bible, is not depicted as the equal of God. Neither is the antagonism that now exists between Satan and God a thing that always existed. No, it has a God-permitted beginning.

In one sense it had two beginnings. It had one beginning in the spirit world. Isaiah 14:12–20 and Ezekiel 28:12–19 appear to relate to that beginning. It had a second beginning on earth. This is related in Genesis 3. After Satan had brought about the fall of man, God said to him, “I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed” (Genesis 3:15). I am of the opinion that this God-decreed enmity was, at least in part, God’s way of spoiling what He knew would be Satan’s favourite tactic, namely that of working as an angel of light.

Satan would like to destroy the categories of black and white and turn everything into a uniform grey. That would afford him an ideal working environment. God has not, and will not allow the devil to do that. In God’s government of the world, He operates by the principle of order, by separation. This is how God pre-

vents moral chaos in a world that contains moral opposites. God’s separation of the light from the darkness in the physical realm back at the time of Creation was a reflection of His purpose to maintain that kind of separation in the moral realm.

Therefore, the antagonism that exists between the kingdom of darkness and the kingdom of light, although it may cause suffering for the saints, is something that God wants to maintain. Although Satan’s eventual doom was foretold already in Genesis 3, he was permitted for reasons known best to God to continue his operation. Since that time his manner of working has reigned all the way from being lion-like to being lamb-like. His being against God is, of course, most evident when he is lion-like. When he operates as a lamb, he is still anti God. However, his antagonism is somewhat hidden as he imitates the true Lamb in the hope of winning followers.

Prior to the incarnation of the Son of God, this opposition to the purposes of God was definitely in operation. However, in that pre-Christian era this opposition was not given the antichrist label because Christ had not yet made His appearance. Already in that pre-Christian era, the conflict between these two great powers

was fought in both the sphere of the spirit world and also in the sphere of human affairs.

The question could be raised, Why was it not confined to the spirit world? Are not God and Satan both spirit beings? The answer would seem to be that both God and Satan chose to employ human instrumentality to accomplish their purposes. Genesis 3 depicts Satan trying to win man over to his side. The same chapter declares God's purpose to strike a crippling blow at the devil using as His instrument the seed of the woman.

On the human level this conflict came to a head in many ways. For obvious reasons there were repeated efforts to either corrupt or destroy Israel. The messianic line particularly seems to have been the target of attacks that may well have been satanically inspired. Nevertheless, right here, we need to be careful lest we pretend to know more than has been revealed. We are so prone to see in the Bible what we want to see. God nowhere tells us how much the devil knew about His plans. We may look at this or that Old Testament incident and declare it to be a purely satanic scheme. However, by what authority can we say that?

In case you are wondering what kind of incidents I am talk-

ing about, I will name three. One would be Pharaoh's edict to destroy newborn male babies born to Israelite parents [see Exodus 1:16, 22]. A second would be Athaliah's attempt to destroy all the seed royal [see 2 Kings 11:1]. A third would be Haman's plot to exterminate the Jews [see Esther 3:6 and following]. Very likely there was more than the purely human element in all three of those attempts. I think there are grounds for saying that it is highly probable that the devil was in some way involved in those attempts. Nevertheless, let us not state those suppositions as though they were God declared facts.

Some of us have a weakness along that line, especially in relation to unfulfilled prophecy. We tend to state our suppositions and speculations as though they were a "Thus saith the Lord." Men observe that the Bible is as wise in its reservations as it is wonderful in its revelations. Some of us need a greater respect for the silence of the Bible.

We likewise know relatively little about the extent to which the forces of evil became organized in those early times. Nevertheless, the mere fact that we cannot trace the lines of a clearly defined system does not prove that no such system exist-

ed. God evidently meant that we should be satisfied with a few hints that He has dropped here and there, and there are some such hints.

A good example would be the tower of Babel incident in Genesis 11:1–9. In that episode there was a banding together of men in an effort to make a name for themselves and possibly also to find security. It was undertaken in apparent disregard for God and possibly in a spirit of defiance against God. On the surface it appears to have been purely a humanistic endeavour. However, the builders were probably idol worshippers, or it is claimed (on good authority) that idolatry originated in that very region.

What is idolatry? It is nothing less than Satan's counterfeit for the worship of the true God. Idolatry is openly antichrist in spirit. A man-made idol is worshipped instead of deity. Whether that project (the building of the tower of Babel) was to some degree demonically inspired, we simply do not know. However, this much is obvious: it was an organized human endeavour motivated by pride and viewed by God as a threat to His purpose. It has all the marks of a forerunner of the present godless world system.

In the Bible there are other

hints suggesting that the forces of evil have long constituted an organized system. For example, Christ referred to Satan as the "prince" or ruler "of this world" (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11). Wherever you have a ruler, you have also those who are ruled. That yields some semblance of a system. Actually, in its broadest meaning, the anti-Christ system would embrace the entire world of unredeemed men with their ideals, with their principles of living and acting in independence of God.

For the last few minutes I have been referring to the visible worldward sign of this system. However, the system is like an iceberg in that it has a side that is not normally open to human view. Here again, God has supplied us with little more than hints. You are familiar with the passage in Revelation 12:9 in which "the great dragon . . . that old serpent" who is later identified as "the Devil," is depicted as drawing, "the third part of the stars of heaven" (Revelation 12:4) with him in his deflection from God. A few verses later, we are given a good hint as to the identity of those stars. We are told that "Michael and his angels fought against the dragon" (verse 7) and his angels. With him, and under him, the devil has his

angels. He is their recognized head, which means that there are likely lines of command, all of which adds up to a system existing in the spirit world.

In Daniel 10:12, 13 God gives us another glimpse into the spirit world. The speaker in these verses appears to be a high-ranking angel who was sent in answer to Daniel's prayer. However, his coming had been delayed by a conflict in the spirit world. Let us listen now to his own account. "Then said he unto me, Fear not, Daniel: for from the first day that thou didst set thine heart to understand, and to chasten thyself before thy God, thy words were heard, and I am come for thy words. (13) But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me one and twenty days: but, lo, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me; and I remained there with the kings of Persia."

Let us drop down now to the middle of verse 20 where we see the same personality speaking. "Now will I return to fight with the prince of Persia: and when I am gone forth, lo, the prince of Grecia shall come." It is significant that a distinction is here drawn between the prince of the kingdom of Persia and the kings of Persia. The indications are that this prince of Persia was an

opposing spirit being who had somehow hindered the mission of this God-sent messenger. Here then is evidence that there are battle lines drawn in the spirit world and that the system we are looking at has roots that reach into that world.

Furthermore, there is evidently some kind of link between these angelic powers and the human governments of the world, since some of these angelic powers are in the employment of the devil. This may help to explain why some governments have been so beastly in their treatment of the saints.

From this survey of the past, I draw this deduction contrary to what some suppose: the anti-Christ system is not something that is only now in the developing stage. No, indeed it has been around for a long time. However, it is only since the dawn of the Christian era that it has taken on the antichrist "label" along with a more "Christward" thrust.

I invite you now to open your Bible to Revelation 12. I will try to summarize this chapter without actually reading it. There is probably no other portion of Scripture that depicts more graphically the opposition that Christ and the Church have needed to face. Taking its start in the Old Testament era this chapter

supplies one with a long range panoramic view that reaches down into the Christian era. We are first introduced to a woman who is about to give birth to a manchild who is destined to rule the world with a rod of iron. Or, “who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron” (verse 5).

Then, we are introduced to a terrible looking dragon who is later identified as the devil. He is depicted as intent on devouring the soon to be born child. However, he evidently failed to do so. The “child was caught up unto God, and to his throne.”

The scene then changes and in verses 7–11 a conflict rages in the spirit world. The defeated dragon having been cast down to the earth proceeds to persecute the woman. She however, is providentially preserved. Persecution is kept up so long that her seed likewise becomes the object of the wrath of the dragon. While there is some disagreement over the details of this chapter, the main thrust is unmistakably clear. This is an unveiling of the devil’s undying hatred for Christ and His followers. It throws new light on incidents such as Herod’s massacre of the children, the temptation in the wilderness and the terrible animosity of the human opponents of our Lord.

It is obvious that the dragon’s hatred for the woman was due to her association with Christ, the man-child, who in a short time had gone beyond the reach of the dragon. Some feel that the woman from start to finish represents Israel. However, in the light of the last verse that is hard to maintain. Verse 17 says, “And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.” Ethnic Israel certainly does not fit that description. That can be said of the Church only.

I believe, personally, that up through verse 5 the woman is the Church of the Old Testament — a spiritual remnant in Israel. After that point she represents the Church of the New Testament. This harmonizes with the highly important fact that the true children of Abraham constitute one body, the one olive tree of Romans 11. This indicates that the saints of all times, whether Jew or gentile, will comprise one single body of whom this woman is another symbol. The persecution of this woman and her seed is the persecution of the saints down through the centuries. It is not Israel but the Church that bears the brunt of anti-Christ’s

fury. The opposition that the Church encounters is here shown to be more than purely physical in origin. “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places” (Ephesians 6:12).

Nevertheless, this chapter is filled with consoling truth. It depicts the devil as unable to defeat the plan of God and is himself defeated. In the first place he could neither kill or entice the man-child. Secondly, he was not permitted to prevent the Saviour from accomplishing His mission. With the head of the serpent bruised the saints are now able to “overcome” (1 John 2:13, 14) him by the shed blood of the now ascended Lamb.

Thirdly, the chapter depicts the Church being preserved amid persecution so that the devil will never be able to stamp out the church. Within limits, he is still permitted to persecute the saints. However, the most he can do is to kill the body. He cannot prevent the dying saint from entering the court of heaven, as is pictured in Revelation 20 reigning there with Christ on His mediatorial throne which is far better than here below.

Possibly you have recognized

that this chapter did not really highlight the anti-Christ system. It rather focussed on the heavenly system. The next two chapters of Revelation introduce one to the agents, the instruments, the tools, the techniques that the great red dragon has enlisted in his service and will continue to enlist as long as he is permitted to operate his system. We will get to that later.

Now, I will turn to the more doctrinal aspects of this system. There are only four verses in the Bible in which the word *antichrist* occurs. All four appear in the epistles of John. Very shortly I will be reading from 1 John 2. In this chapter John enlarges on two perils that endanger Christians. They are 1) the love of the world, 2) the antichrist spirit. Let us listen now to verses 18 and 22, “Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time.” “Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ?” — that He is the Messiah, the anointed of God. “He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son.”

In verse 18, John makes reference to a then current tradition about a forthcoming antichrist. However, he quickly passes over

that to the more immediate threat posed by the many antichrists that have already appeared and even were then exerting an influence. They were antichrists because of their denial of who Jesus is. Anyone who will not accept the Lord Jesus Christ for what He claims to be, and for who He claims to be, is an antichrist, even though he may occupy a church pulpit.

In 1 John 4:2–4, John tells us how to test the spirits. “Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: (3) And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world. (4) Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.” Again, the test revolves around the person of Christ. Is He or is He not more than a man? Is He or is He not God “manifest in the flesh” (1 Timothy 3:16)? To deny that He is marks one for being antichrist in spirit.

God is using John to show that erroneous views of the person of Christ is the very essence of the antichrist spirit. Therefore, put-

ting all this together, when John in this context uses the label antichrist, he is not necessarily thinking of a political leader or even an atheist. He has in view people who profess to be Christians but are promoting erroneous views concerning the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. We must conclude that one can be an antichrist without being openly against Christ. In focus here is also the concept of a plurality of antichrists. In view of John’s insistence of the plurality of this threat, and of its being a present reality, I am wondering about the wisdom of our way of viewing this threat.

With all our emphasis on one towering endtime figure who at the most is only dimly revealed, might we be looking over the heads of a lot of antichrists who are to us a much greater threat? After all, according to the currently most popular interpretation, we who form the Church will not even be around during the reign of that much talked about Antichrist. Furthermore, we ought to be asking ourselves “Am I myself entirely free of this spirit? Am I accepting Christ for all that He claims to be?” In my opinion, it is an insult to the Lord Jesus Christ to insinuate that He has not yet begun His kingly reign. It is a denial of His very

own claim. That kind of a denial, in my opinion, comes very close to the antichrist spirit.

I will not take time to read the other two references where John employs this term. Nevertheless, it is interesting and possibly significant that in no case does John treat this term as a proper noun. For him it is not a name or a title for any one person. Evidently also, the translators took note of that for they did not in any instance capitalize the word *antichrist*.

Let us move now to 2 Thessalonians 2. The opening verses of this chapter have a very direct bearing on our subject. This passage is possibly known best because it brings into focus one called the “man of sin” (2 Thessalonians 2:3). 2 Thessalonians 2:1–5 says, “Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, (2) That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. (3) Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; (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, shewing himself that he is God. (5) Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things?”

Paul wrote to alleviate the anxiety of some Thessalonian believers with regard to the time of the return of the Lord. Somewhere they had picked up the idea that it was even then already, very close at hand. Paul wrote to correct that thinking. He assures them that for them in that day the return was not imminent. We however, must bear in mind that this was written nearly two thousand years ago. If today Paul would write to us, I believe, he would most certainly affirm the imminence of our Lord’s return.

Paul then goes on to tell them why it was not for them imminent. Two developments had to first unfold that had not yet unfolded. 1) Number one, a falling away. 2) Number two, the revelation of the man of sin. From the way they are linked together it appears as though these two events may be related. Allow me now to make this observation with regard to the now popular dispensational view which claims to be a Scriptural view. Some of you may not like my calling this the dispensational view but that is really what it is.

Historical Premillennialism did not hold this view.

The view I am about to allude to first appeared around 1830 over in the British Isles. This view identifies this man of sin with an extremely outstanding Antichrist figure who will come into the public prominence during a supposed seven year tribulation period that supposedly will begin immediately following the rapture of the Church at the second coming of Christ. This view has the Church escaping all the time of persecution that they foresee in that seven-year tribulation period.

However, as I see it, this view clashes with the sequence of events outlined here. That view has him appearing after Christ returns. This Scripture has him appearing before Christ returns. I recognize however that for those holding that view, this is no problem because they foresee two second comings, one at the beginning of the seven years period and one at the end of the seven-year period. One time they say He will come for the saints. The next time He will come with the saints. They then connect the destruction of the Antichrist with that “second” second coming.

For the Brethren, to split the second coming into two stages in order to accommodate those two

aspects is totally unnecessary for God has incorporated those two aspects into a single second coming. First Thessalonians 4 makes that clear. At the same time He is coming with the departed saints for the yet living saints. Upon the wicked He will at the same time come “in flaming fire” (2 Thessalonians 1:8) meting out judgment on every living antichrist, this one included. Therefore, in order to harmonize one’s thinking with this Scripture, he must believe that the falling away spoken of here and the revealing of the man of sin both occur before Christ returns.

Let us read on from 2 Thessalonians 2:6–10. “And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time. (7) For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way. (8) 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: (9) Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, (10) And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth,

that they might be saved.”

We ought to rejoice in the knowledge that our Lord retains a firm grip on the anti-Christ system. Evil is allowed its day but our Lord will have the final word. Verse 8 says, “whom the Lord . . . shall destroy with the brightness of his coming.” At which coming? My answer would be at His one and only second coming. I admit however, that the Lord comes in judgment multiplied times before the last time. Even one of the seven churches was warned, “Repent . . . or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick” (Revelation 2:5). That was a coming in judgment. There are competent Bible students who view this coming mentioned here in 2 Thessalonians 2:8 as one of those intervening judgments. Without disparaging that view, I prefer to connect it with the last coming because in verse 1 Paul indicates that he will be talking about the coming at which the saints will be gathered to their Lord.

That makes a problem for my dispensational friend because he puts the destruction of the Antichrist not at the rapture when the saints will be gathered to the Lord but rather at what he calls the “revelation,” which supposedly occurs seven years later.

We learn here further that the appearance of the man of sin is delayed by the presence of a restraining force, and that the removal of that restraining force will open the door for the appearance of the man of sin. In relation to this I personally have difficulty with the view that identifies the Holy Spirit as this restraining force. I rather endorse the view that sees the Roman empire and the Roman emperor in particular as this restraining force. The fact that Paul does not name the restraining force, the fact that he is deliberately vague, makes sense with this view. For to openly teach that “eternal” Rome was to fall into ruins and that the emperor would be removed might have put the Christians under further suspicions if this document had fallen into their hands. Therefore, not wanting to jeopardize the lives of his fellow believers Paul wrote in terms that (although vague to us) were understandable to them.

In verse 6 he tells them (putting it into my own words) “You know what I am talking about. I do not need to get any plainer.” Anyone who has studied Church history knows that by the fourth and fifth centuries what the world of that day recognized as the Church had actually become a

fallen Church. It had within its confines a “brand” of Christianity which had been watered down terribly. This falling away began in Rome around the time of the breakup of the Roman empire. That is when and where Constantine united state and Church. That is where pagan practices were first incorporated into the Church that later became Roman Catholicism. Roman Catholicism rose out of the ruins of the Roman empire. Not only that, but as long as the seat of the empire was in Rome the power of the bishop of Rome was limited or restrained. However, when the Roman emperor moved from Rome to Constantinople about the fourth century, early in the fourth century the bishop of Rome and his successors moved into that power vacuum. When Rome finally fell in 476 AD the opportunity was “ripe” for the bishop of Rome to seize also political power which he did. From that point on Roman Catholicism developed rapidly. It developed into a powerful corrupt system having at its head a Pope who for centuries was the most powerful figure in the entire world.

From the very beginning of that system to the present hour there has always been a Pope. To this day he wields immense

power. What I am trying to do is to simply call your attention to the striking correspondence between this chapter of the Bible and that chapter of history. Paul’s description here is of one who seeks for the honour that belongs to deity alone. Of whom is that more true than the man who in every generation stands at the very pinnacle of Roman Catholicism? Do you know that the Pope is the only man who wears a triple crown? That triple crown is meant to signify that he supposedly rules over three realms — heaven, earth, and hell. On that crown is inscribed in Latin words that carry this meaning “in the place of the Son of God.”

Personally, I look for this system to flourish down to the end of time. By then, however, it may consist of a multiplicity of religious elements. The ecumenical climate of our day makes that a very real possibility. Therefore, according to my understanding the falling away has occurred. The man of sin has appeared. The return is therefore imminent. At least, it need not wait on these two developments.

The view I have just outlined was held to very widely back in Reformation times. Even our King James Version, in its preface there is an allusion to the

Pope as “the man of sin.” Why then, is that view less prevalent today? If you want to know what I consider to be the answer you may ask me privately. It involves history and therefore lies outside of this assignment. Those who object to this view do so on the ground that the passage seems to have in view only one man. However, since there is a succession of Popes, is it not true that in any one time, at any one time, the whole system comes to a head in one man.

Let us go now for a quick survey to parts of the book of Revelation. We will begin at Revelation 13. Many sincere brethren relate all of Revelation 4–19 to what in their view is a distinct seven year tribulation period here on earth following the rapture of the Church. In contrast to that, I believe that the things spoken of in these chapters occur while the saints are still on earth. For one indication of that look at Revelation 13:7. “And it was given unto him to make war with the saints.” Here are the saints suffering persecution.

However, since the idea of a post rapture, seven year tribulation period is viewed as Scriptural, let us take a quick look at its supposed foundation. This teaching is rooted not in the

New Testament but is inferred from an Old Testament passage namely Daniel 9:24–27 to which I am now turning. It is claimed that God’s plan with Israel was interrupted by the “Church age,” and that after the Church age (after the church is removed) that plan will be completed during that seven-year period. Evidence for this is said to be found in this prophecy that was shared with Daniel by an angel. Beginning at verse 24, Daniel was told that God’s purpose with Israel will be consummated during a predetermined time period consisting of seventy weeks.

There is almost unanimous understanding to the effect that these seventy weeks are really seventy weeks of years that total up to 490 years. Daniel is here told what will transpire during that period. And the predicted events are represented as happening in three distinct stages. During the first seven weeks, the first stage, so and so will happen. During the next 62 weeks this and that will happen. Then, during the one remaining week other things will happen. The claim is made that the last week of years (consisting of seven years) along with its events is still somewhere out there in the future. On the other hand it is freely admitted that the first sixty-nine weeks

followed each other in unbroken sequence and were fulfilled long, long ago.

Is that claim that the seventieth week is still way out there in the future, or somewhere out there in the future, a valid claim? I find the answer in verse 26. “And after . . .” Notice that. “And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off.” The period here talked about is the second one which when added to the first totalled sixty-nine weeks. This then is saying that the cutting off of Messiah is to occur after the sixty-ninth week. Therefore, it must have occurred in the seventieth week which puts the seventieth week in the past as fulfilled prophecy rather than in the future as unfulfilled prophecy.

We are told however, that this reasoning is all wrong because there is a huge time gap between the sixty-ninth and seventieth week of that timeline. That is where the postponed Church age fits in. Therefore, in spite of the discrepancy that was pointed out we continue to hear about how the anti-Christ system will develop, and come to a climax during this endtime seven-year period while the church is temporarily in heaven escaping the tribulation on earth.

Let us return to Revelation, to this survey that I announced a

few moments ago. At an earlier point I indicated that following Revelation 12 the focus turns on those agents, those tools that the dragon, the devil incorporates into his anti-Christ system. Accordingly, Revelation 13 depicts the persecuting forces with which the Church must contend with throughout history. In this chapter John relates how in vision he saw first a beast coming “up out of the sea,” in verse 1. Then, in verse 11, another beast comes up out of the earth. The first beast is a combination of those beasts in Daniel’s vision. Remember in Daniel’s vision those ferocious beasts symbolized (we were told) kingdoms. Taking our clue from that, I believe, this composite beast (the one that comes up out of the sea) represents the entire anti-Christian, persecution movement throughout history embodied in successive world governments. It is the persecuting power of the devil operating in and through political powers of the world.

The second beast of verse 11, has “two horns like a lamb” but speaks like a dragon. He looked like Christ but he was inspired by the devil. Using the power of the first beast he wrought miracles. The second beast represents, I believe, religious power in alliance with political power. At

two later points this beast is actually called the false prophet. It symbolizes, I believe, the false religions and philosophies of the world as they come and go.

Both these beasts oppose the Church all through the course of history. Is that not the way it has been? Repeatedly God's people suffer from Satan inspired political power and also from Satan inspired religious powers. However, these two beasts are described in terms that reflect the form they assume at the time of John's writing. Rome is definitely in focus, and so is the cult of the worship of the emperor which the religious officials of Rome tried to force on the Christians of that day. I believe it is meant to typify, meant to be typical of what God's people will need to face repeatedly.

I can best sum up the content of this chapter by putting it this way. The first beast is the devil's hand. The second beast is the devil's mind. The first represents his persecuting power. The second represents his deceiving power.

Now, a few words yet about the mark of the beast that is mentioned here. In John's day it may have been something like the certificate of loyalty to the emperor required to be produced when buying or selling. In principle, to

receive the mark of the beast simply means to in some way identify with forces that are persecuting the Church — against Christ and the Church. When a Christian of that day refused to offer incense to an image of the emperor, he was refusing the mark of the beast.

I believe that the mark of the beast should be viewed as neither a strictly first century development nor strictly an endtime development. When today a newly formed congregation in Russia refuses to register their church with that beast like government that in my opinion is refusing the mark of the beast.

Verse 18 brings into focus the number of the beast which is also said to be the number of man. Our translation renders it "the number of a man." However that "a" is not in the Greek original. Six hundred sixty-six (666) is the number of the kingdom of man. It is man trying to be like God but failing. If any number could represent deity that number would be 777. 666 aims at that but comes short of it. This number therefore represents an attempt to usurp God. Stated otherwise it is evil raised to its highest power.

Now, Revelation 17 and 18, these chapters as I understand them, bring into focus again the same anti-Christ system. Only

here it is depicted first as a woman riding a beast. I will read Revelation 17:3–5, “So he carried me away in the spirit into the wilderness: and I saw a woman sit upon a scarlet coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. (4) And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication: (5) And upon her forehead was a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.”

All indications point to the fact that this is meant to symbolize religious apostasy in alliance with political power. Here is the counterfeit church under the figure of a woman whose purpose is to manage beastly governments for her own ends. Reflected here is the history of Roman Catholicism. I believe, however, that more is in view than only that. Much that goes by the name of Protestantism has likewise become antichrist in real character.

In the next chapter, Revelation 18, this harlot turns out to be a once glorious city bearing the same name “Babylon.” The last

verse of that chapter, verse 24, reads thus, “And in her” (in this Babylon, in this city) “was found the blood of prophets, and of saints, and of all that were slain upon the earth.” The view here is more than a religious apostasy alone. The anti Christian forces that persecute the people of God consist of both religious power and political power. Therefore, these two chapters dealing with mystery Babylon depict in a symbolic way the total world system, the anti-Christ system at the zenith of its glory. It is the system created by the devil with the help of the beast and the false prophet. It is the devil’s attempt to counterfeit the kingdom of God.

I do not believe however, that the Babylon depicted here is a purely endtime development. The world has always been a Babylon. Babylon should therefore be viewed as past, present, and future. Its form changes. Its essence remains the same. There is a sense in which Babylon’s fall takes place repeatedly through the course of history. However, for the consolation of the saints its final doom is depicted here.

Let us take a quick look yet at Revelation 20:7–10. You may disagree with me if you choose but I view this as depicting the battle of Armageddon which

marks the final end of the anti-Christ system. Assuming, as I do, that the one thousand years symbolize the present era, this final and most intense onslaught against the saints is depicted as transpiring immediately before the return of our Lord. The account reads thus: "And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, (8) And shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea. (9) And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them. (10) And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever."

So massive will be this attack that for the saints the prospect of even a collective survival will at that point be very dim. However, in God's perfect time, God through His Son, will step in and with irresistible power crush all opposition. Satan's human agents are represented here as coming from all four corners of

the earth. It will be a widespread organized onslaught. However, apart from the devil himself no mention is made of any one dominating Antichrist figure. Many people feel that the symbolism of these latter chapters demands a one world government and a one world church. Possibly it does. Nevertheless, I am not really sure that it does.

I do admit that it depicts collectivity and a close working together on the part of the forces of evil. However, where there is a common enemy cooperation can be achieved without a dissolving of the identity of the individual units that are participating in the system. When Christ was here on earth, even enemies joined hands against Him. Nevertheless, those rival parties of the Pharisees, Sadducees and the Herodians maintained their separate identity. I see not organizational ties but the anti-Christ spirit as the real uniting bond that pulls together the anti-Christ system. God alone knows how near we are to this little season.

It was as a direct consequence of God's loosening of that restraint that this final onslaught was made. The devil could not make this final onslaught until God gave him permission. I say we do not know how near we are to that little season. If it should

be our lot to pass through it, would we be ready for the severe testing that it will bring to bear

upon the saints? May that question challenge us to readiness for Christ's return.

A Scriptural View of the Anti-Christ System

From a message by Merle Ruth

Sunday, September 18, 1988

Blue Rock Mennonite Church

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The Ideal Christian Home

With Its
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By
J. S. SHOEMAKER

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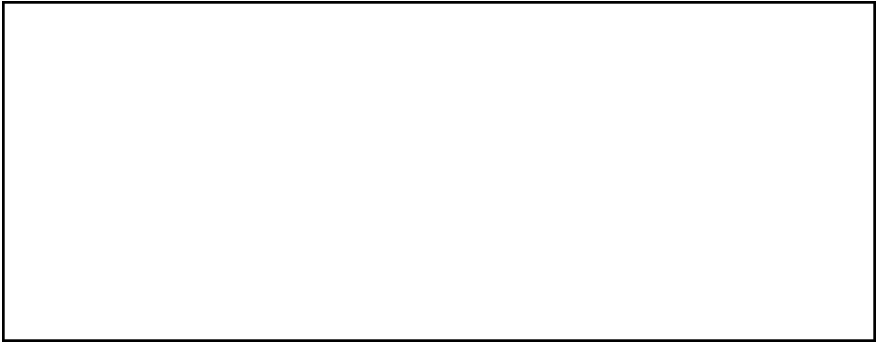
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