

MISTAKE 31

WE SHOULD NOT TRY TO DETERMINE THE IDENTITY OF THE FINAL ANTICHRIST OR THE FALSE PROPHET

The Bible speaks of a personage coming on the scene of history known as the beast, the Final Antichrist. The evidence is clear that he has not yet appeared in history. He will also have a cohort, the False Prophet who will come on the scene after him. This being the case, should we attempt to determine their identity?

In answering this question we will mainly deal with the Final Antichrist. Are believers to specifically look for this coming world leader? We will discover that it is a mistake to do so.

1. THE PRE-TRIBULATION VIEW: THE CHURCH WILL NOT EXPERIENCE THE FINAL ANTICHRIST

There are many Bible believers who say that the Lord never intended the church, the true believers in Christ, to know the identity of the coming Antichrist because they will never experience him in person. While the spirit of Antichrist is certainly alive and well, and working in the world today, the final Antichrist has yet to come.

When he does come, the New Testament church will *not* be upon the earth. The church will first be taken out of the world at the rapture. The living believers will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air. It is only *after* this happens that the final Antichrist can be revealed.

2. ANTICHRIST DEALS PRIMARILY WITH ISRAEL

In addition, according to the pre-tribulation rapture position, the final Antichrist will primarily deal with the nation Israel. Indeed, the time of the appearance of Antichrist is known as the “seventieth week of Daniel.” It is a seven-year period when the Lord once again deals with Israel as a nation. The church is not around at this time.

While Antichrist will indeed persecute the saints, these saints are not part of the New Testament church. The church is never pictured in the various predictions about the final Antichrist.

Therefore, this individual will not become prominent during this present age.

3. ALL ATTEMPTED IDENTIFICATIONS HAVE BEEN FUTILE

It is clear that the many past attempts to identify the final Antichrist have been mistaken. Though many sincere people were absolutely certain that they have correctly identified the coming man of sin with some contemporary personage, their identification has always been incorrect. This should teach us a lesson. It is not for us to know his identity!

4. ALL ATTEMPTED IDENTIFICATIONS WILL BE FUTILE

Indeed, if the pre-tribulation rapture view is correct, then all attempted identifications of the coming Antichrist, by definition, will be futile! His identity will remain unknown until after the time the church is taken out of the world. It is only at that time that he will appear on the scene.

When he does appear, he will start as a relatively unknown person and then work his way up into a position of world leadership. This is further evidence that his identity will not be immediately apparent.

HOW HAS ANTICHRIST BEEN MISIDENTIFIED IN THE PAST?

The answer to this particular question could actually fill up several volumes! The predicted final Antichrist of Scripture has indeed been misidentified many times in the past. Furthermore, it seems fair to say that he will also be misidentified in the future.

However, it must be said that some of these people, who were misidentified as the final Antichrist, could rightly be called “Antichrist” since they have certain of the qualities of the coming man of sin.

Yet, they were not the beast, the man of sin, the final Antichrist, the coming Caesar, which Scripture says will arrive upon the scene shortly before the return of Jesus Christ.

While not desiring to be exhaustive, we can list some of the more interesting identifications which have missed the mark. They include the following.

THE ROMAN GENERAL POMPEY: THE ANTI-MESSIAH

Even before the First Coming of Jesus Christ to the earth, there were identifications by the Jews of an “anti-Messiah.” In a work written before the time of Christ, known as the “Psalms of Solomon,” the Roman general Pompey is called the “adversary of God.”

Pompey profaned the temple by entering the Holy of Holies after his conquest of Jerusalem in 63 B.C. He, therefore, is called “the dragon” in this work written about 60 B.C. Scripture tells us that the final Antichrist will himself profane the temple in an act of defiance against the Lord.

CALIGULA: THE CRAZED ROMAN EMPEROR

During the first century, the Roman Emperor Caligula looked like a good candidate for the predicted Antichrist. Indeed, he ordered a statue of himself to be placed in the Temple in Jerusalem and commanded that the Jewish people worship his image. If this act would have been carried out, then it would have fulfilled the prediction of Jesus. Indeed, the Lord warned the people to look for the following to take place:

So when you see the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand) (Matthew 24:15 ESV).

The Temple is to be desecrated by the coming man of sin. Caligula attempted to fulfill this prediction. However, this crazed emperor died in A.D. 41, and his orders were never carried out. While for a time it looked like he would be the one whom Jesus spoke about, his premature death ended any chance of him being the predicted desolator.

NERO: THE EMPEROR WHO BLAMED CHRISTIANS FOR THE FIRE OF ROME

One of the most popular identifications of Antichrist was that of Caesar Nero. In many ways, his life mirrored that of the final Antichrist. For one thing, he blamed the Christians for the great fire of Rome. Nero then set out to specifically target them for persecution.

When he was condemned to death by the Roman Senate in A.D. 68, Nero committed suicide. Since he died alone, the rumors persisted that he was not really dead. While the return of Nero was expected for a number of years after his death, it was eventually realized that this man would not fulfill what the Scripture predicted about the final Antichrist.

DOMITIAN: THE EMPEROR WHO BANISHED THE APOSTLE JOHN TO PATMOS

The Roman Emperor Domitian was the person who banished John the Apostle to the Island of Patmos late in the first century A.D. Since he was the current Emperor at the time of the composition of the Book of Revelation, many saw him as the first beast, the final Antichrist.

In fact, there are some interpreters of Revelation who still believe Domitian was the beast which John wrote about. This perspective holds that most of the events in the Book of Revelation were all fulfilled in the first century A.D., whether literally or figuratively.

DIOCLETIAN: THE EMPEROR WHO ORDERED EMPIRE-WIDE PERSECUTION OF CHRISTIANS

The Roman Emperor Diocletian had a number of qualities of the final Antichrist. In A.D. 303, Diocletian instituted the most thorough persecution of Christians to that date. The church historian Eusebius relates what happened in this manner:

It was the nineteenth year of Diocletian's reign [A.D. 303] the month Dystrus, called March by the Romans, and the festival of the Savior's Passion was approaching, when an imperial decree was published everywhere, ordering the churches to be razed to the ground and the Scriptures destroyed by fire, and giving notice that those in places of honor would lose their places, and domestic staff, if they continued to profess Christianity, would be deprived of their liberty. Such was the first edict against us. Soon afterwards other decrees arrived in rapid succession, ordering that the presidents of the churches in every place should all be first committed to prison and then coerced by every possible means into offering sacrifice (Eusebius, *History of the Church* (VIII.2).

This edict concerned three things. Diocletian ordered all Christian churches to be destroyed, ordered all copies of Scripture to be burned, and deprived believers in Jesus Christ of their civil rights. These despicable acts made him a candidate for the predicted Antichrist.

JULIAN THE APOSTATE: HE WANTED TO REBUILD THE TEMPLE

After the rule of Constantine, there was the rise of an anti-Christian Emperor known as Julian the Apostate. This evil ruler attempted to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem in defiance of the words of Christ. In many ways, Julian was an Antichrist, but he was not the final Antichrist.

CHARLEMAGNE: THE MAN WHO WANTED TO REBUILD THE ROMAN EMPIRE

Charlemagne, Charles the Great, was the King of the Franks. He lived from A.D. 742-814. During his rule, he controlled a large portion of Europe. Indeed, he was the first ruler of an empire in Western Europe after the fall of the Roman Empire. He was viewed as a possible candidate for the final Antichrist because of his attempt to rebuild the fallen Roman Empire. This will ultimately occur when this future "man of sin" comes upon the scene. Charlemagne, however, died before achieving this lofty goal.

THE PROTESTANT REFORMERS BELIEVED THE POPE WAS ANTICHRIST

At the time of the Protestant Reformation, it almost became an article of faith that the pope and the papacy constituted the biblical Antichrist. In fact, the Protestant reformers were unified in their belief that Antichrist had appeared in the person of the pope in Rome.

Rome, of course, responded to those attacks. Interestingly, one of the arguments which Rome advanced to show that the pope could not be the predicted Antichrist was the fact that the coming man of sin had to be Jewish.

We Should Not Try To Determine The Identity Of The Final Antichrist

It was assumed that if the Jews accepted the Antichrist as their Messiah, then he would have to be a Jew. Otherwise it would be impossible for him to be embraced by the nation. Since there has never been a Jewish pope, the idea that the papacy was the predicted Antichrist was thoroughly rejected by Roman Catholics.

THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH BELIEVED PROTESTANTS WERE ANTICHRIST

The Roman Church turned the tables on the Protestants by claiming they were actually the biblical Antichrist! If the Roman Catholic Church was the sole work of Jesus Christ upon the earth, then to resist the church was to resist Christ. Therefore, Protestantism could rightly be called “Antichrist” by the Roman Catholic Church.

NAPOLEON BONAPARTE

During the French Revolution there was another popular candidate for Antichrist, Napoleon Bonaparte. As usual, the numbers which were attached to the name of Napoleon could be calculated to equal 666. While Napoleon seemed to have many of the characteristics of the predicted Antichrist, he too left the scene without fulfilling what the Scripture predicted.

THE SECOND WORLD WAR: MANY CANDIDATES FOR THE COMING ANTICHRIST ARISE

During the events leading up to the Second World War, as well as during the conflict, there were a number of books written which identified the final Antichrist as one of the leaders of the Axis powers. The main candidates were Adolph Hitler and Benito Mussolini, though some people suggested Joseph Stalin or even President Franklin Roosevelt!

PRESIDENT FRANKLIN DELANO ROOSEVELT

The numerical value of FDR's name was reported to add up to 666. Because of the Great Depression, FDR was the most autocratic United States President of the 20th century. Roosevelt was in office for 12 years. This was longer than any United States President.

HITLER: THE PERSECUTOR OF THE JEWS

Adolph Hitler was a favorite candidate for Antichrist during his rise to power. Indeed, there were many well-respected Bible interpreters who publicly came out and claimed Hitler was the biblical Antichrist.

As with others in the past, it was found that the letters of his name added up to 666. However, with the death of Hitler, and the end of the Second World War, the identification of him with the final Antichrist lost its momentum.

MUSSOLINI: THE ITALIAN ANTICHRIST

Benito Mussolini was also a popular choice among people who attempted to discover the identity of the first beast of the Book of Revelation. In fact, Mussolini seemed like a prime candidate. He wanted to re-establish the Holy Roman Empire, he was from Rome, and he had world domination in mind. Many booklets were written which depicted him as the coming beast, the man of sin.

Sad to say, some of these were composed by reputable Bible teachers. They, too, were caught up in the events surrounding the Second World War and therefore made the mistake of identifying a living person as the beast of Revelation. Like all of the interpreters before them, these godly people were wrong in their claim that Antichrist was alive and living among them.

JOSEPH STALIN: THE GREAT MASS MURDERER

Joseph Stalin, the Russian dictator, is believed to be the greatest mass murderer in history. He is said to have ordered the death of some thirty million people. While most rulers killed those of other nations, Stalin's victims were mostly his own people. He was a despicable human being and therefore seemingly a prime candidate for the biblical Antichrist. Yet, he was not the predicted one.

THE POST-WORLD WAR II ANTICHRISTS

World War II came and went. The final Antichrist had still not appeared. The embarrassments of the identifications of Hitler and Mussolini during the Second World War did not stop others from repeating their mistake. Indeed, after the Second World War there were still candidates for the position of Antichrist among those who appeared on the world scene.

JOHN F. KENNEDY: THE MORTAL HEAD WOUND

For a while, a popular candidate was United States President John F. Kennedy (JFK). He was the first Roman Catholic who became President of the United States. This made him suspect to a number of people because it was believed that he would do whatever the pope asked.

In addition, at the 1956 Democratic convention, where he was nominated for president, Kennedy received 666 votes. When President Kennedy was shot in the head in Dallas on November 22, 1963, it was thought that his deadly head wound would heal. Stories circulated that he was being kept alive in the Vatican. Eventually, the idea that John F. Kennedy would return and become this final Antichrist lost momentum.

HENRY KISSINGER: THE PEACEMAKER

Another popular candidate was the former Secretary of State of the United States, Henry Kissinger. Because of Mr. Kissinger's peacemaking activity in the Middle East, he was labeled the Antichrist by some. However, he eventually withdrew from politics without fulfilling the biblical requirements of Antichrist.

ANWAR SADAT: THE MAN OF PEACE, MAN OF SIN?

Anwar Sadat, the leader of Egypt, was a popular choice for a while as being the biblical Antichrist. It was claimed that he was from the right geographical area, made a groundbreaking peace treaty with Israel and won the Nobel Prize as a "man of peace."

In fact, one Christian book named Anwar Sadat the Antichrist and claimed that this identification was by divine revelation! However, Sadat was soon assassinated and consequently the idea that he was the man of sin quickly faded.

This also illustrates the foolishness of people who claim that their own particular insight into the identity of the man of sin is somehow divinely given!

MIKHAIL GORBACHEV: THE MAN WHO DISMANTLED THE SOVIET UNION

Another favorite during the Cold War was the Soviet Leader Mikhail Gorbachev. He became a prime candidate because of his participation in dismantling the Soviet Union. Yet, this world leader fell from power and thus became a non-candidate.

PRESIDENT RONALD WILSON REAGAN: EACH OF HIS NAMES HAD SIX LETTERS

Strange as it may seem, during the 1980's, there was some speculation that President Ronald Reagan of the United States was the predicted Antichrist. The fact that he had six letters in all three of his names, Ronald Wilson Reagan, caused some to speculate that this popular president was actually the man of sin. As has been true with the other identifications in the past, this one turned out to be incorrect.

SADDAM HUSSEIN: THE BUTCHER OF BAGHDAD

Saddam Hussein, the leader of Iraq, the butcher of Baghdad, was also highlighted as being a possible candidate for Antichrist in the early 1990's. For one thing, Hussein was going to rebuild the ancient city of Babylon whose location is in modern day Iraq.

Yet, like all previous candidates, this identification was incorrect. Hussein was eventually overthrown when Iraq was invaded by the United States and its allies. At the end of 2006, Hussein was executed for his murderous crimes.

The list goes on and on. This has merely been a sampling of the misidentifications of the past with respect to the identity of the final Antichrist.

THE MISIDENTIFICATIONS NEVER STOP

The misidentifications of the person of the Antichrist continue to this day. Indeed, it seems that anyone who becomes a public figure is sooner or later found to have the numbers of his name add up to 666.

LESSONS TO BE LEARNED FROM THESE MISTAKES

There are many lessons to be learned in these attempts to name the biblical Antichrist. Some of the more obvious ones are as follows.

1. WE SHOULD NOT ATTEMPT TO IDENTIFY ANTICHRIST AHEAD OF TIME

To begin with, we should not engage in such fruitless speculation. People will only know the identity of the final Antichrist when he arrives on the scene and performs certain predicted acts. Until that time, his identity will remain a mystery.

To sum up, it is not possible to know who he is until then.

2. HIS NUMBER IS GIVEN TO CONFIRM HIS IDENTITY, NOT DISCOVER IT

Second, the number of his name, 666, is given to us to *confirm* his identity, not to discover it. In other words, it is to verify what is already believed about this man, that he is the beast, the man of sin, predicted in Scripture. We are not to know who he is ahead of time.

3. IT DOES NOT HONOR THE LORD WHEN PREDICTIONS ARE MADE

Finally, and most important, such public predictions of either the exact identity of Antichrist, or the precise timing of his coming, never honor the Lord. In fact, all they do is bring shame and ridicule to the Christian faith.

We Should Not Try To Determine The Identity Of The Final Antichrist

When unbelievers are told that they need to know that a particular person is the final Antichrist because the great tribulation is about to happen, and the coming of Jesus Christ is near, the message of Christ is shamed and held up to ridicule when the prediction does not come to pass.

In fact, who can blame unbelievers for this response when so-called Bible experts are telling them that they know, or they think they know, the identity of the coming man of sin?

If well-known Bible teachers are wrong about the identity of the final Antichrist, then unbelievers may conclude they are also wrong about Jesus Christ! Why trust anything which they say?

Therefore, hopefully one of the great lessons to be learned from the study of Antichrist concerns what we should not do. Indeed, we should not attempt to identify any living person as Antichrist.

When Antichrist arrives on the scene, there will be no question about who he is. Indeed, when this political leader becomes the beast who dominates the world, there will be little doubt about his identity.

So the lesson we should learn from all of this is that we are not to try to identify any living individual as the Final Antichrist. Indeed, it is a mistake to do so.