



# **The Falling Away**

*Identifying the antichrist in the Bible*

While some people like to make the issue of the antichrist complicated, the antichrist in the Bible really isn't the great mystery that many modern pastors make it out to be. Let's check it out for ourselves. First, the word "antichrist" only appears four times in the Bible and in the plural form once. All these are found in 1 and 2 John, where John says things like, "you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come" (1 John 2:18). While there are only a handful of specific references using the term 'antichrist,' there are many references to the antichrist power.

In other places, the antichrist is referred to as the man of sin or the son of perdition. As we will see, the antichrist was to be an apostate power that would make its way into the church. The Bible writers repeatedly warned against this apostasy that was coming inside the church. Paul said, "after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves," later adding that "the time will come when...they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables" (Acts 20:29, 30; 2 Tim. 4:3, 4).

Peter also spoke of this coming apostasy that would make its way into the church with the warning, “there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies” (2 Pet. 2:1). Jude warned that “there would be mockers in the last time who would walk according to their own ungodly lusts. These are sensual persons, who cause divisions, not having the Spirit” (Jude 18, 19). In fact, Paul added that “the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons” (1 Tim. 4:1).

Even Jesus mentioned the apostasy that would make its way into the church, warning us, “the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service” (John 16:2). Jesus said that some professed Christians would even kill people in the name of God. While Paul, the apostles, and Christ Himself warned of the coming apostasy, Paul said that Jesus could not come back “unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who...sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God” (2 Thes. 2:3, 4). Paul said this apostasy would come “in the temple of God,” or the church!

According to the Bible, after the Jewish nation rejected Christ, the Christian church would then rise, but it would fall into an even worse form of apostasy than the Jewish nation fell into before it. This “falling away” that Paul spoke of would result in the “fall” of the church, as spoken of in the book of Revelation. The spiritual “falling away” that the apostles warned of would eventually result in the fall of the Christian church, culminating in the warning cry, “Babylon is fallen,” “Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins” (2 Thes. 2:3; Rev. 14:8, 18:4).

We see a picture of Babylon depicted in Revelation 17:3 as “a woman sitting on a scarlet beast” (Rev. 17:3). Since a woman, or bride, represents a church in the Bible (See Jer. 16:2; Eph. 5:25), this harlot woman must represent an unfaithful church. Notice also that she is riding a beast, which is symbolic of kings or kingdoms (Dan. 7:17, 23). This is a picture of the Christian church after they began to mingle with pagan Rome. Just as ancient Israel mingled with the pagan nations around it to become a spiritual “harlot,” the Christian church would mingle with “kings of the earth” to become Babylon, “the great harlot” (Eze. 16:28; Rev. 17:2, 1).

So we see that this woman is a harlot “with whom the kings of the earth committed fornication” (Rev. 17:2). Again, as a harlot unites with strange men, this church united with a paganism—specifically Rome. The prophecy calls Babylon a “mother” who is a “great city” that sits on “seven mountains,” or “hills,” as we are told in the NIV (Rev. 17:5, 18, 9). Ironically, the Catholic church refers to herself as the “mother church,” because all the other churches came out of her, and in mingling with paganism, eventually seated herself in Rome, “the city of seven hills,” perfectly fulfilling the prophecy!

The church fell into apostasy when it mingled with Rome to become the Roman Catholic Church. As a result of this union, the words of Christ, who said “the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service,” were fulfilled in Catholicism. At this time, the church started persecuting Christians who disagreed with her doctrines, becoming “drunk with the blood of saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus” (Rev. 17:6). During this time, over fifty million people were persecuted and killed by the church during the inquisition and the crusades. It is no wonder that the Bible warned of this horrible apostasy.

When the great reformer, Martin Luther, saw the fulfillment of these prophecies in the church, he identified the Catholic Church, which he belonged to, as the antichrist. As Catholicism mingled with pagan Rome, they began to introduce teachings like penance, saint worship, papal infallibility, the immaculate conception, priestly confession, purgatory, and other false doctrines that are not found in the Bible. Finally, Luther protested the church, affirming, "I know that the pope is antichrist," giving birth to the Protestant reformation (D'Aubigne, b. 6, ch. 9).

This teaching that the Catholic church was the antichrist was the fuel that gave birth to the rise of Protestantism. The word Protestant comes from the root, protest. The Protestant churches were protesting the teachings of the Catholic Church because they recognized the church as the antichrist, the man of sin, and the son of perdition that would arise in the church. This fundamental teaching is at the root of the Protestant churches. In the October 31, 1999, issue of *Newsweek*, Kenneth Woodward wrote, "Martin Luther was the first to identify the papacy as such with the Antichrist... a view that was to become dogma for all Protestant churches."

Paul, the apostles, and Christ all warned of a coming apostasy in the church. Looking back on history, we see that this took place. While basically all Protestants identified the Catholic Church as the antichrist, nearly all of them have let go of this foundational teaching. Of course, this had to happen in order for the antichrist to rise again and fulfill the prophecy, “all the world marveled and followed the beast” (Rev. 13:2). According to the Bible, the antichrist will again rise up, uniting with other nations to make a law that enforces the mark of the beast, thrusting God’s faithful people into one final tribulation.

Long ago, Paul warned of a “falling” away in the church that would culminate in the cry, Babylon is “fallen.” While there are many godly people in the Catholic Church, God is pleading with these, “Babylon the great is fallen... Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins” (Rev. 18:2, 4). On September 11, 2001, after the Twin Towers were struck by airplanes, a little time intervened before the buildings fell. Similarly, God is giving His people a little time to come out of the fallen churches of Babylon. Please respond before it is too late.

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