

“Year of Antichrist”? Anno Domini!

By Greg L. Bahnsen

The February *Guardian* certainly deserves commendation. The popular notion that Presbyterians are indifferent to (or intimidated by) eschatological issues has been further fractured by Reitsma and Miladin. Reitsma’s exhortation to dedicated and diligent labor in the Lord’s kingdom and Miladin’s critique of premillennial hermeneutics were greatly appreciated.

It would not seem, though, that Reitsma really substantiates from Scripture “that we are approaching the most dangerous period in all human history . . . the time of Antichrist.”

John’s epistles are our only source of information about “antichrist,” since he alone uses the word. Speaking of the many heretical teachers who departed from the Christian assembly, John declares, “*This is . . . the antichrist*” (2 John 7). To those who heard the dire prediction “that antichrist is coming,” John writes to correct their understanding: “He who denies the Father and the Son *is* the antichrist” (1 John 2:18a, 22). John sees the antichrist as a personification of heretical apostasy, *not* as one “final Antichrist [who] will be a definite person living in the end time.” Instead, there are “*many antichrists*,” from which we learn that John himself *already* lived in “the last hour” (1 John 2:18b).

So, perhaps it would have been better to speak of the “man of lawlessness” (since appeal is made to 2 Thessalonians 2) who would appear at the end of history. Yet that too would be unsatisfactory. That man’s lawlessness was *already* operating in Paul’s day (verse 7). The man of lawlessness would sit in the *temple* of God (verse 4), indicating that he was operative before the Temple’s destruction in A.D. 70, (since the man of lawlessness sets himself against *anything* that is even *called* God – verse 4a – his sitting in the temple is not a metaphorical description of a “religious leader”). 2 Thessalonians 2 parallels Christ’s discussion of the “abomination of desolation” in Matthew 24, which in turn is explained by the parallel passage in Luke as being the military overthrow of Jerusalem (Luk3 21; 20) by the Romans. Thus the “man of lawlessness” is a past historical figure, unveiled in order to bring God’s historical judgment upon Israel’s falling away (2 Thess. 2:3; cf. 1 Thess. 2:14-16).

Scripture wouldn’t appear to teach us, then, that we are *approaching* the time of a final “Antichrist” or “man of lawlessness.” And even if the Bible taught us to expect a future man of sin, do we really have warrant to see his appearance as impending? The path of church history is strewn with faulted predictions that Christians (in every age) were upon the threshold of the final apostasy, the last climactic reign of Satan’s terror. Should we repeat this error as so many are prone to do today?

Let us rather, “with the optimistic notes of the New Covenant sounding triumphantly” (to use Miladin’s phrase), have the God of peace bruise Satan under our feet shortly (Romans 6:20). After all, he has been bound by Jesus Christ with a great chain so that the nations can be delivered from deception (Revelation 20:1-3) and disciplined for the Lord (Matthew 28:18-20).

All power and authority in heaven and earth is our resurrected Savior’s and he is *with us* until the end of the age. He must reign until he has put all enemies under his feet (1 Corinthians 15:25), and so this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith (1 John 5:4). Let us, then, anticipate, pray, and work for the time (as Miladin says) “when the gospel will have achieved unprecedented success.” For it verily is the *power* of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16). Christ’s kingdom, though it had a small beginning, shall grow extremely large (Matthew 13:31-32); indeed, it will crush all earthly empires and become a great mountain filling the earth (Daniel 2:35, 44), a mountain unto which all nations shall flow. (Isaiah 2:2-4).

“Is 1974 the year of Antichrist?” Not at all. 1974 is another “Anno Domini,” “year of *our Lord*!” He only and always reigns.