

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Evangelical Quarterly* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_evangelical_quarterly.php

THE MEANING OF "ANTICHRIST" IN THE GREEK OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

It may be helpful to consider the true meaning of the term "Antichrist" as deduced from the Greek of the New Testament.

It is well known that the primary meaning of the preposition *anti* is "opposite to" in a physical sense; as when an island is opposite to a town on the coast. This meaning occurs in Scripture in the compound *antikrus*, Acts xx. 15. From this, its two most usual meanings are "opposed to", as when two armies are aligned opposite each other for combat; and "in place of", when one thing is exchanged for another in commercial transactions. A count of the verbs and nouns in the New Testament that are compounded with *anti*, made by the writer, shows that the number having these two meanings respectively, is just equal.

Examples of *anti* in the sense of exchange, are found in the following phrases: "to render evil *for* evil", and "to give a serpent *for* a fish"; both these being expressed by *anti* (1 Thess. v. 15; Luke xi. 11). There are also two different nouns for "reward" or "recompense" which are compounds of *anti*; the meaning being payment *in return for* service rendered (*antapodoma*, Luke xiv. 12; Rom. xi. 9; *antapodosis*, Col. iii. 24, both being formed from the verb *antapodidōmi*, which occurs seven times in the New Testament, e.g. twice in Luke xiv. 14).

On the other hand, direct opposition is more forcefully expressed by another preposition, *kata*, "down"; with the meaning of the colloquial English "down upon", when some one is said to be "down upon" another. In expressing the most definite opposition, where Christ says: "He that is not with me is *against* me," it is *kata* that is used for "against" (Matt. xii. 30=Luke xi. 23; cf. Mark ix. 40=Luke ix. 50). This preposition is used in the New Testament much more than any other (some 58 times) with the meaning of direct opposition; as "to speak against", "to take counsel against", "to war against", and such like. Two other prepositions (*epi* and *eis*) are occasionally translated "against", but indicating disagreement of a milder kind, rather than actual opposition like *kata*.

In regard to *anti*, it occurs in the New Testament 22 times by itself; and not once is it translated "against" in our Authorised Version. Its meaning is always one thing for another, or else recompense or retribution for something done, by reward or punishment. It is thus most usually translated "for". When compounded with other words, however, the compounded word may come to mean either to oppose or to help and support, according to what it is compounded with. Yet on the whole, these compound words have the meaning of "against" just about half the time, as we have noted. It might therefore be thought that it is as likely as not that the meaning of this compound word Antichrist may be "against Christ".

There seems to be one rule, however, which is quite invariable. It is that *anti*, when combined with any office or position of authority, always means "in place of". In English, we use very varied terms for one who acts for another; such as Viceroy, Lieutenant-General, Pro-consul, and ecclesiastically Vicar; but in Greek all these would be expressed by *anti*. For Viceroy there is "Anti-king" (*antibasileus*) and although the word does not occur in the New Testament, we have a near approach to it in Matt. ii. 22; "when (Joseph) heard that Archelaus did reign in Judaea *in the room of* his father Herod", where "in the room of" is the one word *anti*. Also, the compound *anthupatos* (i.e. *anti-hupatos*) is used for the proconsul (A.V. "deputy") of Cyprus, of Achaia, and (in the plural, for a special reason) of Asia (Acts xiii. 7, 8, 12; xviii. 12; xix. 38). The title might be rendered "anti-consul" to indicate the Greek form.

If then there is no exception to the rule that in New Testament usage, *anti* expresses the functioning of one ruler or governor for another, the meaning of Anti-christ becomes clear. It is one who claims to take the place of Christ as Head or Ruler; one who acts for Him as a Vice-christ. With an ecclesiastical significance, the closest equivalent rendering in English is "Vicar of Christ". It may be objected to this view, that in the epistle in which Antichrist is spoken of, he is said to *deny* the Father and the Son. But a Greek concordance would readily show that "to deny" frequently means to set aside or to ignore; and in the passage in question, this denial is contrasted with abiding in the Son and in the Father (see 1 John ii. 18-24).

This meaning is also quite in accord with the discourse of

the Lord Jesus in Matt. xxiv. For in this foreview of the Christian era, He does not use the term Antichrist, but announces: “Many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many”; and further on He designates these false Christs as “Pseudo-christs,” as it is in the Greek; that is, pretending to be Christ and claiming to act with His authority; “insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect”. We see that this must be the true meaning of what is elsewhere termed Antichrist, for there are said to be many such where this word is used (in 1 John ii. 18, 22; iv. 3 and 2 John 7 only). For if such Pseudo-christs were open opponents of Christ, and even denouncing God, how could the elect be deceived by them, and what need would there be of such a definite and careful warning against them?

We find a clear corroboration for this meaning of Antichrist at the Reformation, when light on the Scriptures dawned after the Dark Ages. For although the various evangelical groups or denominations which then arose may have differed on some points, they were unanimous in the belief that the Papacy was the Antichrist. All the leading Reformers in various countries were agreed upon this.

It is very noteworthy, when looking into the meaning of *anti*, that this preposition is used to bring out unmistakably the substitutionary sacrifice of Christ. It occurs in two of the Gospels where He is said “to give his life a ransom for many” (*lutron anti pollōn*), meaning definitely “in place of” (Matt. xx. 28=Mark x. 45); and this same statement is made in an epistle, where *anti* is found in composition in the noun *antilutron*, lit. “counter-ransom” (1 Tim. ii. 6). Other words also express substitution; but this use of *anti* makes it unanswerably clear.

W. BELL DAWSON.

Montreal, Canada.