

Antichrist, Part 2: Antiochus Epiphanes

Post by "Don" of October 8, 2023 at 11:48 AM

Dewitt brings up Antiochus Epiphanes at least a half dozen times in his St. Paul book. Here is an example, p.57:

THESSALONIANS *Peace and Safety*

the disciples of Christ were first called Christians in Antioch, then Paul would also have known it; and if this name was coined for them to distinguish them from the disciples of Epicurus, then he must have been aware that to the populace of Antioch and to others who adopted the new names a particular rivalry was recognized between the sect of Epicurus and the followers of Christ, and by virtue of this fact Epicurus had become a sort of Antichrist. Moreover, the name of Epicurus must certainly have shot into the mind of Paul whenever he recalled the violence practiced upon his race by the notorious **Antiochus**, the generous patron of Epicureanism.

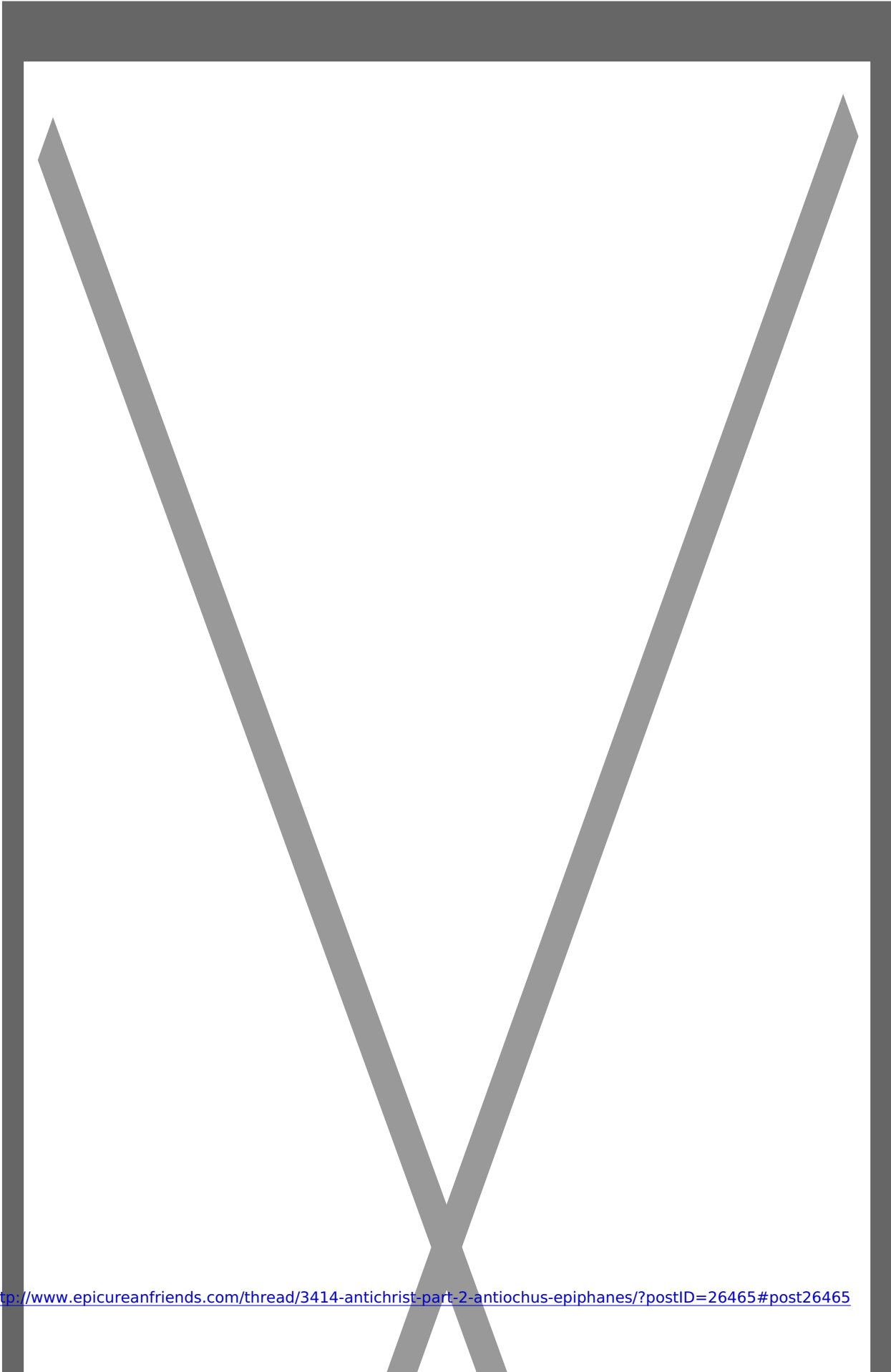
In the progress of this study we shall in due time discover other reasons for the conflicting emotions of Paul and in particular the attractiveness of the Epicurean ethic as opposed to its shocking theology.

Dewitt says later that "Neither can it be doubted, in view of his known conversion to Epicureanism, that [Antiochus's] name was associated with this hated philosophy." Maybe

tangentially, but the Jews had much bigger grievances against this Hellenizing ruler.

For background, here's his WP article:

Image not found or type unknown



[Antiochus IV Epiphanes - Wikipedia](#)

en.wikipedia.org

It doesn't even mention Epicureanism.

Antiochus is the big bad of the Maccabean revolt. The fact that he may have had some Epicureans at court does appear that there's where the start of Jewish antipathy toward Epicurus's philosophy began, but there were other reasons there Jews revolted against his reign. For example:

- In 167 BCE he placed a statue of the Greek god Zeus, in the Temple itself.
- He required Jews to sacrifice to the pagan gods.
- He made it illegal for Jews to circumcise their baby boys and to maintain their Jewish identity.

He basically tried to eradicate Jewish culture and practice. So, yeah, *anything* associated with him was going to be seen as repulsive!

As such, he became a favorite exemplar of the anti-religious ruler in Jewish and subsequently early Christian traditions. Some commentators see him as the "Man of sin", a precursor of the return of Christ, in 2 Thessalonians.

[Quote from Bible Hub](#)

VII. The Man of Sin.—We have stated our belief that “the Man of Sin” is not only to be identified with Daniel’s “Little Horn,” but that St. Paul consciously drew the doctrine from that passage. But it may be objected that some of the words in which St. Paul most narrowly describes him are taken, not from the description of the Little Horn in Daniel 7, but from that of the Little Horn of Daniel 8:5, which represents quite a different person, viz., Antiochus Epiphanes.[7] It might be thought, therefore, that St. Paul was only borrowing Daniel’s language, and not adopting his prophecy. The answer is, that even those prophecies of Antiochus in many points do not suit Antiochus at all; and not only so, but the Jewish expositors themselves held that Antiochus had not exhausted the meaning of the prophecy. They themselves applied it to some Antichrist, whose coming should precede, and be defeated by the Christ’s. Even in St. Jerome’s time, “From this place onwards” (he is commenting on Daniel 11:36) “the Jews think that Antichrist is spoken of, that, after the little help (Daniel 11:34) of Julian, a king shall arise who shall do according to his own will, and lift himself up against all which is called God, and speak great things against the God of gods, so that he shall sit in the Temple of God and make himself god, and his will be performed, until the wrath of God be fulfilled: for in him shall the end be. Which we, too, understand of Antichrist.” Thus, according to the current explanation of the Jews, Antiochus was looked upon as a type of the Antichrist, whom they expected to arise (in fulfilment of Daniel 7:8) at the overthrow of the Roman empire, whose coming was to precede the Christ’s. The only change made by the Christian Church is to apply to the Second Advent a prophecy

which the Jews applied to the one Advent which they recognised. It is impossible not to do so when, in Daniel 12:2, we have the Resurrection made to follow close upon the development of this Antiochus-Antichrist. So far, then, as St. Paul's date is concerned, the doctrine is drawn from Daniel 2, 7; traits of character are added (in accordance with Jewish interpretation) from Daniel 8, 11.

There's a lot to unpack there and I'm not the one to do it.

One academic site helps to put Antiochus's connection to Epicureanism in context:

[Quote from Gary Zabel](#)

Antiochus was sympathetic to Epicureanism (albeit not acting in accord with Epicurus's injunctions to avoid politics), so his attempt at a forced hellenization of Judea was closely linked to Epicureanism in the minds of the Judean patriots. Another factor was that Epicureans were prominent in the hellenized cities of Galilee, creating a rivalry between Epicureanism and the traditional religion among the northern Judeans. Antiochus's provocations brought about a strong nationalistic reaction, which exploded into violence when a rumor of Antiochus's death reached Judea. While the rumor was false, nonetheless the Hasmonean leader Judas Maccabeus was ultimately successful in his revolt against the Seleucids.

In short, Antiochus Epiphanes (nicknamed Epimanes "the Mad" by his subjects) became a personification of all things apostate and evil and sinful in the world, could have been the impetus for the use of apikiros "apostate" in Jewish texts, and was looked back on by Paul as the "man of sin" prophesied to come before the return of Jesus. I don't see his Epicurean leanings or sympathies as *the* prime mover in that personification but only one Hellenic aspect of the whole picture.