

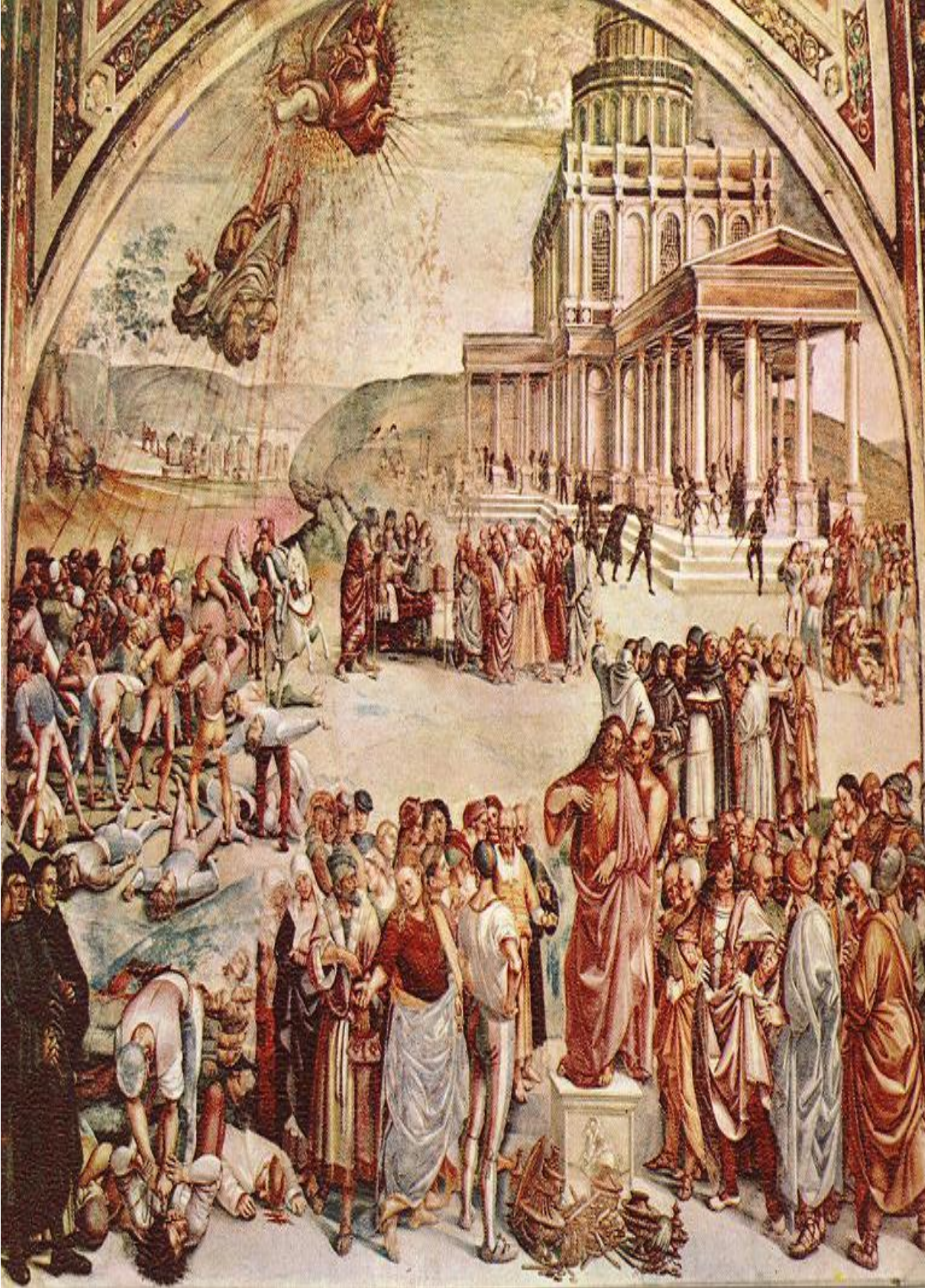
NO FUTURE ANTI-CHRIST!

By David Lee Burris

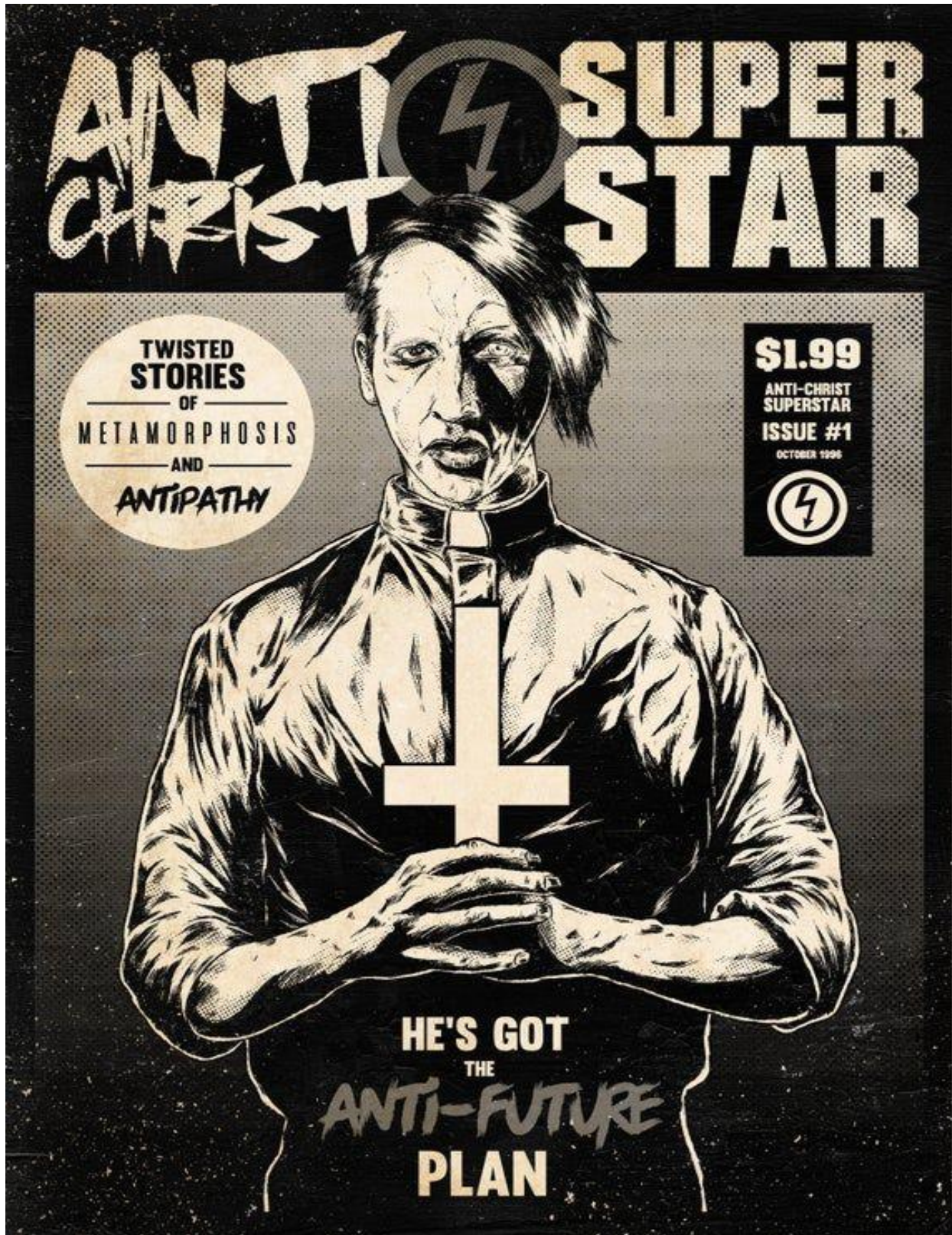


THY ANTICHRIST // WRATH OF THE BEAST









ANTI-CHRIST SUPERSTAR

TWISTED STORIES
OF
METAMORPHOSIS
AND
ANTIPATHY

\$1.99
ANTI-CHRIST
SUPERSTAR
ISSUE #1
OCTOBER 1996

HE'S GOT
THE
ANTI-FUTURE
PLAN

MILLENNIALISM & METHODOLOGY. In terms of the **Apocalyptic Timeline** there are three choices: *Pure Preterist – Partial Preterist – Futurist*. **Pure Preterists** believe all the events referenced in the Book of Revelation have already occurred; **Partial Preterists** limit those events that have already occurred to those of the First Century - after the death of the Apostles – to the Roman Carnage During the Destruction of the Jewish Capitol – The City of Jerusalem & its city life center - the Last Literal Temple. Although, not all are agreed, most partial preterists believe those events only remaining are The Second Coming of Our Lord & Savior, The Resurrection of the Dead, and the Final Judgement; **Futurists** believe all events referenced in Revelation and most those contained in the O.T. Hebrew Apocalyptic Writings still have their fulfillment in the near to distant future.

In terms of the **Nature of the Apocalypse** there are – still another three choices associated with the previous three: *Post-Millennial – Amillennial – Pre-Millennial*. This categorization points to the grouping of thousand year millennial theories that either suggest - *Literally or Figuratively - The Thousand Year Interval as an Episode Either Over, Ongoing, or Off into the Distance*. **Post-Millennialists** of the Christian Reconstruction Movement - share a looser definition of the Thousand Years - The Symbolic Reign of Christ on Earth – Supposedly In Process - Still To Be Symbolically Completed. They reason that Christ's Reign increases in fact as His Theocratic Old Testament Blueprint for family, society, and government - under the title of "Theonomy" - are achieved by the Church Militant. [Note: Realizing these goals to the objective is also how Satan is overcome in real time.] Once Theonomy Will Be Completed. Once the Millennium Symbolically Completed and the world is made all good – then will *Usher in Christ's Second Coming in Final Judgment*; However, *Progressive Parallelism* proponents of an *Inaugurated Millennialism* or **Amillennialists** - equate the start of God's Kingdom with Church Beginnings - as it was established in Acts Chapter Two. Amillennialists believe we are *Currently under the Figured Thousand Year Time Regime Binding Satan*; **Pre-Millennials** – known in the early church as devotees to the (Chilia)sm Doctrine - believe this "Church Age" is a substitutive because Christ was successfully resisted by the Jewish People & the Hebrew Nation (who will be given a second chance) from establishing His Kingdom & His Literal Thousand Year Reign on Earth. Although divided as to the *Rapture Doctrine* into Post-Trib, Mid-Trib, and Pre-Trib, they are without division that the Millennium is to be *Future Literal Thousand*

Year Fulfilled. [Pre-millennialists never seem to have an answer for Revelation 1: 1 positioned before the Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia Minor and Revelation 22: 6 positioned after the last vision of the last chapter.]

Nature of The Kingdom & Nature of The Church – History of Kingdom Models:

Tertullian taught it was Future, Origen taught it was Interior, Augustine taught it was Institutional, Monastics taught it was Counter-System, Calvin taught it was Theocratic, Ana-Baptists taught it was Utopian; Venn Models Church + Culture: Radicals teach Christ Against Culture, Dualists teach Christ & Culture in Paradox, Conversionists teach Christ Transforms Culture, Synthesists teach Christ Above Culture, and Culturalists teach The Christ of All Cultures.

If you can once get him to the point of thinking that ‘religion is all well up to a point,’ you can feel quite happy about his soul. A moderated religion is as good for us as no religion at all – and more amusing. – Screwtape Letters

NOTE: It is worthy of mention to members of the Lord’s Church that there is a heresy unique to the churches of Christ taught by erring brother Max King – a fourth perspective to the millennial concept & methodological approach – sweeping through certain regions of the United States – that has been called by two names – Trans-millennialism and/or Realized Eschatology. Basically, it is in apocalyptic timeline & nature - Full Preterist/Post-Millennialist with minor modification.

Methods of Interpretation – In his classic work “Worthy is the Lamb,” Ray Summers writes of five options: The *Futurist* Method – The *Continuous-Historical* Method – The *Philosophy of History* Method – The *Preterist* Method – The *Historical-Background* Method. The selected methodology can be correlated directly to the combination of choices made previous as to the Nature & Timeline of the Apocalypse. Due to the fact that most members of the churches of Christ believe in some combination of the partial preterist & amillennial perspectives on the Book of Revelation we shared with the author of “Worthy is the Lamb” his chosen interpretive method of Historical-Background. The Historical-Background Method of Interpretation is the only one of the five that contextually examines completely by questioning, per Summers - “authorship, date and place of writing, recipients and their condition, and the general condition of the world out of which the work came.”

Late Date or Early Date – In the churches of Christ this has been the only real Book of Revelation debate within the Brotherhood during the last century – When Was Revelation Written? It is either Early First Century Referencing the Fall of Jerusalem or Late First Century Referencing the Decline of Rome. Early 20th Century Bible Scholar Foy Wallace said it was the early date. Middle 20th Century FCC Bible Department Head Homer Hailey claimed it was the late date. Once late 20th Century Arthur Ogden published his book *The Avenging of the Apostles & Prophets* - the Brotherhood seems equally divided. The brochure promoting his book – which I still have – was all I needed to tilt in opinion toward prophecy fulfillment within the early date. Only by way of the early date do you have parallel fulfillment of Matthew 24, 2nd Thessalonians 2, & Revelation Chapter 20. Those that reject the early date seem to hold two different past dates for the Matthew 24 Olivet Discourse & Binding 1,000 Years of Revelation 20: 1 – 3 & multiple past or future fulfillment of 2nd Thessalonians 2: 3 – 10 @“Lawless One” or “Man of Sin.” Arthur Ogden writes of the absence of documental support for the early date: “Why did these men write so boldly of a Domitian persecution and fail to substantiate it by historical documentation? There are two reasons why we would not document a claim. First, the matter is accepted as historical fact and needs no verification, or, second, there is no evidence by which to document the claim...THERE IS NO HISTORICAL EVIDENCE THAT WOULD PROVE DOMITIAN WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE DEATH OF A SINGLE CHRISTIAN MUCH LESS THAT HE SLEW MANY THOUSANDS BATHING THE EMPIRE IN THEIR BLOOD. No historian current with Domitian’s reign records any evidence of Christians being persecuted though they did record the Neronian and Trajan persecutions. The evidence tends to suggest that the Domitian persecution is the creation of church writers late in the second and third centuries... Unless there is evidence to support a bloody Domitian persecution, which none of the many historical sources I have checked reveal, then, the affirmation of such a persecution is the affirmation of an untruth.” (Promotional Pamphlet for Ogden Book)

APOCALYPTIC LITERATURE & BIBLICAL NUMEROLOGY – Ferrell Jenkins said it best concerning *Apocalyptic Literature*: “This literature was highly relevant to the historical situations of the day. Daniel and Ezekiel wrote during the Babylonian exile to comfort people in their faithfulness, and to prepare them for trials even down to the times of Antiochus Epiphanes, and finally to the Roman Empire.

The Book of Revelation was written when God's Saints were being severely tried in the crucible that was called Rome. It served to reveal God's power to overcome all enemies and His disposition toward His afflicted ones. This book should serve as an encouragement to God's people, whenever they are persecuted, down to the end of time. In literature like the Apocalypse, one expects a great use of visions and symbols..." CARM's Matt Slick writes of *Biblical Numerology* in both Hebrew & Greek: "It seems quite obvious that the Bible uses numbers in pattern. One of the interesting features of Hebrew and Greek is that in both written languages there are no numeric characters, where we have numbers and letters [In English], they have only letters. So, in each language the letters are also used as numbers. When they are used, the context tells us which is which. They knew when they were writing numbers and when they were writing letters." Slick of CARM continues explaining that there is a number for Unity(1), a number for Division(2), a number for Divine Perfection(3), a number for Creation(4), a number for Grace(5), a number for Man(6), a number for Spiritual Perfection(7), a number for New Beginnings(8), a number for Judgment(9), a number for Testimony & Law(10), a number for Disorder(11), a number for Governmental Perfection(12), a number for Apostacy(13), a number for the Year of Jubilee Linked to the First Recorded Sermon of Jesus' Earthly Ministry(444)... The number one thousand symbolized "multitude", "immensity", or "fullness of quantity."
1,000 Number In Reference To Time – Days, Years, & Generations: "In every occurrence of such usage of the word 'thousand,' by itself, (1000) is not literal but symbolic. It represents a large (indeterminate) number or extended period of time."

"666" The Number of a Man – [Referred to also as *The Mark of the Beast* @Revelation Chapter 13 Verses 15 – 18]. In my opinion, both Homer Hailey & Arthur Ogden present two strong arguments equally credible. In *REVELATION: An Introduction and Commentary* Brother Hailey writes: "I believe, however, that the number does not represent an individual such as Nero, Domitian, or others per se, but the sum of that which is human... When John adds, 'It is the number of a man,' he omits the definite article before 'man,' thereby indicating that he has no particular individual in mind."

He is saying that the number represents that which is human; it is therefore a human number...Since the Apocalypse abounds in the symbolic use of numbers which express ideas rather than persons or literal quantities, the same principle should be followed in the interpretation of this number. Throughout the book, seven expresses the idea of perfection or completeness: the seven churches, seven horns, seven eyes, seven spirits, and so forth. So six, which falls below the sacred seven, can never be seven or reach perfection; therefore, it symbolizes the imperfect, that which is human and destined to fail. It is said that to the Jews the number six was an omen or symbol of dread and doom, so when it was tripled, 666, it represented the completeness of doom and failure.” In his book *The Avenging of the Apostles and Prophets*, Brother Ogden makes a credible case for verse 18 as having application to a specific individual on the Throne of Imperial Rome: “This verse is intended to explain the significance of the preceding verse and to identify the specific administration in power at the time of the Apocalypse. The number of the beast ‘is Six hundred threescore and six.’ The reference is to an ancient practice of figuring the number of one’s name by adding up the assigned total for each letter in his name. Many ancient languages used alphabetical characters as numerical figures with specific values attached to the letters. The process is known as **gematria**. [The] number of the name *Neron Caesar* is 666 and identifies the specific emperor ruling Rome at the time of the Apocalypse. The explanation is simple, factual, and in perfect harmony with the subject material of the Apocalypse.” Similarly, the “Man of Sin” of 2nd Thessalonians 2: 3 – 10 corresponds in timeline. Both Thessalonian Letters were written by Paul while in Athens around 51 AD., Caesar Nero ruled the Roman Empire from 54 AD to 68 AD, and the Jewish Campaign began approximately year 64 AD. [However, a plausible argument for the Late Date & Roman Punishment of Biblical Proportion could be made based on the unnatural number and large magnitude of Volcanic Eruptions, Tectonic Plate Earthquake Shifting, and Tsunami Tidal Waves wiping out many major coastal population centers of the Roman Empire Late First Century.]

First Century Wisdom in Numerological Interpretation – Author Bruce Winter in his recent book *Divine Honours for the Caesars: The First Christians Responses* in Section II: Playing the Numbers Game to Identify the Beast addresses how the original reading audience would have interpreted the meaning of Revelation 13:18. He writes: “A greater challenge was issued that would test the skills of his readership to undertake a more complicated form for numerical calculation – ‘this calls for wisdom,’ ‘here is wisdom,’ a term used in Greek for *skill* in various disciplines of learning including music, poetry, medicine, and divination, and here the author of the letter uses it of *gematria*. He further defines the person possessing this skill as ‘the one having knowledge.’ This clue is in the use of the imperative when he writes that ‘he must calculate the number of the beast,’ and then explains, ‘for the number of the beast is a man and his number is 666’ (13:18). The actual text does not have the Greek letter for six repeated three times but, i.e. 600, 60, 6. This followed the Greek convention of spelling each of the letters that were represented numerically – ‘six hundred,’ sixty,’ and ‘six’.

What is the numerical value of the Greek letters for ‘beast’? It totals 247 (9,8,100,10,70,50). So, he is not referring to a calculation of Greek letters of this term. However, ‘the same numerical technique was used in the Hebrew alphabet, and ‘beast’ in the Hebrew alphabet is 666 (400,200,10,6,50). The number of the beast is explicitly to coincide with another number. The writer explains, ‘For it is the number of a man’ and then discloses that number is ‘666’ (Revelation 13: 18). So, the total number for ‘beast’ and that for ‘man’ are the same. There is an **official external evidence of the numerical value of the name of Nero** in the Hebrew-Aramaic Script on an official deed of debt in A.D. 55 declared to be the second year of ‘Nero’.”

The Antichrist

“Won’t Antichrist *eventually* take over?”

“The idea that the Antichrist will rule the world has been a popular belief for centuries. And there have been many Antichrist candidates. But can the modern Antichrist doctrine be found in the Bible? I don’t believe it can. When each proposed biblical Antichrist figure is analyzed in context, Bible students will find that the modern Antichrist doctrine is a myth that has affected the way Christians live in the world and plan for the future.”

If the central prophetic cities in LaHaye’s *Left Behind* series are Babylon and Jerusalem, then the central prophetic character is the Antichrist. He makes his appearance in the first volume and is prominent in every volume thereafter. Nicolae Carpathia was “born in Romania.” He is described as “blonde and blue eyed, like the original Romanians, who came from Rome, before the Mongols affected their race.” LaHaye’s Antichrist must be Roman since he believes that the Antichrist arises out of a reconstituted Roman Empire. LaHaye tells us that many Romanians are of Italian descent. Though Nicolae was “born in Romania, his heritage is actually Italian.” LaHaye stresses that “many native Romanians” are Italian.⁴

This smooth-talking, very clever Antichrist will use the unseen power of Satan to disarm the world powers, “empower the United Nations,” and move the world to one currency with the ultimate goal of becoming a “global village” under his control. Of course, at first, Nicolae is benevolent. He does not act the way that most people would envision an antichrist to behave. Chloe says, “He looks like a breath of fresh air to me. If he starts trying to weasel his way into power, I might be suspicious, but a pacifist, content to be president of a small country? His only influence is his wisdom, and his only power is his sincerity and humility.”⁶

Separating fiction from fact when it comes to the Antichrist is difficult since no single place in the Bible provides a lengthy exposition of the subject as there is for the timing and events of the Tribulation (Matt. 24; Mark 13; Luke 21). The doctrine has to be pieced together from various biblical texts. So much fiction is wrapped up in LaHaye’s Antichrist character that it’s essential for us to turn to his nonfiction works on the subject to understand what he claims the Bible actually says about the Antichrist.

Building an Antichrist

For Tim LaHaye, the Antichrist is “the king of Babylon” (Isa. 14:4), “Lucifer” (Isa. 14:12 KJV), “the son of destruction” (2 Thess. 2:3), “the prince who is to come” (Dan. 9:26), “the little horn” (Dan. 7:8; 8:9), “the man of lawlessness” (2 Thess. 2:3), “the beast” (Rev. 13), and several other biblical characters all rolled into one. LaHaye asserts, “Many titles are given to Antichrist in the Scriptures—at least twenty in number.” This futurized composite Antichrist supposedly will make himself known during the seven-year Tribulation period, after the rapture of the church. LaHaye maintains that he is European, specifically Roman, since he arises out of the midst of the “ten horns” on the head of the “fourth beast” (Dan. 7:7–8, 19–26). The fourth beast, like the fourth kingdom in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream (Dan. 2), is said to be a distant future, revived Roman Empire. This is the same beast that rises out of the sea in Revelation (13:1–10).

As a man of peace, the Antichrist will make a covenant with the Jews guaranteeing them peace and security in their own land. In the middle of the covenant period, he will break his agreement and turn on the Jews. He will then make war with the Jewish saints and will overcome them (Rev. 13:17; Dan. 7:21). According to LaHaye, during this three-and-one-half-year period of time, two-thirds of the Jews living in Palestine will be killed (Zech. 13:8–9).

As a counterfeit Christ, the Antichrist will be given great power by the devil in an attempt to duplicate Jesus' miraculous works. He will even seek to match the Resurrection. He will seem to have suffered a mortal wound to the head but will then be miraculously resurrected (Rev. 13:3, 14). Of course, the world will be awestruck by this manifestation of supernatural power and follow him with undying loyalty and reverence.

According to this elaborate scenario, the world will be living under a tyranny directed by Satan through his Beast-Antichrist and False Prophet. Each and every person will be stamped with the dreaded identifying number 666 (Rev. 13:18)! This recipe for disaster will eventually lead to Armageddon where all the nations of the world will be brought against Israel (Rev. 16:13–16). Only the return of Christ will save Israel and the world.

When it is tested against sound biblical interpretation, will such a theory hold up? The issue of timing invalidates the entire modern Antichrist theory (Rev. 1:1, 3; 3:10; 22:10). Is it possible that what was prophecy when the New Testament was written is now history? Could the Beast of Revelation 13 and his attendant number 666 be referring to a well-known historical figure who played a prominent religious and political role during the time in which Revelation was written?

As we will see, LaHaye's modern doctrine of Antichrist is an amalgamation of biblical concepts, personalities, and events that are unrelated to one another or find their fulfillment in history. Trying to merge these divergent entities has led to consistent confusion for centuries in attempts to identify Antichrist. There have been literally hundreds of Antichrist candidates, everyone from Caligula and Domitian to Henry Kissinger and Ronald (6) Wilson (6) Reagan (6).⁹ All have one thing in common; all have been wrong.

The Biblical Antichrist

It's curious to read LaHaye's material on the Antichrist and learn that he briefly mentions the only verses that actually use the term. The word *antichrist* appears in only two of John's epistles (1 John 2:18, 22; 4:3; 2 John 7), and the term's definition is clear and precise. LaHaye admits this, but then adds to the definition by claiming, "The Bible repeatedly predicts, however, that one person will arise as the embodiment of all anti-Christian attitudes, purposes, and motives that Satan has implanted in his emissaries throughout past centuries." Yet one cannot reach this conclusion by studying John's *biblical* description of Antichrist. John's Antichrist is

- anyone "who denies that Jesus is the Christ" (1 John 2:22).
- anyone who "denies" the Father and Son (1 John 2:23).
- "every spirit that does not confess Jesus" (1 John 4:3).
- "those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the antichrist" (2 John 7).

None of John's statements relate to the modern doctrine of the Antichrist as outlined by LaHaye and many other prophecy writers. LaHaye even has to admit "that the term the *Antichrist*, which has been universally accepted by fundamental Bible teachers and prophetic students, is nowhere in the Bible used in connection with a specific person." Having written this, LaHaye spends thousands of pages in his *Left Behind* series applying the term to a specific person. John's Antichrist doctrine is a dispute over the nature of Jesus Christ. John did not have a particular individual in mind; he was referring to *individuals* who taught that Jesus Christ is not who the Bible says He is:

In one word, "Antichrist" meant for John just denial of what we should call the doctrine, or let us rather say the fact, of the Incarnation. By whatever process it had been brought about, "Christ" had come to denote for John the Divine Nature of our Lord, and so far to be synonymous with "Son of God." To deny that Jesus is the Christ was not to him therefore merely to deny that he is the Messiah, but to deny that he is the Son of God; and was equivalent therefore to "denying the Father and the Son"—that is to say, in our modern mode of speech, the doctrine—in fact—of the Trinity, which is the implicate of the Incarnation. To deny that Jesus is Christ come—or is the Christ coming—in flesh, was again just to refuse to recognize in Jesus Incarnate God. Whosoever, says John, takes up this attitude toward Jesus is Antichrist.

Is this interpretation possible? Aren't we supposed to look for a future apostasy out of which *the* Antichrist will arise? As the New Testament makes clear, apostasy was present in John's day. Paul had to counter a "different gospel" that was "contrary" to what he had preached (Gal. 1:6–9). He had to battle "false brethren" (Gal. 2:4, 11–21; 3:1–3; 5:1–12). He warned the Ephesian church leadership that "men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them" (Acts 20:28–30). Theological insurrection came from within the Christian community in the first century.

Many people prior to Jerusalem's destruction in A.D. 70 questioned and disputed basic Christian doctrines such as the Resurrection (2 Tim. 2:18). Some even claimed that the Resurrection was an impossibility (1 Cor. 15:12). Others within the church prohibited marriage (1 Tim. 4:1–3) and the goodness of God's creation (Col. 2:8, 18–23). The apostles found themselves defending the faith against numerous false teachers and "false apostles" (Rom. 16:17–18; 2 Cor. 11:13–14; Phil. 3:18–19; 1 Tim. 1:3–7; 2 Tim. 4:2–5). Apostasy increased to such an extent that Paul had to write letters to a young pastor who was experiencing the doctrinal disputes firsthand (1 Tim. 1:19–20; 6:20–21; 2 Tim. 2:16–18; 3:1–9, 13; 4:10, 14–16).

Peter wrote,

"False prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves" (2 Peter 2:1).

John listed several movements that were affecting the church with false doctrines: "evil men" (Rev. 2:2), "those who call themselves apostles" but who are found to be "false" (2:2), a revival of "the teaching of Balaam" (2:14), those who "hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans" (2:15), and the toleration of the "woman Jezebel, who ... leads [God's] bond-servants astray so that they commit acts of immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols" (2:20). An apostasy was alive and well on planet Earth in the *first century* (2 Thess. 2:3).

John told us that those antichrists,

“went out from *us*, but they were not really of *us*; for if they had been of *us*, they would have remained with *us*; but they went out, in order that it might be shown that they all are not of *us*” (1 John 2:19, emphasis added).

The Bible leaves us with no doubt: the Antichrist was a *first-century* movement.

Conspicuous By Its Absence

One of the arguments that LaHaye uses for his belief that the church is raptured before a future Tribulation period is that the word *church* does not appear after Revelation 4:1 when a voice told John, “Come up here.” Following this logic, then, how does LaHaye support his claim that Revelation describes a future seven-year Tribulation period in which Antichrist is in control of the world, when the word *Antichrist* does not appear anywhere in Revelation? The absence of the word *Antichrist* is significant since the John who defined Antichrist for us in two of his short epistles is the same John who penned Revelation. Edward Hindson, one of four associate editors of LaHaye’s *Prophecy Study Bible*, writes, “Ironically, the term ‘antichrist’ appears only in 1 John 2:18–22; 4:3; and 2 John 1:7.” Having acknowledged this, Hindson, like LaHaye, does not explain why John never uses the term in Revelation, even though Antichrist is the book’s main evil character.

More Than One

According to the Bible, Antichrist is not a single individual. John wrote, “Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have arisen; from this we know that it is the last hour” (1 John 2:18). It is possible that the early church “heard” that one man was to come on the scene who was to be *the* Antichrist. John seemed to be correcting this mistaken notion:

John is adducing not an item of Christian teaching, but only a current legend—Christian or other—in which he recognizes an element of truth and isolates it for the benefit of his readers. In that case we may understand him less as expounding than as openly correcting it—somewhat as, in the closing page of his Gospel, he corrects another saying of similar bearing which was in circulation among the brethren, to the effect that he himself should not die but should tarry till the Lord comes [JOHN 21:18–23].

In a similar manner, the people in Jesus’ day had “heard” certain things that were only partially true. Jesus corrected them in their misreading of the Bible (Matt. 5:21, 27, 33, 38, 43). Christians are bound by what is written in the Bible, not what people claim the Bible teaches.

The Last Hour

Whether there was to be only one or many antichrists, John made it clear that “it is the last hour” or “the last time” for those who *first* read his letters (1 John 2:18). How do we know this?

John said, “Even *now* many antichrists have arisen.” And in case a reader missed his point, he repeated it: “From *this* we know that it *is* the last hour.” John did not describe a period of time thousands of years in the future. The presence of antichrists in John’s time was an indication that the end of the age was upon them. Previous predictions about those who would oppose Jesus as the Messiah were being fulfilled. The antichrists were manifesting themselves within the church community in John’s day. Paul told his fellow Christians, “Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision” (Phil. 3:2). “The party of the circumcision” (Gal. 2:12) insisted that the shed blood of Jesus was not enough to save sinners. The Judaizers demanded that Old Testament blood rituals and ordinances had to be followed. For them, “Christ will be of no benefit” (Gal. 5:2). Because of the corruption of the gospel, John described the Judaizers as a “synagogue of Satan” (Rev. 2:9; 3:9).

John wrote that it was the “last hour” for *his contemporaries*. The fact that there were antichrists alive and well in his day was evidence that it was the last hour. Compare the straightforward statement of Scripture with LaHaye’s interpretation of “the last hour”:

“In 1 John [2:18] the apostle speaks of ‘the last hour.’ He is referring here to the new economy of God’s grace, warning that in this church age there would be ‘many antichrists ... by which we know that it is the last hour.’ He was right: For two thousand years the church age has not been without false christs and antichrists sent by Satan to deceive the saints.”

LaHaye, who insists on interpreting the Bible literally, has turned “the last hour” or “the last time” into two thousand years of church history. Keep in mind that Jesus had told His disciples years before, John among them, that their generation would see the destruction of the temple and the city of Jerusalem (Matt. 24:1–34). John, writing close to the time when this prophecy was to be fulfilled, could point to the rise of “many antichrists” as evidence that it was the last hour for *his* generation. The fact that people were denying that Jesus had come in the flesh was proof enough that Jesus’ prediction was true and on time (2 John 7).

Christians had heard that “the spirit of the antichrist” was coming. For them, “*now* it is *already* in the world” (1 John 4:3, emphasis added). Antichrists had arrived. It is inappropriate to look for a future political leader and describe him as *the* Antichrist when the Bible makes no such application.

An antichrist, therefore, is *anyone* who “denies that Jesus is the Christ,” that is, *anyone* “who denies the Father and the Son” (1 John 2:22). “Every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God ... *this* is the spirit of the antichrist” (1 John 4:3, emphasis added). “For *many* deceivers have gone out into the world, *those* who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. *This* is the deceiver and the antichrist” (2 John 7, emphasis added). John’s very exact definition does not apply to “the king of Babylon” (Isa. 14:4), “Lucifer” (Isa. 14:12 κϐ), “the little horn” (Dan. 7:8; 8:9), “a king of fierce countenance” (Dan. 8:23 κϐ), “the prince who is to come” (Dan. 9:26) or “the mighty king” (Dan. 11:36), since denying “that Jesus is the Christ,” denying “the Father and Son,” not confessing Jesus, and not acknowledging “Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh” were foreign concepts to them and their time.

The Beast

If the antichrist is a term that was used to describe anyone who did not believe that Jesus was God incarnate, and the term is not found in Revelation, then who or what is the Beast of Revelation 13? Actually, two beasts conspire together to oppose the things of God: a sea beast (13:1–10) and a land beast (13:11–18). The time parameters of Revelation limit who the beasts can be. Because the events of Revelation were to happen “shortly” (Rev. 1:1), the time was “near” (1:3) for those who first read the prophecy, and the temple was still standing (11:1–2), the list of Beast candidates must also be near in time to those who first picked up and read or heard the original scroll. Nero Caesar fits three essential criteria in determining the identity of the sea beast who will “make war with the saints” (13:7): the time of his reign (a.d. 54 to 68), the numerical value of his official name and title, and his character as a persecutor of “the saints.”

The Beast’s Name and Number

When trying to match “six hundred and sixty-six” with a historical figure, we need more than a plausible candidate; we need a relevant candidate. The first readers of Revelation were told to “calculate the number of the beast, for the number is that of a man; and his number is six hundred and sixty-six” (13:18). Since Revelation was written to a first-century audience, we should expect the first-century readers to be able to calculate the number with relative ease and understand the result. They would have had few candidates from which to choose. Notice that the number is “six hundred and sixty-six,” not three sixes. LaHaye misidentifies the number when he writes, “The plain sense of Scripture tells us that it comprises the numbers: six, six, six.” The three Greek letters that make up the number represent 600, 60, and 6.

Ancient numbering systems used an alphanumeric method. This is true of the Latin (Roman) system that is still common today: I = 1, V = 5, X = 10, L = 50, C = 100, D = 500, M = 1,000. Greek and Hebrew follow a similar method: each letter of each alphabet represents a number. The first nine letters represent 1–9. The tenth letter represents 10, with the nineteenth letter representing 100 and so on. Since the book of Revelation is written in a Hebrew context by a Jew with numerous allusions to the Old Testament, we should expect the solution to deciphering the meaning of six hundred and sixty-six to be Hebraic, “The reason clearly is that, *while [John] writes in Greek, he thinks in Hebrew*, and the thought has naturally affected the vehicle of expression.”

Is there anything in John’s writings, especially in Revelation, that hints at this use of both Greek and Hebrew? The “angel of the abyss” was described in two ways: “His name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in the Greek he has the name Apollyon” (Rev. 9:11). Something similar was done with “Har-Magedon” (hill of Megiddo) or “Ar-Magedon” (city of Megiddo) (Rev. 16:16). Megiddo was an Old Testament city (1 Chron. 7:29), the place where King Josiah was killed (2 Chron. 35:20–27). In John’s gospel, the place where Pilate sat down to judge Jesus was called “The Pavement,” but John called attention to its Hebrew name “Gabbatha” (John 19:13). In the same chapter, John wrote how Pilate had an inscription placed on the cross above Jesus’ head written in “Hebrew, Latin, and in Greek” (John 19:20). Going from Greek to Hebrew was typical and expected since Jews spoke Hebrew.

When Nero Caesar's name is transliterated into Hebrew, which a first-century Jew would probably have done immediately, he would have gotten *Neron Kesar* or simply *nrwn qsr*, since Hebrew has no letters to represent vowels. (The *w* represents the "o" sound and the *q* represents the "k" sound in Hebrew.) "It has been documented by archaeological finds that a first century Hebrew spelling of Nero's name provides us with precisely the value of 666. Jastrow's lexicon of the Talmud contains this very spelling." When we take the letters of Nero's name and spell them in Hebrew, we get the following numeric values: n (50) + r (200) + w (6) + n (50) + q (100) + s (60) + r (200) = 666.

Every Jewish reader, of course, saw that the Beast was a symbol of Nero. And both Jews and Christians regarded Nero as also having close affinities with the serpent or dragon ... The Apostle, writing as a Hebrew, was evidently thinking as a Hebrew ... Accordingly, the Jewish Christian would have tried the name as he *thought* of the name—that is in *Hebrew letters*. And the moment that he did this the secret stood revealed. No Jew ever thought of Nero except as "*Neron Kesar*."

How does the beast coming out of the earth or land fit into this equation? The land beast was most likely Jewish, probably the religious leaders who were continually fighting against their countrymen in Judea who embraced Jesus as the Messiah. He had "two horns like a lamb," but "he spoke as a dragon" (Rev. 13:11). Jesus warned His disciples about this character: "Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves" (Matt. 7:15). They might present themselves as God's religious representatives, but underneath the "sheep's clothing," a dragon was present. The "beast coming up out of the earth" with the "two horns" most likely represents the Jewish high priest and the Herodian dynasty. It was "Herod the king" (Matt. 2:1), also called Herod the Great, who slaughtered "all the male children ... from two years old and under" in an attempt to kill Jesus (2:16), "the King of the Jews" (2:2). "Herod the tetrarch" (Matt. 14:1), whom Jesus described as "that fox" (Luke 13:32), arrested John the Baptist and had him beheaded because John had been saying to him, "It is not lawful for you to have [your brother's wife as your own]" (Matt. 14:3–12). Herod Agrippa I killed James the brother of John (Acts 12:2) and was heralded as "a god" by the people and "did not give God the glory" (Acts 12:20–23).

The "Herodians" aligned themselves with the Pharisees against Jesus (Mark 3:6; 12:13). Philip Mauro's comments are especially helpful:

For history, both sacred and profane, sets before us a most notable character, one who appears upon the scene and occupies the center stage in Israel just at "the end" of the Asmonean era, and one who answers to *every item* of the prophetic description. We have reference to that strange, despotic, ungovernable and unspeakably cruel personage, whom the evangelists designate emphatically as—"Herod the King"—that remarkable character who was a usurper upon the throne of David when Christ, the true King, was born.

The high priest oversaw the execution of Stephen (Acts 7:1, 54–60), and Herod "laid hands on some who belonged to the church in order to mistreat them. And he had James the brother of John put to death with a sword" (Acts 12:1–2). Notice that Herod was delighted "that it pleased the Jews" (Acts 12:3).

The Beast's Character

Nero had his mother bludgeoned and slashed to death by marines ordered to do the job after his attempts to poison and drown her failed. A few years later, he had his wife, Octavia, killed so he could marry his mistress, Poppaea. He kicked Poppaea to death when she complained about him coming home late. But his persecution of Christians led the first-century church to regard Nero as Revelation's "beast" in confirmation of what they read in Revelation. Miriam Griffin, tutor in ancient history and Fellow of Somerville College, Oxford, writes, "In A.D. 64 came the most serious threat to Nero's popularity when the Great Fire broke out. It was widely believed that Nero first used the blaze as a backdrop for a virtuoso performance and then restarted it to clear the ground for his reconstruction of Rome. This time, force was used on a despised minority, the Christians, who were burned alive to illuminate circus games."

Rumors circulated that Nero had set the fire. "Nero first attempted to quash the rumors by religious ceremonies designed to appease the supposedly angry gods." He needed a scapegoat, "so he decided to fasten guilt on a human culprit, the Christians," using them as "human torches."²⁵ John said of the Beast, "It was also given to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them" (Rev. 13:7).

The Testimony of the Church

Christian history supports the view that Nero was the Beast. "All the earliest Christian writers on the Apocalypse, from Irenaeus down to Victorinus of Pettau and Commodian in the fourth, and Andreas in the fifth, and St. Beatus in the eighth century, connect Nero, or some Roman Emperor, with the Apocalyptic Beast." Although confusing the Antichrist with the Beast, Miriam Griffin writes that "Nero is the Anti-Christ whose persecution of the Christians heralds the destruction of Rome. This view of Nero as Anti-Christ continued to be celebrated by the Church Fathers and by later Christian writers. The picture of him as the incarnation of evil triumphed as Christianity triumphed." Tertullian (ca. 155–220), in chronicling the sufferings of the apostles, wrote, "At Rome Nero was the first who stained with blood the rising faith."²⁸

A curious variation on 666 adds validity to the argument that Nero was considered to be the sea beast of Revelation 13. Some Greek New Testament manuscripts read 616 instead of 666. Why would someone making a copy of the Revelation scroll make such a number change? "Perhaps the change was intentional, seeing that the Greek form *Neron Caesar* written in Hebrew characters (*nrwn qsr*) is equivalent to 666, whereas the Latin form *Nero Caesar* (*nrw qsr*) is equivalent to 616." Keep in mind that there were no copy machines in the first century. If a person wanted a copy of a manuscript, someone had to copy it for him by hand. No matter how carefully a scribe worked, mistakes were inevitable. Some mistakes occurred when a scribe was making a copy of a known copy. He might have thought the copy he was copying was mistaken and it was up to him to correct it. A Latin copyist might have thought that 666 was an error because *Nero Caesar* did not add up to 666 when transliterated into Latin. He then changed 666 to 616 to conform to the Latin rendering since it was generally accepted that Nero was the Beast. In either case, a Hebrew transliteration nets 666, while a Latin spelling nets 616. Nero was the "man" and 666 was his number.

Conclusion

While LaHaye paints a fascinating picture of an end-time world leader, whom he describes as Antichrist, we have to ask why the biblical definition of this figure does not match his amalgamated world leader. We also must ask why LaHaye insists on skipping over centuries of history in search of an “antichrist candidate” when there are a number of more likely candidates that fall within the time frame of first-century biblical history. Further, we have to ask why LaHaye’s understanding of Antichrist is so certain when hundreds of speculative prophecy writers throughout the centuries were equally certain of their choice. Lastly, we must ask why LaHaye disagrees with Paul when he states that the “mystery of lawless was already at work,” and John assured his first-century readers that the presence of antichrists in his day was evidence “that it is the last hour.”¹

¹ DeMar, G. (2009). [*Left Behind: Separating Fact from Fiction*](#) (pp. 131–150). Powder Springs, GA: American Vision.

The Idea of the Anti-Christ in the New Testament

Then I saw a Beast emerge from the sea; it had seven heads and ten horns,
And each of its heads was marked with blasphemous titles.

—Revelation 13:1

The circumstances surrounding Nero's suicide by sword blow in 68 ce—let alone the more bizarre aspects of his reign—were so mysterious that they gave rise to a host of stories and legends.

—Bernard McGinn, *Anti-Christ*

There will be three signs of the coming of the Lord. First, a sign spread out in heaven (Matthew 24:30). Second, the sign of the sound of the trumpet (Matthew 24:31a). And third, the resurrection of the dead (Matthew 24:31b).

—*The Didache* early second-century document.

INTRODUCTION

The term *Anti-Christos* occurs five times in the New Testament. Most of these appear in 1 John (2:18, 2:22, and 4:3), and one in 2 John 7. In all these references, they refer to a figure who brings a different perspective on Jesus, particularly one that says He was “never in the flesh.” In none of these references does the term refer to a celestial embodiment of evil, nor as an equivalent of Satan, nor as a son of Satan. In much contemporary literature, the idea of the Anti-Christ has become a synonym with the demonic, or as an off-spring of the devil; but, as we shall see, the materials from the New Testament of the Anti-Christ make none of these claims.

THE ANTI-CHRIST IN THE JOHANNINE EPISTLES

Among the epistles in the New Testaments, if Hebrews is the Epistle of Priesthood, James, the Epistle of Practice, and First Peter, the Epistle of Hope, then the First Epistle of John, is the Letter of Life, or “Eternal Life.” To have eternal life for the letters of John is to have the gospel equivalent of being in the “Kingdom of God,” or Paul's “being in Christ.”

The apocalyptic categories of light and darkness, good and evil, and love and hate pervade the Johannine epistles. These epistles have a dual focus: an emphasis on the Incarnation, and an emphasis on the love of God. The core of the doctrine of the Incarnation for John is that God was in Christ, that is, in Jesus, who was “born of the Virgin Mary, and suffered under Pontius Pilate.” God stooped low for humanity and our salvation.

John never tires of saying things like, “Little children love one another,” but he also blazes indignantly at pseudo versions of Christianity, which, feigning love for God, looks with loveless eyes upon its Christian brethren. It is in the context of these railings against false prophets that mentions of the Anti-Christ arise in the Johannine epistles.

The word *Anti-Christos* (Anti-Christ) appears only in John's epistles, though there are parallels to those passages in Revelation, and the letters of Paul. The term *Anti-Christos* appears five times in First and Second John—once in the plural form and four times in the singular form. The writer of John's epistles seems to suppose his readers are acquainted with the idea of the Anti-Christ. In 1 John 2:18, the writer tells us, “Children, it is the last hour! As you have heard, the Anti-Christ is coming.”¹²

First John 4:3 also suggests these early Christians already had an idea of the Anti-Christ: "And every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. And this is the spirit of the Anti-Christ, of which you have heard that it is coming . . ." ¹³

The writer of John's epistles also supplies some observations of the character and workings of the Anti-Christ: "Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ. This is the Anti-Christ, the one who denies the Father and Son." ¹⁴

In 2 John 7, we get another description of the character of the Anti-Christ: "Many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh; any such person is a deceiver and Anti-Christ." ¹⁵

Thus, John suggests that false teachings and deception are signs that Anti-Christ is at work in the world. First John 2:18 also tells us that the time of Anti-Christ is the "last hour," in accordance with Jewish apocalyptic beliefs about the end of the world. In the Johannine epistles, Anti-Christ seems to describe any false teacher, false prophet, or corrupter of the Christian faith. John's letters also sometimes seem to indicate that the Anti-Christ is a particular person or spirit of deception that speaks false teachings, and whose presence is a sign of the end times.

One peculiar element about 2 John 7 is that the tense changes from the past "has come" [*elluthota*] in the flesh (1 John 4:2) to the present participle "as come [*erchomenon*] in the flesh." This makes it possible that this is a reference to Jesus' Second Coming: he is coming (i.e., will come) in the flesh. (Compare 1 John 2:28 and 3:2.) Some exegetes translate the participle *erchomenon* in the past tense, as if its meaning were identical to 1 John 4:2.

First John 4:3 suggests that the Anti-Christ is "in the world already." 1 John also posits the idea that the Anti-Christ is among a class of Anti-Christ: "As you have heard, the Anti-Christ is coming, so many Anti-Christ have come. From this we know that is the last hour." ¹⁶

The writer of John's letters speak of "many Anti-Christ," who typify the "spirit of the Anti-Christ, that was both present in the first century ("is in the world already"), and continues to exist down to this day. As the writer concludes, such an anti-Christ (or opponent of Christ) is anyone who "denies that Jesus is the Christ," "denies the Father and Son," "does not confess Jesus," and does not "confess the coming of Jesus."

1 John 2:26–27 suggests that John the Divine wrote to the recipients of his epistle for the purpose of directly warning them of a "spirit of error," a false Messiah, so that they will not be deceived. The text tells us: "I write these things to you concerning those who would deceive you, as for you the anointing that you received from him abides in you, and so do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and not a lie, just as it has taught you, abide in him." ¹⁷

THE ANTI-CHRIST IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION

When we move from the other books of the New Testament to the Revelation of Saint John the Divine, we feel that we have crossed over from familiar territory to an alien world. Revelation, to the modern reader, is a weird and fantastic book full of angels and trumpets, and earthquakes, of beasts, dragons, and demons. We should not be surprised to learn that the early Church had some doubts about the canonical status of Revelation.

Like other apocalypses, the Book of Revelation shows a dependence on various other religious works, borrowing 245 times from the Old Testament, many from Daniel, nine from the New Testament, and several suggestive references from non-canonical literature. The book is written mostly in prose; 37 of 394 verses of Revelation are poetry.

The book's language is clouded with mystery, symbolism, myth, and numerology. The number seven, for example, is used 54 times, applying to churches, seals, heads, trumpets, angels, bowls, and plagues. Multiples of 12 and 1,000 are also used throughout the book. In the history of the Christian tradition, many scholars have tied some of these images to their views of the Anti-Christ.

Revelation is the finest example of early Christian apocalyptic literature. The Bible contains only one other book of the same genre, Daniel; but between 200 bce and 100 ce, Judaism produced many such books. For the most part, these books fell into disrepute and were gradually forgotten, so that it is only in recent times we have rediscovered many of them.

Contrary to popular belief, and to the surprise of many Christians, the words "Anti-Christ" or "Anti-Christ," do not appear in the Book of Revelation. It does speak of the Tribulation, the beast, the dragon, the Whore of Babylon, and of false prophets, but nowhere does it use the word Anti-Christ.

Nearly all New Testament scholars agree that the Anti-Christ is to be found in *Revelation*, but they disagree about where he is to be found. Some say the Anti-Christ is to be identified with the "beast" of Revelation 11:7, others with the "Red Dragon" of chapter 12. Other scholars, with the description of an animal having "seven heads and ten horns" in chapter 13, while many claim the Anti-Christ is identified with a beast with "two horns like a lamb," and spoke "like a dragon," in Revelation 13:11.

Still other scholars suggest the "the scarlet colored beast" with "seven heads and ten horns," is the Anti-Christ, or finally, Satan "loosed out of his prison," and "seducing all nations" of chapter 20 is the best description of the Anti-Christ in the New Testament.

Although the Book of Revelation does not use the term Anti-Christ, it does warn against a false Christ image that becomes a living icon and an object of worship:

Then I saw another beast that rose out of the Earth; it had two horns like a lamb, and it spoke like a dragon. It uses all the authority of the first beast, whose mortal wound had been healed. It performs great signs, even making fire come down from heaven to Earth in the sight of all; and by the signs it is allowed to perform on the part of the beast, it deceives the inhabitants of Earth, telling them to make an image for the beast that had been wounded by the sword, and yet lived.²⁰

Bernard McGinn begins his discussion of the Anti-Christ in the Book of Revelation this way: "The mythological frame work of heavenly opposition between the forces of good and evil that sets the stage for the coming of the Anti-Christ is described in chapter 12, the famous vision of the pregnant Queen of Heaven who is attacked by a 'huge Red Dragon, which has seven heads and ten horns.'"²¹ McGinn goes on to point out: "This Dragon, identified with the Devil in verse 13, does not prevail over the Woman and her male child, the Messiah. He is cast down to earth "to make war on the rest of her children, that is, all who obey God's commandments and bear witness for Jesus."²²

THE ANTI-CHRIST AND 2 CORINTHIANS

Of all of Paul's letters, the second letter to the Corinthians is as close as Paul comes to an autobiography. Paul's life is offered with none of the jagged edges filled in. The letter is an authentic, uncensored, and sometimes bewildering account of Paul's life. Anyone who reads 2 Corinthians will notice an abrupt change that comes over the letter after the ninth chapter. Until then, Paul's tone has been one of thankfulness and reconciliation. But in chapter ten this attitude suddenly changes to a fierce defense of Paul's work, and a denouncing "false apostles," who Paul believed were forces of the Devil.

On the other hand, 2 Corinthians is a subtle text full of language that is an exegetical nightmare. Paul uses a variety of literary and rhetorical strategies, in his attempt to establish the foundations of his faith. From 2 Corinthians, we derive the idea of the “old” and “new” covenants. Chief concerns for our purposes in 2 Corinthians are what we might call “Paul the Visionary,” specifically his revelation in 2 Corinthians 12. Also of interest for our purposes is 2 Corinthians 6:15, and its use of the Beliar figure.

In 2 Corinthians 12:1–12, Paul refers to the “signs of a true apostle,” and apologizes to the Corinthians for not making these signs more clearly. Again, Paul seems to be worrying about “false apostles” that may try to deceive the faithful.

One other passage in Saint Paul is sometimes used in connection to discussions of the Anti-Christ is 2 Corinthians 6:15. The Revised Standard Version translates the verse this way: “What agreement does Christ have with Beliar? What does a believer share with an unbeliever?”⁵⁰

The Hebrew word Belial or Beliar is the name of a Devil in many apocryphal Jewish documents. In the “War of the Sons of Light and Sons of Darkness,” a text found among the Dead Sea Scrolls, Belial is the leader of the Sons of Darkness: “But for the corruption that have made Belial, an angel of hostility. All his dominions are in darkness, and his purpose is to bring about wickedness and guilt. All the spirits associated with him are angels of destruction.”⁵¹

Some exegetes suggest that the name Beliar comes from Psalm 18:4–5: “The cords of death encompass me, the torrents of perdition assailed me. The cords of Sheol entangle me, the snares of death confronted me.”⁵²

The rivers of Belial are spoken of throughout apocryphal literature. The figure appears to have been a god of the underworld, and later becomes a name that plays a role in the Anti-Christ tradition. In the *Ascension of Moses*, we get a description of the beginning of the End Times (10:1), where “then will God’s rule be made manifest over all his creatures, and then will the Devil have an end.”⁵³

Belial, it should be clear, is connected to the fallen angel’s story, and was thought to be the chief of the bad angels against Michael and his minions. The figure also appears in the apocryphal “Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs,” [Armenian Canon] where humans must choose between God and the forces of Belial. In this text, we get the notion that when the Messiah comes, he will do battle with Belial and his angels. In some early circles of Jewish Apocalyptic, Belial was claimed to be the Messiah. This led some first century Christians to label him the Anti-Christ.

In other early Christian association Belial was used as a synonym for Satan or Lucifer. Throughout Christian history, the name has been used for both purposes, as a synonym for the Devil, and as a name for the Anti-Christ.

Belial played a heavy role in the Christian apocrypha and pseudepigraphia. He appears in *Jubilees*, [Coptic Canon] where uncircumcised heathens are called “sons of Belial,” and in a number of other texts as well.

In the history of the West, Belial is sometimes associated with the Anti-Christ in particular and the demonic in general. In early Christianity, the name Belial is sometimes associated with Emperor Nero who would return as the Anti-Christ.

THE ANTI-CHRIST AND FALSE PROPHETS

A number of passages in the New Testament have been used over the centuries to show a connection between the Anti-Christ and false prophets. This material is as old as Deuteronomy 18:20–21 that tells us: “But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in my name which I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that same prophet shall die.”⁵⁹

Second Peter 2:1 speaks of “false teachers among you who will secretly introduce destructive heresies,” even denying the sovereignty of God, “will have swift destruction brought on them.”⁶⁰ Romans 16:17 urges us to: “Brothers and sisters, to keep an eye on those who cause dissensions and offenses, in opposition to the teaching that you have learned; avoid them.”⁶¹

These passages and many others have been used in the history of Christian exegeses as evidence for the coming of the Anti-Christ, as well as the Final Enemy being a deceiver and a false teacher. Matthew 7:15 has been used for similar purposes. The text tells us that both good and bad people are known by their deeds.⁶²

In the Gospel of John 5:43, Jesus tells us: “I have come in my Father’s name, and you do not accept me; If another comes in his own name, you will accept him.”⁶³

These and many other pericopes are often tied to I John 2, where 2:22 talks of “men who will lead you astray,”⁶⁴ and II John 4:1–3 that tells us to: “Do you believe in every spirit but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.”⁶⁵

In Acts of the Apostles 20:29–30, Paul tells us: “I know that after I have gone, savage wolves will come among you, not sparing the flock. Some will even come from your own group distorting the truth in order to entice disciples to follow them.”⁶⁶

False prophets are also spoken of in a number of other passages in the New Testament. And many of those passages have often been linked to the Anti-Christ in the history of Christian interpretation.

In the gospel of Luke, Jesus refers to the idea of false prophets in the Old Testament: “Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for that is how their fathers treated the false prophets.”⁶⁷

In Acts, Paul and Barnabus encounter a false prophet named Elymas Bar-Jesus, on the island of Cyprus. Acts 13:6–12 tells us:

They traveled through the whole island until they came to Paphos. There they met a Jewish sorcerer and false prophet named Bar-Jesus, who was an attendant of the proconsul, Sergius Paulus. The proconsul, an intelligent man, sent for Barnabas and Saul because he wanted to hear the word of God. But Elymas the sorcerer (for that is what his name means) opposed them and tried to turn the proconsul from the faith. Then Saul, who was called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looking straight at Elymas and said, “You are a child of the Devil and an enemy of all that is right. You are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery. Will you never stop perverting the right ways of the Lord? Now the hand of the Lord is against you. You are going to be blind, and for a time you will be unable to see the light of the sun.”

Immediately mist and darkness came over him, and he groped about, seeking someone to lead him by the hand. When the proconsul saw what had happened, he believed, for he was amazed at the teaching about the Lord.⁶⁸

ANTI-CHRIST AND THE TRIBE OF DAN

One early Christian tradition about the Anti-Christ suggests that the Final Enemy will be from the tribe of Dan, and that his followers will be Jews. This claim in the early Church was supported by two Biblical passages. The first of these is Genesis 49:17, that refers to Dan “shall be a serpent, a viper that bites the horse’s heels.”⁶⁹ This passage may refer to the fact that the tribe of Dan was historically believed to be one that fell into idolatry during Biblical times, leading members of the other eleven tribes into idolatry as well.

In Revelation 7:1–8 we get a description of eleven of the tribes of Israel. The tribe that is missing is Dan. It seems to suggest that none of the 144,000 Jewish evangelists shall come from the tribe of Dan. There are, however, other lists of the tribes of Israel where some of the twelve are missing, so that may be what is the case in chapter seven of Revelation as well.

The notion that the Anti-Christ and his followers will be of Jewish descent is often based in the early Church on Daniel 11:37. This verse in the Hebrew Old Testament looks this way: “He shall pay no respect to the gods of his ancestors, or to the one beloved by women; he shall pay no respect to any other god, for he shall consider himself greater than all.”⁷⁰ The following verse tells us: “He shall honor the god of fortresses instead of these, a god whom his ancestors did not know, he shall honor with gold and silver, with precious stones and costly gifts.”⁷¹

In the early Church these verses in Daniel were taken to mean that the Anti-Christ will not worship the God of Israel, and that he will use bribery to persuade believers to follow him. Some exegetes in the early Church also tie these verses to John 5:43 that seem to suggest that the Anti-Christ may be accepted as the long-awaited Jewish Messiah.

Both Irenaeus’ *Against Heresies* and Hippolytus’ “On Christ and Anti-Christ,” held of tradition that Anti-Christ will be a Jew, and that he will come from the tribe of Dan. Irenaeus bases his judgment on Jeremiah 8:16, the Hebrew of which goes like this: “The snorting of their horses is heard from Dan; at the sound of the neighing of their stallions the whole land quakes.”⁷²

Irenaeus remarks that Dan is, in view of this tradition, not in the Apocalypse (Rev 7:5–7) among the 144,000 saved ones of the twelve tribes.⁷³ For Irenaeus, Dan became a symbol of wrong-doing. He [Dan] was placed in the north (Num 2:25) because, as Irenaeus says, “This is a region of darkness and evil.”⁷⁴ As Irenaeus puts it:

And Jeremiah does not merely point out his [Anti-Christ] sudden coming, but he even indicates the tribe from which he will come where he says, “We shall hear the voices of this swift horses from Dan; the whole earth shall be moved by the voice of the neighing of his galloping horses; he shall also come and devour the earth, and the fullness thereof, the city also, and they will dwell therein.” This too is the reason that this tribe is not reckoned in the Apocalypse along with those which are saved.⁷⁵

Bousset also speaks on the idea of the Anti-Christ coming from the tribe of Dan. He tells us: “Nevertheless the opinion that the Anti-Christ is to come from Dan occurs also in the Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs, a document probably of Jewish origin. Unfortunately, the text is here so corrupt that no definite conclusion can be arrived at.”⁷⁶

Bousset suggests that the belief that the Anti-Christ shall come from the tribe of Dan is of Jewish origins. It may well have been a common Jewish belief around the time of the writing of the Book of Daniel.

THE ANTI-CHRIST IN THE POST-GOSPELS PERIOD

James J. L. Ratton describes the mood of second century Christianity toward the Anti-Christ: “At the beginning of the second century the Churches of the chief cities of Hellenized Asia exercised a great influence on the Christianity of the East.”⁷⁷ Ratton goes on to identify the “Greek word *Anti-Christos* with the Beliar tradition of the Jews.” This “emphasized the antagonism of the Destroyer against Christ to the exclusion of his predicted function as the Destroyer of the city and the Holy Place.”⁷⁸ Ratton goes on to mention Polycarp and Irenaeus as the first post-biblical writers to treat the Anti-Christ.

A brief remark should be made about a number of second century sources that mention the word *Anti-Christos*. The chief one of these is a mentioning of the term in Polycarp's *Letters to the Philippians*. The reference comes at 7:1 of the letter, which is generally dated around 135 ce. Chapter seven of this letter contains three condemnations of heretics that are called "Anti-Christ," "from the devil," and the "first-born of Satan." This tradition may in fact be the source of the later Christian view that the Anti-Christ shall be a son of Satan.

Whether or not this is true, it is clear the Polycarp quotes 1 John 4:2–3 directly, when he speaks of "anyone, then, who does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh, is an Anti-Christ."⁷⁹

It is also clear from **Polycarp's letter** shared with First John that the Anti-Christ is to make an eschatological appearance as a metaphysical being, and that this being was expected to be an opponent of Christ that precedes that parousia. This tradition may well be a Christianization of the Jewish tradition of the eschatological coming of Beliar (or Belial).

The author(s) of First and Second John use(s) it is to describe and legitimize the situation of the Johannine community. By interpreting the conflict this way, as a splitting of the community in the coming of the Anti-Christ, the author(s) represent(s) this conflict as proof for the nearness of the End Times.

At any rate, it is clear that Polycarp shares a number of characteristics and elements of the Anti-Christ with judgments about the Final Enemy that are made in materials from the New Testament. The next mention of the word *Anti-Christos* appearing in the Christian tradition comes with Irenaeus, the second/third century bishop of Lyons.

Ratton goes on to describe the contribution of Irenaeus to the Anti-Christ tradition in the Roman Church: "The third mention of Anti-Christ is in the book of Saint Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*. Whether directly or indirectly all writers on Anti-Christ have drawn their inspiration from St. Irenaeus. All their arguments are found in his writings."⁸⁰ Ratton's estimation of Irenaeus' contribution is right on the money... he is the most important early patristic thinker on the Christian idea of the Anti-Christ.²

² Vicchio, S. J. (2009). [*The legend of the anti-christ: a history*](#). Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock.

ANTI-CHRIST IN THIRD AND FOURTH CENTURIES

Cyril of Jerusalem, a fourth-century doctor of the church, was bishop of Jerusalem. Most of what we know of his life comes from his contemporaries Epiphanius, Jerome, and Rufinus. Cyril's *Catechetical Lectures*, written around 350 ce, contains materials on the Anti-Christ. The lecture, which is principally about Christology, contains an analysis of the exegesis of Daniel 7:13–27. In this section, Cyril warns against being led astray “by that false Anti-Christ.” He calls the Anti-Christ “a highly skilled magician that deals in deceit, evil art, and enchantment.”²¹

This notion of the Anti-Christ being a magician, as we have seen earlier, is as old as first-century Christianity, where Simon Magnus was believed by many early Christians to have been the Anti-Christ.

Again, commenting on Daniel 7:9–14, Cyril tells us: “But this aforementioned Anti-Christ is to come when the times of the Roman Empire shall have been fulfilled, and the end of the world is now drawing near. There shall rise up ten kings of the Romans, reigning in different parts, perhaps, but all about the same time, and after these, an eleventh, the Anti-Christ who by magical craft shall seize upon Roman power.”²²

In the same passage, Cyril suggests that: “Signs and wonders of his magical deceit as having beguiled the Jews, as though he were the expected Christ. He shall afterwards be characterized by all kinds of crimes of inhumanity and lawlessness, so as to undo all unrighteous and ungodly men . . . against us Christians.”²³

Again, Cyril speaks of the Anti-Christ beguiling his people, the Jews:

Having beguiled the Jews by lying signs and wonders of his magical deceit, until they believe he is the expected Christ, he will afterwards be characterized by all manner of wicked deeds of inhumanity and lawlessness, as if to outdo all the unjust and pious men who have gone before him. He shall display against all men, and especially against us Christians, a spirit that is murderous and most cruel, merciless and wily. For three years and six months only shall he be the perpetrator of such things; and then shall he be destroyed by the glorious second coming from heaven of the only-begotten Son of God, our Lord and Savior Jesus, the true Christ, who shall destroy him with the breath of his mouth, and deliver him over to the fire of Gehenna.²⁴

Cyril argues that the Anti-Christ will attain power over the kingdoms of the earth through force and fraud. The Anti-Christ, Cyril maintains, will be accepted as the Messiah by Jews. He also argues that the Anti-Christ will rebuild the Temple at Jerusalem, and enthrone himself there as God.²⁵

In Cyril's fifteenth lecture, he speaks of the Second Coming and the Anti-Christ when he writes: “But since it was needful for us to know the signs of the end, and since we are looking for Christ, therefore, that we may not die deceived and be led astray by the false Anti-Christ.”²⁶ A little later in the same lecture, he warns his readers to: “Make safe thy soul. The Church now charges thee before the Living God; she declares to thee the things concerning the Anti-Christ before they arrive.”²⁷

In lecture 15, Cyril tells us that the Anti-Christ's malice “will surpass the combined wickedness of all the evil doers gone before him,”²⁸ and that he will be “like an ocean in which all human and diabolical wickedness shall meet.”²⁹ It is clear that Cyril believed that Christians could be deceived by the Anti-Christ, and that there will be a number of activities that are to precede the coming of the Anti-Christ. Cyril also hints that the Anti-Christ will involve persecutions that may or may not occur at the end of time.

Cyril believes that the end of the world was at hand; that the apostasy of Paul speaks about in 2 Thessalonians 2:3 applies to heretics of his day, particularly the Arians and Sabellians. Indeed, he calls these groups “forerunners of the Anti-Christ.” Cyril also identifies the “many who say they come in my name” in Matthew 24:5 as Simon Magus and Meander. Cyril of Jerusalem, who lived from 315–387, also suggests that the Anti-Christ will be a Jew, and will be worshipped by them.

Cyril also gives a description of the actions of the man of lawlessness and a description of the coming Anti-Christ, as well:

At first he will feign mildness and will appear to be learned and an understanding man, with pretended prudence and kindness . . . And afterwards, his character will be written large in evil deeds of humanities and lawlessness of every kind, so as to outdo all wicked and godless men that were before him. He will display a murderous, most absolute, pitiless and unstable temper toward all men, but especially toward Christians.³⁰

Cyril closes his analysis of the Anti-Christ with a plea to his followers:

So be warned, my friend, I have given you the signs of the Anti-Christ. Don’t just store them in your memory. Pass them on to anyone who does not know them. If you have a child of the flesh, teach him right away. If you are a godparent, teach your godchild immediately, lest he should take the false Christ for the true one. For the “mystery of iniquity” already does work.³¹

Of all the church fathers, the fullest treatment of the legend of the Anti-Christ is to be found in Books IV and V of Irenaeus’ *Against Heresies*. Irenaeus, who lived from 130 to 202 ce, was born in Asia Minor and became bishop of Lugdunum in Gaul. His writings were formative in the early developments of Christian theology. Irenaeus was a student of Polycarp’s, who in turn was a disciple of John the evangelist.

The purpose of Irenaeus’ *Against Heresies* was to refute various teachings of a number of heresies in the first few centuries of the church. Chief among these heresies was Gnosticism. Until the discovery of the Library at Nag Hammadi in 1945, *Against Heresies* was the fullest extent description of Gnosticism.

Saint Irenaeus describes the Anti-Christ this way:

By the things which shall be under Anti-Christ it is shown that the Devil, being a rebel and a thief, desires to be adored as God; and being a slave, wants himself to be proclaimed a king. For he, taking to himself all the might of the Devil, will come, not as a just king, nor as one in God’s obedience, sanctioned by law, but being impious, unjust, and lawless, as a rebel and unrighteous, and a murderer, as a thief summing up the rebellion of the Devil and himself.³²

Irenaeus continues: “And while he sits aside idols, to persuade men that he, himself, is God, he will exalt himself, the one idol, containing in himself the various errors of all other idols, that those who by many abominations adore the Devil, may be this one idol, be slaves to him.”³³

Irenaeus goes on to quote Saint Paul: “Of whom the Apostle, in the Second Epistle to the Thessalonians thus speaks, “For except there has come a departure first, and the man of sin shall have been revealed.” The Apostle, you see, plainly declares his apostasy, and that he is exalted above all that is called God, or that is worshipped.”³⁴

Saint Irenaeus uses a number of the themes concerning Anti-Christ already present in the second century, including the notions that the Final Enemy shall be a deceiver, that he shall claim to be God, and that he will be associated with the Devil who is also a deceiver.

Irenaeus gives an account of the workings of the Anti-Christ in Book V of *Against Heresies*:

And not only by these things, but also by the things in the days of Anti-Christ. It is shown that he (Satan), though an apostate and thief, desires to be worshipped as God; and though he is a slave, yet he desires to be proclaimed as king. For he (Anti-Christ) shall come, taking up all the power of the devil, not as a just or God-fearing king, but impious, lawless, and unjust, as a traitor, murderer, and thief, gathering up in him the apostasy of the devil, removing idols, indeed, in order to persuade men that he is God.³⁵

Again in Book V of *Against Heresies*, Irenaeus speaks of the time of the Anti-Christ: "By means of the events which shall occur in the time of the Anti-Christ it is shown that he, being an apostate and robber, is anxious to be adored as God, and although a mere slave, he wishes to be proclaimed a king. For he being educated with all the powers of the Devil, shall not come as a righteous king . . . but as an impious, unjust, and lawless one."³⁶

A little later in Book V, Irenaeus again discusses the Anti-Christ. After quoting Isaiah three times, Irenaeus wrote: "All these indisputably refer to the resurrection of the just, which takes place after the advent of the Anti-Christ, and the destruction of all the nations under him, when the just shall reign on the earth, growing in the vision of the Lord, and through Him will become used to contain the glory of God the Father; and with the holy angels shall have converse, and fellowship and spiritual union in the kingdom."³⁷

Also in Book V, Irenaeus concludes his comments on the Anti-Christ: "But when this Anti-Christ has devastated all things in this world, he will reign for three years and six months, and will sit in the temple of Jerusalem, and then the Lord will come from the heavens in the clouds, in the glory of the Father, sending this man and those who will follow him into the lake of fire."³⁸

Irenaeus also suggests that the end of the world will be associated with the end of the Roman Empire: "John and Daniel have predicted the dissolution and desolation of the Roman Empire, which shall precede the end of the world and the Eternal Kingdom of Christ. The Gnostics are refuted, those tools of Satan, who invent another Father different from the Creator."³⁹

In this one small paragraph, **Irenaeus ties the End Times to the end of the Roman Empire**, while identifying false prophets with the Gnostics. In another paragraph from the same chapter, Irenaeus writes: "In a still clear light has John, in the Apocalypse, indicate to the Lord's disciples what shall happen in the last times, and concerning the ten kings which shall then arise, among whom the empire which now rules the earth shall be partitioned. He teaches us what the ten horns shall be which were seen by Daniel."⁴⁰

A few chapters later, Irenaeus again discusses the Anti-Christ: "Moreover, another danger, by no means trifling, shall overtake those who falsely presume that they know the name of Anti-Christ. For if these men assume one number, when this Anti-Christ shall come having another, they will be easily led away by him, as supposing him not to be the expected one, who must be guarded against."⁴¹

In these few short paragraphs, Irenaeus reiterates many of the ideas in early Christianity about the Anti-Christ: that the end of the world will be associated with the Fall of the Roman Empire; that the Anti-Christ will be associated with deception; and that the Anti-Christ is to be associated with false teachings, particularly the Gnostics.

In addition to these fairly conventional observations about the Anti-Christ, Irenaeus also offers some new elements about the idea. In a long discussion of the number 666, he suggests that it "shows

the recapitulation of that entire apostasy which happened in the beginning, and in the intervening times, and which will happen in the end."⁴²

Irenaeus argues that the Anti-Christ must recapitulate all evil in the same way that Jesus must recapitulate all good. In the same way that God must become man to atone for the sins of men, the Anti-Christ, Irenaeus argues, will come as a man, and becomes a figure that embodies all evil, separating the just from the unworthy.

Along the way, Irenaeus also reveals that the Anti-Christ will be born a Jew, from the tribe of Dan. He also points out that the tribe of Dan is conspicuously absent from the number of the saved in chapter 7 of Revelation. Indeed, Irenaeus goes on to point out that in Jewish apocalyptic the tribe of Dan was to be the origin of the last messiah.

Irenaeus uses John 5:43, as other patristics do, to describe the Anti-Christ. He is called *allos* (other) because he is alienated from the Lord. (Against Heresies 5.24.4) He also concurs with the early Church view that the Anti-Christ will come from the tribe of Dan, and bases this view on his interpretation of Jeremiah 8:16. Irenaeus also applies the story of the unjust judge in Luke 18 to refer to the Anti-Christ.

Because of the persecution of Christians during Irenaeus' time, the Bishop of Lyons was one of the first Christians theologians to identify the Anti-Christ with the Roman Empire. Thus, Irenaeus adhered to many of the traditional early perspectives on the Anti-Christ, including the notion that he will be a Jew, from the tribe of Dan, and that the final enemy was associated with the Roman Empire.

Hippolytus, who lived from 160 to the mid 230s, was a disciple of Irenaeus. His principal work is called *Refutations of all the Heresies*, which is also known by its first part, the *Philosophoumena*.⁴³ Hippolytus also wrote a commentary on the book of Daniel, written in the beginning of the third century. In the fourth book of the commentary on Daniel, Hippolytus wrote a great deal about the Anti-Christ. Like many before him, Hippolytus believed that the Anti-Christ would be a Jew from the tribe of Dan. Commenting on Revelation 12:2, Hippolytus says that the Anti-Christ will adroitly conceal his sins, and will pass for the most virtuous of men.⁴⁴

Hippolytus also tells us a number of other things about the Final Enemy. In section six of his essay on the Anti-Christ, Hippolytus sums up his view of the Anti-Christ:

Now as the Lord Jesus Christ, who is also God, was prophesied under the figure of a lion, on account of his royalty and glory, in the same way have the scriptures beforehand spoken of Anti-Christ as a lion, on account of his tyranny and violence. For the deceiver seeks to liken himself to all things to the Son of God. Christ is a lion, so Anti-Christ is a lion. Christ is a king, so Anti-Christ is a king. The Savior was manifested as a lamb, so he too in like manner will appear as a lamb without, while within a wolf. The Savior came into the world circumcised, and he will come in the same way. The Savior raised up and showed his holy flesh like a temple, and he will raise a temple of stone in Jerusalem.⁴⁵

Like many other Christian thinkers of his time, Hippolytus identifies the beast of Revelation with the Romans. Indeed, he goes on to give a description of the beast: "Then he says, 'A fourth beast, dreadful and terrible, it has iron teeth and claws of brass.' And who are these but the Romans? Which kingdom is meant by the iron—the kingdom which is now established; for the legs of that image were of iron. And after this, what remains, beloved, but the toes of the feet of the image, in which part is iron and part clay, mixed together."⁴⁶

Hippolytus goes on to identify those ten toes with the ten kings predicted in Daniel: "As these things, then, are in the future, and as the ten toes of the image are equivalent to so many democracies, and the ten horns of the fourth beast are distributed over ten kingdoms . . ."⁴⁷

Commenting on Romans 11:30, Hippolytus suggests that the Anti-Christ will be defeated by certain people of western nations. But he will soon recover from those battles, and have control over all the nations of the Earth. **Hippolytus also, along with St. Ambrose, believed in a view that John the evangelist did not die, but rather disappeared and shut himself up in a tomb.⁴⁸ Hippolytus argues that John will return to disclose the artifices of the Anti-Christ, since he foretold for centuries before hand the man of sin.⁴⁹**

Hippolytus uses Jeremiah 8:16, Genesis 49, and Deuteronomy 33 to prove that the Anti-Christ will come from the tribe of Dan, and he thought the raising up of the Temple in 2 Thess 2:4 refers to the Temple in Jerusalem. He refers to “raising a Temple of stone by the Anti-Christ.”

Hippolytus also makes the identification that the followers of the Final Enemy shall be Jews:

And under this was signified none other than Anti-Christ, who is also himself to raise the kingdom of the Jews. He says that three horns are plucked out by the root by him, that is, the kings of Egypt, and Libya, and Ethiopia, whom he cuts off in the array of the battle. And he after gaining terrible power over all, being nevertheless a tyrant, shall stir up tribulation and persecution against men, exalting himself against them. For Daniel says: “I considered the horn, and behold that horn made war with the saints, and prevailed against them, until the beast is slain and perished, and its body given to the burning of fire.⁵⁰

Hippolytus, who was martyred in 236, was the author of a work called *The Dogmatic Treatise on Christ and Anti-Christ* around the year 200. In the beginning of chapter 61 of this work, Hippolytus speaks of a Dragon who “persecuted the woman which brought forth the man-child.” Later he refers to a “tyrant that is to reign and persecute the Church.” It is likely that Hippolytus’ references are to the Anti-Christ.⁵¹

Hippolytus, in his work on the consummation of time, does not hesitate to affirm that Anti-Christ will heal lepers, make the lame walk, cast out demons, and raise the dead to life. Hippolytus tells us, Anti-Christ will know the most secret and hidden things. He will move mountains, walk on the waves of the sea, turn day into night, and vice versa. He will direct the course of the sun at will, and finally, he will appear as being the master of the elements.⁵²

Theodoret, who lived from 393 to 457 and was heavily involved in the Nestorian controversy, identified the man of lawlessness of 2 Thessalonians 2:7 with various contemporary heretics of his day. He also believed, as many of the patristics did, that the Anti-Christ will arrive from the tribe of Dan. Other thinkers who believed the Anti-Christ will come from the tribe of Dan include: Prosper of Aquitaine, Ambrose, and Gregory the Great.

Other opinions from the same period, like those of Jerome, Tertullian, and St. Augustine, maintained that St. John was as dead as the other apostles. Hippolytus also believed, as Tertullian, Ambrose and Gregory did, that the events recorded in the book of Daniel and Revelation were not allegories, but rather narrations of historical fact.⁵³

Hippolytus was of the opinion that Paul wrote the second letter to the Thessalonians, for the purpose of dissuading people from believing that the Second Coming was at hand.⁵⁴ Other thinkers, like Hilary (fourth century) and Cyprian (third century), however, were convinced the end times were soon to come. Cyprian, in book IV of his *Testimonies*, tells us: “The day of tribulation begins to dawn upon us; the world is near its end; the time of the Anti-Christ is close at hand; let us prepare for the combat.”⁵⁵

Cyprian also tells us in his *Epistle to the People of Thibaris* that Christians are “nearing the time of the Anti-Christ, and thus they must be prepared for martyrdom.” “For you ought to know and to believe, and to hold it for certain that the day of affliction has begun to hang over their heads, and that the end of the world and the time of the Anti-Christ is to draw near, so that we must all stand for the battle.”⁵⁶

Finally, Hippolytus thought that at the end of time, the Anti-Christ, like Jesus, will heal lepers, make the lame walk, cast out demons, and raise the dead to life. He will know the most secret and hidden things. He will move mountains, walk on the waves of the sea, and turn day into night, and vice versa. Hippolytus says that the Anti-Christ will direct the course of the sun at will, and he will appear as the master of the elements. Hippolytus thought that the Anti-Christ will appear to perform miracles similar to those wrought by Christ, in order to eclipse his glory. He will also, in Hippolytus’ view, take on a number of honors afforded to the true messiah.

David Dunbar, writing about the views of the end times of Irenaeus and Hippolytus says, “[From them] we get a kind of mainline eschatology, which may have been quite widespread during the closing decades of the second century.”⁵⁷

Fourth-century thinker, Lactantius, in his *Divine Institutes*, sums up the Christian view of the Anti-Christ in the early fourth century:

A king shall arise out of Syria, born from an evil spirit, the overthrower and destroyer of the human race, who shall destroy that which is led by the former evil, together with himself . . . But that king will not only be most disgraceful in himself, he will also be a prophet of lies, and he will constitute and call himself God, and will order himself to be worshipped as the son of God; and power will be given to him to do signs and wonders, by the sight of which he may entice men to adore him. He will command fire to come down from Heaven and the sun to stand and leave its course and an image to speak, and these things shall be done at his word . . . Then he will attempt to destroy the temple of God and persecute the righteous people.⁵⁸

Lactantius also identifies the last things to occur after the fall of Rome:

These are the things which are spoken of by the prophets as about to happen hereafter . . . The subject itself declares that the fall and ruin of the world will shortly take place; except that while the city of Rome remains it appears that nothing of this kind is to be feared. But when that capital of the world has fallen, and shall begun to be a street, which the Sibyls say shall come to pass, who can doubt that the end has now arrived to the affairs of men and the whole world?⁵⁹

Lactantius was also among the church fathers who believes, as Irenaeus and Saint Hilary, and Saint Justin do, that the world will last only 6,000 years, because according to 2 Peter 3:8, the world was created in six days and each day represents 1,000 years. Cyprian holds the same view and Augustine regards it as probable. Saint Ambrose, on the other hand, says this view has no credence.⁶⁰

Lactantius, Italian born apologist and educated in North Africa by Arnobius, mentions a number of the key elements of the early Christian view of the Anti-Christ, including the judgment that he will be a prophet of lies; he will call himself God; and he will have the power to do signs and wonders.

One final thinker from the fourth century is Athanasius of Alexandria. This Christian bishop and Patriarch of Alexandria lived from approximately 298 to 373. Athanasius is important for our purposes because he was one of the early church fathers to identify the Anti-Christ with heresies of his day. For Athanasius, the Anti-Christ is to be seen as Arius (256–336) and his followers.

During the Council of Carthage in the mid-third century, one of the questions for debate was whether heretics should be rebaptized. There were a number of opinions expressed in the *Protocols of the Council of Carthage*. Among those was Bishop Secundinus of Carpis who said, “Those who do not rebaptize heretics are Anti-Christ.”⁶¹

ANTI-CHRIST IN THE FIFTH CENTURY

The two most important Christian thinkers on the Anti-Christ in the fifth century are Jerome and Augustine, Jerome’s most important remarks on the Anti-Christ are to be found in his *Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, as well as a number of his letters. Augustine speaks of the Anti-Christ in a number of places, including several references in the *City of God*.

Among Jerome’s letters are several mentions of the end things and the Anti-Christ. In a letter to Pope Damascus, written from the desert of Chalcis, **Jerome speaks of the division of the Christian Church into East and West. In the letter he also repeats the Johannine phrase, “He who is not of Christ is of the Anti-Christ.”** In another letter written to Damascus, which is a commentary on Luke 15:11–32, the prodigal son, Damascus mentions the idea of the Anti-Christ sacrificing a kid to himself, a sort of reverse first fruits ritual.⁶² In a third letter to Eustochium on virginity, Jerome also mentions the Anti-Christ. Jerome comments:

But such virgins as there are said to be among the various heretical sects and with the most foul Manichean are to be considered harlots, not virgins. For the author of their body is the devil, how can they honor what has been framed by his foes. But because they know that the word “virgin” is glorious, they shelter wolves in sheep’s clothing. Anti-Christ pretends to be Christ, and they falsely clothe shamefulness of life by the honor of that name.⁶³

In his commentary on the Book of Daniel, Saint Jerome discusses typological readings of the book. Jerome writes: “Therefore, as the Savior has both Solomon and other saints as types of his coming, so Anti-Christ is to be understood to have as a type of himself the most wicked king Antiochus, who persecuted the saints and violated the Temple.”⁶⁴

These same types of typologies continue throughout the Middle Ages. Thomas Aquinas, for example, claims that all evil characters who come before Anti-Christ are, nevertheless, symbols of the Anti-Christ.⁶⁵

In Jerome’s commentary on Daniel, he tells us that the Anti-Christ will be born in Babylon, apparently connecting the Anti-Christ to impiety in general. Jerome also tells us that the Anti-Christ will have incomparable eloquence, and he will represent Jesus as an imposter, attacking his teachings and doctrines. Jerome also says that at the end of the world, after the destruction of the Roman Empire, ten kings will divide the remnants among them. Then an eleventh king will enter the scene and will conquer three of their number: the kings of Egypt, Ethiopia, and Africa. After their deaths, the remaining seven kings will lay their scepters at the feet of the Anti-Christ.⁶⁶

Saint Jerome believes the Anti-Christ will be defeated by certain nations from the West, who will give the Anti-Christ a great naval battle. But the Anti-Christ will recover from this defeat, and eventually will go on to rule the Earth.⁶⁷ Jerome thinks that the images of Gog and Magog symbolize the Anti-Christ’s battle against the Church. Gog will be the Anti-Christ himself, and Magog will be his army. As a result of this battle, the holy sacrifice of the mass shall no longer be offered in public on altars. The Church shall be devastated, their sacred vessels desecrated, their priests scattered and separated from their flocks.⁶⁸

Jerome claims that the restraining force of 2 Thessalonians 2:6 is the Roman Empire, that the Anti-Christ is the Devil himself, and that the enthroning of the Anti-Christ is to be understood as a leader of the Church, and not a reference to the Temple at Jerusalem. Jerome also notes the discrepancy between 1290 and 1335 days assigned to the Anti-Christ in Daniel 12, and concludes there must be a surplus of 45 days of peace after the death of the Anti-Christ.⁶⁹

Jerome was vehemently against any ideas that the end of the world was at hand. he was also against any form of millenarianism. Indeed, he edited Victorinus' *Commentary on Revelation* to remove any hints of a thousand year earthly reign.⁷⁰ **Jerome also rejected, as Augustine did, the Nero redivivus theory. Other thinkers of the period, however, endorse the theory, including John Chrysostom, Commodian, and Ambrosiaster. Saint Martin of Tours, a fourth-century German doctor of the Church,⁷¹ thought that the Emperor Nero will arise along with the Anti-Christ. Nero will control the Western half of the Christian Empire, and the Anti-Christ the Eastern half.** Victorinus of Pettau, who died at the beginning of the fourth century, combined the *Nero redivivus* theory with the belief that the Anti-Christ will come from the tribe of Dan. Victorinus says the Anti-Christ will erect a temple in his image, and will force all to circumcision.

Saint Jerome also identifies the second beast of Revelation 13 with the Anti-Christ.⁷² Jerome believes that the "time" mentioned in Daniel 12:14 is generally employed in scripture to signify a year. In discussing Daniel 12:45, Jerome says that the Anti-Christ will ascend from the top of a mountain into the air, like a magician. God will overwhelm him, however, by his glory, and shall precipitate the Anti-Christ to the earth by a single puff of his breath.⁷³

This reference to magicians is most likely related to the fact that in Roman times Simon Magus, also called Simon the Sorcerer and Simon of Gitta, was thought by some in the early Church to be the Anti-Christ. He is mentioned in Justin Martyr's *Apologies* and in Irenaeus' *Against Heresies*. The apocryphal *Acts of Peter* gives a legendary account of Simon Magus' death. While performing magic for Emperor Claudius in the forum, in order to prove he was God, he is said to have levitated. While suspended in the air, the apostles Peter and Paul pray to God to stop the flying, and Simon Magus falls to his death.⁷⁴

Saint Jerome, as well as Ambrose and Thomas Aquinas, believe, on the evidence of Daniel 11:45 that the mountain on which the Anti-Christ will be defeated at the end of time is the Mount of Olives. All three thinkers say that Anti-Christ will ascend from the top of this mountain into the air, as did Simon Magnus at Rome. But God shall overwhelm him by the splendor of his glory, and shall precipitate him to the north by a simple puff of his breath, according to 2 Thessalonians 2:8.⁷⁶

Saint Augustine wrote in several places on the Anti-Christ. The three principal sources for comments on the Anti-Christ are the *City of God*, his commentary on 1 John, and in letter number 199.

Emmerson points out that in Book XX of *The City of God*, Saint Augustine includes many of the standard features regarding the Anti-Christ: "Anti-Christ is Satan's agent, the great false prophet of the beast (the godless city), the leader of the devil's final persecution of the faithful. In his sermons on the Johannine epistles, on the other hand, Augustine develops the second expectation of multiple Anti-Christis already living."⁷⁷

Like many of his predecessors, as well as those who come after him, Augustine identified the Anti-Christ with many heresies of his day and before. Augustine ties this idea to the notion of John's epistles that there are already many Anti-Christis at work.

In Book XVIII of the *City of God*, Augustine refers to the defeat of Anti-Christ by Jesus, which the bishop of Hippo says is foreordained in 2 Thessalonians 1:9. Augustine comments, "Truly Jesus Himself shall extinguish by His presence the last persecution which is to be made by the Anti-Christ." Following Paul, he refers to Jesus defeating the Anti-Christ by the breath of his mouth.⁷⁸

In Book XX, chapter 13, Augustine discusses whether the three and a half year reign of the Anti-Christ is to be included in the thousand year reign of the Devil. Augustine comments: "The last persecution of the Anti-Christ shall last for three years and six months, as we have already said, and as is affirmed both in the book of Revelation and by Daniel the prophet. Though this time is brief, yet not without reason is it questioned whether it is comprehended in the thousand years in which the devil is bound and the saints' reign with Christ, or whether this little season shall be added over and above to these years."⁷⁹

In the same book of the *City of God*, Augustine speaks of the prophecies of Daniel and how they are related to the Anti-Christ. Augustine tells us: "Daniel prophecies of the last judgment in such a way as to indicate that Anti-Christ shall first come and carry on his destruction to the eternal reign of the saints. For when in prophetic vision he had seen four beasts, signifying four kingdoms, and the fourth conquered by a certain king, who is recognized as Anti-Christ, and after this the eternal kingdom of the Son of Man, that is to say, of Christ."⁸⁰

Augustine goes on to say he does not know the answers to these questions, but he surmises that the three and a half years are not part of the thousand year reign of Satan. At Book XX, chapter 19, of the *City of God* Augustine again discusses the Anti-Christ in relation to what Paul has to say in 2 Thessalonians. Augustine reiterates that the Second Coming will not occur until there is first the coming of the Anti-Christ.⁸¹ Augustine refers to the last times as the Day of the Lord. He also comments that it is uncertain whether the Temple on which the Anti-Christ shall sit is "the ruins of the Temple built by Solomon, or is the Church."⁸²

In chapter 23 of Book XX of the *City of God*, Augustine comments on Daniel's predictions about the Anti-Christ and judgment in such a way as to indicate that the Anti-Christ shall first come, and to carry on his description to the eternal reign of the saints."⁸³ Augustine agrees with earlier Christian exegetes that three of the four beasts in Daniel 7:15–28 are the kings of Assyria, Persia, and Greece. The fourth beast, for Augustine, is the kingdom of the Anti-Christ, which "fiercely, though for a short time, will assail the Church before the last judgment of God and shall introduce the eternal reign of the saints."⁸⁴

Again, in a separate passage in chapter 23 of Book XX of the *City of God*, Augustine refers to a passage in the twelfth chapter of Daniel. Augustine tells us: "But he who reads this passage [Daniel 12] even half asleep, cannot fail to see that the kingdom of the Anti-Christ shall fiercely, though for a short time, assail the Church."⁸⁵

For Augustine, the period of the Anti-Christ shall be short, and it will come prior to the eternal reign of the saints. Augustine seems to share many of the early church beliefs about the Anti-Christ, including the notion that he will be a deceiver, and that he will come prior to the end of the world.

In Book XX, chapter 23, Augustine also suggests, "The kingdom of Anti-Christ shall fiercely, though for a short time, assail the Church."⁸⁶ In chapter 19 of the same book, Augustine discusses 2 Thessalonians 2, where he tells us:

Only he who now holdeth, let him hold until he is taken out of the way," refer to the Roman Empire, as if it were said, "Only he who now reigneth, let him reign until he be taken out of the way." And then shall the wicked be revealed: no one doubts that this means Anti-Christ.⁸⁷

In Book XX, 30 of the *City of God*, Augustine remarks that the events pertaining to the end of the world will happen in the manner they have been foretold, but as to the accidental circumstances, God alone knows the order in which they will happen.⁸⁸

Augustine's most lengthy comments on the idea of the Anti-Christ come in his Homilies on 1 John. In his homilies, Augustine rejects the notion that the Anti-Christ will be an offspring of the Devil, as well as the idea that the Emperor Nero was the Anti-Christ. Augustine also has negative things to say, like his friend Jerome, of any form of millennialism.

The gist of Augustine's argument on the Anti-Christ can be seen in the following quotation:

Now, then, brothers, if actions are to be asked about, we find not only that many anti-Christians have gone outside, but that many are not yet manifest who have not at all gone outside. For however many the Church holds [who are] perjurers, swindlers, sorcerers, users, slave dealers, and all the things that it is not possible for us to number—all these things are contrary to the teachings of Christ, are contrary to the word of God. But the word of God is Christ; whatever is contrary to the word of God is in Anti-Christ. For the Anti-Christ is the one contrary Christ.⁸⁹

A second quotation brings Augustine's central argument on the Anti-Christ in a clearer resolution: "But let us now be saddened. "They have gone out from us, but they were not of us. For if they had been of us, they would no doubt have remained with us. If then they have gone out from us, they are anti-Christians. If they are anti-Christians they are liars; if they are liars, then they deny that Jesus is the Christ."⁹⁰

Augustine argues that anyone who leaves the Church were never really part of the Church, for if they were part of the Church, they would not have left. If they have left, then they are Anti-Christians. And if they are Anti-Christians, then they are liars. It is likely that Augustine was speaking of heretics from his day. These heretics, if they have left the Church, were never really a part of the Church. Thus, in Augustine's view, anyone who has left the Church is an Anti-Christ and a liar.

In his comments on First John, Augustine also comments that "Whoever calls himself Universal Bishop, or even desires in his pride to be called such, is the forerunner of Anti-Christ."⁹¹

A few pages later, Augustine reaffirms these basic ideas about the Anti-Christ: "Therefore, you come against Christ, you are an Anti-Christ. Whether you are within or without, you are an Anti-Christ. But when you are within, you are hidden; when you are without, you are obvious. You dissolve Jesus and you deny that he has come in the flesh; you are not of God."⁹⁵

Augustine seems to suggest that not only are there heretics who have left the Church and thus are Anti-Christians, there are also Anti-Christians that remain hidden within the Church. Those who are outside the Church are obvious, those who remain in the Church are difficult to detect.

Saint Augustine also rejects the idea that the Anti-Christ will appear as a son of the Devil, and that the Anti-Christ will be born of a virgin.⁹⁸ He also, along with Jerome, Tertullian, Isidore, and Epiphanius, rejects the notion that Saint John was not really dead.

Saint Augustine, by using 2 Peter 3:8, suggests that since God created the world in six days, and Second Peter tells us that for God each day will be a thousand years, it follows that the world will last 6,000 years. This position was also held by Irenaeus, Hilary, and Saint Ambrose. But Huchere tells us "Several other Fathers give it no credence."⁹⁹

Saint Augustine also speaks briefly about the relationship between Satan and the Anti-Christ. The Bishop of Hippo takes the position that the Anti-Christ is a human agent of the demonic. As Emerson remarks: "Usually, as in Augustine, Anti-Christ is merely described as the human agent of the devil. He will be a man of evil, born of Jewish parents, and then possessed by the devil."¹⁰⁰

Julius Firmicus Maternus, another fourth-century Latin writer and astronomer, in his *De erroribus profanarum religionum*, "On the Errors of Profane Religions," discusses at some length the relationship between the Devil and the Anti-Christ. Maternus concludes that they have a "father-son" relationship.

One other way that Saint Augustine contributed to subsequent Christian views of the End Times is his effort of taking the seven days of creation as a paradigm for what he believed were the seven ages of world history. The first day extends from Adam to the flood; the second from the deluge to Abraham. From Abraham to the advent of Christ there are, as Matthew calculates, three periods: one from Abraham to David, a second from David to the captivity, and a third from the Babylonian Captivity to the birth of Christ. There are thus five ages in all, we are now living in the sixth age, in Augustine's view. It is not known how many generations it will last.¹⁰³

In the seventh age God will rest, as in the seventh day of creation. The seventh age shall also be our Sabbath. It will also be the time, in Augustine's view, for the End Times, and the coming of the Anti-Christ. This view of history had deep influences on subsequent views of Christian history, both in the Dark Ages and beyond.¹⁰⁴

A final fourth and fifth-century Christian thinker on the Anti-Christ was John Chrysostom, who lived from 347 to 407 ce. John was an Antioch native and became Patriarch of Constantinople in 398. His most important works were his brilliant homilies, including a series on the letters of John. Like many of his contemporaries, John Chrysostom believed that the Anti-Christ will be a Jew from the lost tribe of Dan; his principal followers will also be Jews; and the Anti-Christ is to come in the form of a resurrected Emperor Nero.

John Chrysostom also believed that the end of time would correspond with the end of the Roman Empire, and that Emperor Nero, and the Man of Lawlessness are one and the same. About 2 Thessalonians 2:6–9, John tells us: "He speaks here of Nero, as if he were a type of Anti-Christ. For he too wished to be thought of as a god. And he well said, "the mystery"; that is, it works not openly, as the other, nor without shame. For if there was found a man before that time, he means he was not much behind Anti-Christ in wickedness."¹⁰⁶

John goes on to say that the Man of Lawlessness shall be destroyed by the breath from the mouth of Lord Jesus, and, in the meantime, the Anti-Christ's work shall coincide with the working of Satan.¹⁰⁷

ANTI-CHRIST IN THE DARK AGES

Of the period between the fall of Rome in the fifth century and the beginning of the High Middle Ages around 1000, several prominent thinkers wrote about the Anti-Christ. Among these thinkers are John of Damascus, a seventh- and eighth-century Syrian theologian, and Gregory the Great.

Gregory (540–604), Italian Churchman was pope from 590 to 604. He is credited with the origin of Gregorian chant, and coined the phrase, "the seven deadly sins."

In the *Moralia*, Gregory makes several comments on the Anti-Christ. He calls the Anti-Christ the "head of all hypocrites . . . who feign holiness to lead to sinfulness."¹⁰⁹ Gregory identifies Behemoth and Leviathan from chapters 40 and 41 of the book of Job as symbols for Satan and the Anti-Christ. The tail of Behemoth in Job 40:11 is identified by Gregory as the Anti-Christ. The description of Leviathan's sneeze in Job 41:9 Gregory takes to be the Anti-Christ's final explosion.¹¹⁰

Like many thinkers before him, Gregory identifies the Anti-Christ as an embodiment of the Devil. Indeed, in the *Moralia*, Gregory tells us, “The Devil Himself in the last times will be called Anti-Christ when he has entered into that vessel of destruction.”¹¹¹ Gregory primarily uses an allegorical method in interpreting scripture. Thus, many of the images he finds in the book of Job are tied to signs of the demonic and the Anti-Christ.

Gregory seems to suggest that the imminence of **the coming of the Anti-Christ can be seen in the fall of the Roman Empire**. He also implies that the work of Anti-Christ can “be seen daily among the wicked.” The Roman Pope seems to argue that any action against the Church is, as McGinn points out, “nothing less more than an attack of the Final Enemy.”¹¹²

At times, Gregory seems confused about how the Anti-Christ will be defeated. He quotes 2 Thessalonians 2:8 that the Anti-Christ will be defeated by the breath of God’s mouth, but he also, using Daniel 12 and 20:12, alludes to the possibility that the angel Michael will defeat the Anti-Christ at the end of time.

Pope Gregory also makes the connection between the Anti-Christ and the Jews. Gregory suggests that since the Jews did not accept Christ, they are still looking for the coming of their Messiah. **Gregory says that Anti-Christ will be a follower of the Old Law. He will be circumcised, and he will be from the lost tribe of Dan. Gregory suggests that the conversion of the Jews will mark a turning point in the reign of Anti-Christ.** After establishing his political power, he will set to work converting the faithful.¹¹³

Gregory points out in the *Moralia* that those followers of Anti-Christ who refuse to obey him shall perish in the midst of the most excruciating torments. They shall be tortured by infernal engines of pain such as have never been thought of before. The persecutors will add to the terror of punishment.¹¹⁴ About the prestige of Anti-Christ miracles, Gregory exclaims: “What a frightful temptation for the human heart! Behold a martyr who delivers over his body to torture, and his executioner performs miracles before his eyes! Where is the virtue that would not receive a profound shock in presence of such a scene? Woe, then, to the land and sea! Because the Devil is come down unto you having great wrath, knowing that he has but a good time.”¹¹⁵

The notion that the Anti-Christ was to be identified with the papacy was also something for which Gregory was responsible. Many of the formulators of the Reformation, like Martin Luther, for example, suggest that it was Pope Gregory who first made the papacy to be identified with the Anti-Christ. More is said about this in a later chapter on “The Anti-Christ in the Reformation.”

This notion that Gregory the Great was the first Pope to be identified with the Anti-Christ was held by John Wycliffe, Martin Luther, and continues to the present day. Harold O. J. Brown writes:

In every age there has been those who considered the claims of a single bishop to supreme authority to be a sure identification of the corruption of the church, and perhaps even to the work of the Anti-Christ. Pope Gregory I (ad 590–604) indignantly reproached Patriarch John the Faster of Constantinople for calling himself the universal bishop; Gregory did so to defend the rights of all the bishops, himself included, and not because he wanted the title for himself.¹¹⁶

Contemporary Anglican scholar J. N. D. Kelly, in the *Oxford Dictionary of the Popes*,¹¹⁷ also makes the Gregory-Anti-Christ connection, as does Norman Geisler and Ralph MacKenzie, in their *Roman Catholics and Evangelicals*.¹¹⁸

The other thinker in the Dark Ages extensively to write on the Anti-Christ was John of Damascus. John was among the greatest of the Eastern Fathers. He was among the greatest defenders of orthodoxy in the East. His comments on the Anti-Christ can be found in his *De Fide orthodoxa*.

John of Damascus held the view that the Anti-Christ will be an illegitimate offspring, and that he will come from the tribe of Dan. John also suggests, as Cyril and Jerome do, that the Anti-Christ will be of incomparable eloquence when he returns to the earth. The Anti-Christ will represent himself as an imposter of Christ who will attack the doctrines and institutions of the Church.

John of Damascus, like many of his predecessors, is of the opinion that the Anti-Christ will be of illegitimate birth, though he stops short of saying that he will be the son of Satan—a position that Augustine and others were adamantly against.

John of Damascus tells us that chapter 15 of *Apocalypse* suggests that at the end of the world the angel of darkness shall be loose for a while. During this time, he shall have full liberty to attack the Church, and use every possible artifice for its destruction. Anti-Christ shall be his most docile agent, wonderfully adapted to seduce the people.¹²¹

John of Damascus believes that the temple mentioned in chapter 12 of the *Apocalypse* is the Temple in Jerusalem, which the Anti-Christ shall have rebuilt and in which he shall have Divine honors paid to him. Damascus suggests that it is there, according to the prophet Daniel, that the abomination of desolation shall be in the Temple, seated in the holy place.¹²²

Gregory of Tours was a sixth-century French monk. He is best known for his *Historica Francorum*, “History of the Franks.” In Book One, he speaks of the End Times: “But as to the end of the world beliefs which I learned from our forefathers, that Anti-Christ will come first. He will first propose circumcision asserting that he is Christ. Next, **he will place his statue in the Temple at Jerusalem to be worshipped**, just as we read that the Lord said, ‘You shall see the abomination desolate standing in the holy place.’”¹²⁴

Gregory goes on to point out that the time of these things is unknown to men, but it is known “to the Father alone.”¹²⁵ Gregory was clearly aware of the tradition that the Anti-Christ will be a Jew, and his first followers will be Jews—as well as the tradition that he will set himself up in the Temple at Jerusalem to be worshipped as a God.

Aelfric of Eynsham (ca. 955–1010), English abbot and homilist, is another early commentator on the Anti-Christ. In the preface to his *Catholic Homilies*, Aelfric discusses the great tribulation to come and the many false prophets who claim to be Christ. Aelfric also suggests, as other Medieval exegetes do, that the Anti-Christ might be the embodiment of the Devil.¹³²

Aelfric points to the prologue of the Book of Job, where Satan calls fire from above to destroy the patriarch’s animals. For Aelfric, this is evidence that Anti-Christ shall have far beyond the normal capacities to control nature—one of the traditional characteristics of the final enemy.¹³³

Aelfric also suggests that at the end of the world, with the appearance of the Anti-Christ will also come a period of false miracles and deceit. He gives a metaphor in which he suggests that false teachers and deceivers shall become the “limbs” of the Anti-Christ, presumably suggesting they will be the armies of the final enemy.³

³ Vicchio, S. J. (2009). [The legend of the anti-christ: a history](#). Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock.

W P
 H O I
 I T I b
 T E t y
 R O C
 O B h
 E F a
 B I l
 L A n
 A C u
 K I g
 R O n
 O B e
 E s

 W P
 H O I
 I T I b
 T E t y
 R O C
 O B h
 E F a
 B I l
 L A n
 A C u
 K I g
 R O n
 O B e
 E s

◎ *In theory the Holy Roman Empire was a continuation of the ancient Roman Empire. The fathers of the church had maintained that when the Roman Empire finally collapsed it would signal collapse of the great cycle of empires and begin the reign of the Antichrist.*

SEE - PAGE 170 - THE TIME WAS AT HAND BY ROB FINLEY

◎ *In truth, all that remained of the old empire was a bit of magic in the imperial name. The emperor labored in vain to keep his electors under the impression that they were his vassals. Where once the empire had seemed strong because all its enemies were weak, now the newly united nations of England, France and Spain defied the empire with impunity.*

The Anti-Christ in the Reformation

Martin Luther is in relation to the Reformation rather like the opening notes of some piano concerto—say Beethoven’s Fourth—which states the theme, which is then taken up by other instruments, and finally lost in the developing pattern of music.

—Gordon Rupp, “Luther and the Reformation”

It is heretical for the pope whose power is spiritual to become a prince. If he does this, he is the Anti-Christ. This is a term that comes from the Bible and was used during the Reformation. It has been used in Church history, especially by sectarians in their criticisms of the Church. They said that if the pope claims to represent Christ, but is actually a ruler of this world opposed to Christ, then he is the Anti-Christ.

—Paul Tillich, *A History of Christian Thought*

I hope that the last day is at hand; things surely cannot possibly grow worse than what the conduct of the papacy has brought to pass. It has suppressed God’s commandments, replacing them with their own. If this is not the Anti-Christ, let someone else say what it is.

—Martin Luther, *Against the Execrable Bull of Anti-Christ*

INTRODUCTION

The idea of John Wycliffe and John Huss that the Anti-Christ is to be identified with the Roman papacy was a notion adopted by most of the principal reformers of the Christian Church from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries. In this chapter, we take a close look at the development of this idea in the work of Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Knox, Thomas Cranmer, John Wesley, Roger Williams, Cotton Mather, Ian Paisley, and many others.

LUTHER’S TRADITIONAL VIEW OF THE ANTI-CHRIST

In his book, *Here I Stand*, Roland Bainton speaks about Luther’s adopting of the Wycliffe/Huss papal Anti-Christ theory: “The theme became very popular in the late Middle Ages among the Fraticelli, Wycliffites, and Hussites, who identified the pope with the Anti-Christ soon to be overthrown. Luther was unwittingly in line with these sectaries with one significant difference. Whereas they identified particular popes because of their evil lives with Anti-Christ, Luther held that every pope was Anti-Christ.”¹⁷

In his preface to Second Thessalonians, Luther says that the Roman Empire must pass away before the Anti-Christ sets up himself with a false religion, implying that the establishment of the papacy of Gregory the Great was the first manifestation of the Anti-Christ in Medieval Christianity.

Two other places where Luther’s view of the Anti-Christ can be seen are two related works published around 1545, *Against the Roman Papacy: An Institution of the Devil*, and a pamphlet, *The Depiction of the Papacy*. The latter work was accompanied by nine eschatological woodcuts, depicting the pope as the Anti-Christ. In the opening paragraph of *Against the Roman Papacy*, Luther writes: “The most Hellish Father, Saint Paul III, in his supposed capacity as the bishop of the Roman Church.”²⁵ Later, he adds: “The pope is the head of the accursed Church of all the worse scoundrels, on earth, a vicar of the devil, an enemy of God, an adversary of Christ, a destroyer of Christ’s churches, a teacher of lies . . . a brothel keeper over all brothel keepers, even that which cannot be named; an Anti-Christ.”²⁶

In *Against the Roman Papacy*, Luther identifies the pope with 2 Peter 2:14's "insatiable for sin," and with 2 Thessalonians 2:8 Anti-Christ. About the latter, Luther says: "I only deride with my weak derision, so that those who now live and those who come after us should know what I thought of the pope, the damned Anti-Christ, and so that whoever wishes to be a Christian may be warned against such an abomination."²⁸

Later in *Against the Roman Papacy*, Luther identifies Saint Paul's "Man of Sin" and "Son of Perdition" with the papacy and the Anti-Christ. Luther comments: "In Hebrew 'Man of Sin' means one who is not only a sinner in his own right, but who through false doctrines causes others to sin with him, as Jeroboam the King of Israel sinned [1 Kings 14:16], or, as Scripture says, made Israel to sin, through his idolatry."²⁹

Luther seems to be agreeing here with the long-standing Christian tradition, going all the way back to Paul and the Johannine epistles, that the Anti-Christ will be a false prophet, one who convinces others to join his ranks, and is possessed with supernatural powers of persuasion.

One interesting aspect of Luther's view of the pope as the Anti-Christ is the fact that several German artists, including Luther's friend Lucas Cranach, provided illustrations to Luther's translations of the Bible. Roland Bainton writes of these illustrations: "Unfortunately, the illustrations for the Book of Revelation were made all too contemporary. The temptation was too strong to identify the pope with the Anti-Christ. In the first edition of the New Testament, in September of 1522, the scarlet woman sitting on the seven hills wears a papal tiara. So also does the great dragon. The beast of the abyss has a monk's cowl. Fallen Babylon is clearly Rome."³¹

James Ratton quotes Moses Stuart who sums up Martin Luther's view of the Anti-Christ:

This Reformer, when he published his German translation of the New Testament, thrust the Apocalypse from the canon and printed it merely in the way of an Appendix and an apocryphal book. His main reason was the book is unintelligible, and that there was no Christ in it. Subsequent writers, more keen sighted than Luther, found, or thought they found, good reasons for applying John's description of the beast to the Pope and his adherents. As the contest waxed warmer, Luther perceived the advantage of such an ally, and it was not long before consent was given to the reception of the Apocalypse. Thus the book was restored to its place of honor at the close of the canon, and John was converted into one of the most formidable assailants of the Roman camp.³⁷

Ratton goes on to say that after the *Articles of Schalkald*, the Papal Anti-Christ was an article of faith, and "from that time until the last quarter of the nineteenth century, Anti-Christ was used as a polemical weapon against the Catholic Church."³⁸

THE ANTI-CHRIST AND OTHER REFORMERS

Calvin also identifies the Anti-Christ with the papacy in a number of places in the *Institutes*. He also makes the same claim in his *Commentary on Daniel*. At vol. IV, 7:25 of the *Institutes*, Calvin again identifies the papacy with the Anti-Christ: "To some we seem slanderous and petulant, when we call the Roman Pontiff Anti-Christ. But those who think so perceive not that they are bringing a charge of intemperance against Paul, after whom we speak, nay, in whose very words we speak. But lest anyone suggest that Paul's words have a different meaning, and are wrestled by us against the Roman Pontiff, I will briefly show they can only be understood of the Papacy. Paul says that Anti-Christ would sit in the temple of God (2 Thess 2:4)."⁵⁸

Later, in the same section of the *Institutes*, Calvin again suggests that Daniel 7:9 is further evidence that “He that would rob God of his honor and take it for himself is the Anti-Christ.”⁵⁹ He adds, “This is the leading feature which we ought to follow in searching out Anti-Christ.”⁶⁰ Calvin’s conclusion is clear: “Seeing then it is certain that the Roman Pontiff has impudently transferred to himself the most peculiar properties of God and Christ, there cannot be a doubt that he is the leader and standard bearer of an impious and abominable kingdom.”⁶¹

In another section of the *Institutes* in regard to prophecies, Calvin tells us this:

Daniel and Paul had predicted that Anti-Christ would sit in the temple of God. The head of that cursed and abominable kingdom, in the Western church, we affirm to be the Pope. When his seat is placed in the temple of God, it suggests that his kingdom shall be such, that he will not abolish the name of Christ or the church. Hence, it appears that we by no means deny that church may exist, even under his tyranny; in such churches Christ lies half buried, the gospel is suppressed, piety exterminated, and the worship of God almost abolished.⁶²

Calvin often used 2 Thessalonians 2 and 1 John 2:18 and 4:43 as clear signs and proof texts that the pope is the Anti-Christ. Calvin also thought the burning of John Huss in 1415 was a clear sign that the papacy was the Anti-Christ. Commenting on Daniel 12 in 1561, Calvin remarks, “At the present time in the papacy, . . . impiety and the Anti-Christ prevail.”⁶³

In Calvin’s treatise *The Necessity of Reforming the Church*, written in 1544, the reformer repeats his view of the papal Anti-Christ: “I deny that See (the Roman Catholic’s throne of authority) to be Apostolical, wherein naught is seen but a shocking apostasy. I deny him to be the Vicar of Christ, who furiously persecuting the gospel, demonstrates by his conduct that he is Anti-Christ.”⁶⁴

Calvin’s students were expounded in Britain by his student John Knox. In his *Zurich Letters*, Knox speaks of “that tyranny that the pope himself has for so many ages exercised over the Church . . . As with Luther, I conclude that the papacy is the very Anti-Christ, and Son of Perdition, of whom Paul speaks.”⁶⁵

John Knox took Daniel seven and identifies the four kingdoms there as Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome. Knox then shows that Daniel’s “little horn” is identical to Paul’s “man of sin,” and John’s “Whore of Babylon” as symbols of one Anti-Christ. Knox understood every prophetic day as a year. “A prophetic week is a week of years,” and a Jewish or Greek common year is a year of “360 days.” Knox quotes Numbers 14:34 and Ezekiel 4–6 and cites the seventy weeks as evidence of fulfillment. “In the seventy weeks of Daniel, a day is to be taken for a year, extending in the whole to 460 years; otherwise, that prophecy of the Messiah’s coming, would not fall upon the just time of Christ’s coming, as necessarily it ought to do.”¹⁰¹

Like Martin Luther, John Calvin believed that the pope and Islam were two horns of the Anti-Christ. Calvin tells us: “The Pope is the spirit of the Anti-Christ, and the Turk is the flesh of the Anti-Christ. They help each other in their murderous work. The latter slaughters bodily by the sword, and the former spiritually by doctrine.”⁶⁶

Phillip Melancthon (1497–1560), a key leader in the Lutheran Reformation, confirms Luther’s identifying the pope with the Anti-Christ, when he writes: “It is most manifest, and true without any doubt, that the Roman pontiff with his whole order and kingdom, is the very Anti-Christ.”⁶⁹

In his essay, “On Matrimony,” Melancthon also speaks of the Papal Anti-Christ: “Since it is certain that the pontiffs and the monks have forbidden marriage, it is most manifest, and true without any doubt, that the Roman pontiff, with his whole order and kingdom, is very Anti-Christ.

A group known as the Centuriators of Magdeburg, a group of sixteenth-century Lutheran scholars, wrote a twelve volume work called *The Magdeburg Centuries*. For the purpose of discrediting the Roman Papacy, and identifying the Anti-Christ with the Pope.

The *Magdeburg Centuries* is divided into thirteen centuries, covering 1,300 years from the birth of Jesus to the year 1298. The work was first published in 1559 to 1574. In addition to identifying various popes with the Anti-Christ, it also speaks of a legend related to the female Pope Joan. Donald Kelly, in his recent book, *Faces of History*, writes extensively on Flacius and the Centuriators of Magdeburg.⁷²

The Luther-Calvin-Knox view was reflected in the First and Second Scots Confessions of 1560 and 1580, as well as in the 1646 Westminster Confession of Faith. The First Scots Confession of 1560 speaks of “The true Kirk distinguished from the filthy Synagogues of Romanism.”⁷⁴ The Second Scots Confession, also known as the Scottish National Covenant, denounces “all kinds of papistry in general.” “We detest and refuse the usurped authority of that Roman Anti-Christ. Many are stirred up by Satan and that Roman Anti-Christ to subvert secretly God’s true religion.”⁷⁵

Finally, the Presbyterian Westminster Large Catechism suggests that the portion of the Lord’s prayer that mentions, “Thy Kingdom come,” is a plea for the destruction of the ecclesiastical Anti-Christ, and it uses Thessalonians, Revelation, and Romans 16:20 to prove that point.⁷⁷

Other early reformers that believed that the pope is the Anti-Christ are Thomas Cranmer, Roger Williams, Cotton Mather, and John Wesley. Thomas Cranmer (1489–1556) was the Archbishop of Canterbury during the reigns of English kings Henry VIII and Edward VI. He is also credited with the compiling of first two Anglican Books of Common Prayer. Cranmer was also one of the first Anglican martyrs. He was burned at the stake for heresy in 1556. In volume one of Cranmer’s *Collected Works*, the Anglican Bishop tells us, “Whereof it followeth Rome to be the seat of Anti-Christ, and the pope to be the very Anti-Christ himself, I could prove the same by many other scriptures, old writers, and strong reasons.”⁷⁸

Cranmer combines the prophecies of Daniel seven and 2 Thessalonians two when he wrote: “After all these sprung up the pope, that triple-crowned monster, and great Anti-Christ, which took upon his authority, not only over the clergy, but also climbed above kings and emperors, disposing of them at his pleasure, and settled himself in the temple of God, that is, in the consciences of men, extolling himself above God, dispensing with good laws, and giving men leave to break them and to regard more his decrees than the everlasting commandments of God.”⁷⁹

Richard Emmerson tells us that Cranmer, in his *Confutation*: “Argues that the miracle of the real presence in the sacrament is the delusion of the Devil, and notes that Anti-Christ is to work false miracles.”⁸⁰

Emmerson also points out that other Protestant era thinkers also equated the veneration of saints with Anti-Christ’s false miracles and doctrine. Other thinkers, Emmerson adds, thought the mass and other Catholic doctrine are “spiritual witchcraft.”⁸¹

Thomas Cranmer was burned at the stake for his testimony in favor of the Papal Anti-Christ theory, as were Hooper, Ridley, Bradford, and many others.

Roger Williams (1603–1683), governor of the state of Rhode Island and first Puritan minister in America, also held the pope as Anti-Christ view. Leroy Froom, in Volume III of his *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers*, quotes Williams: “The pope is the pretended Vicar of Christ on earth, who sits as God over the Temple of God, exalting himself not only above all that is called God, but over the souls and consciences of all his vassals, yea over the Spirit of Christ, over the Holy Spirit, yea, and God himself . . . speaking against the God of heaven, thinking to change times and laws; but he is the Son of Perdition (II Thessalonians 2).”⁸⁵

Cotton Mather (1663–1748), was a Harvard educated, influential Puritan preacher. He was also a prolific writer and pamphleteer. Some estimates have it that Mather authored more than 450 books and pamphlets. In his work, *The Fall of Babylon*, Mather mentions the pope as Anti-Christ theory: “The oracle of God foretold the rising of the Anti-Christ in the Christian Church: and the pope of Rome, all the characteristics of that Anti-Christ are so marvelously answered that any who read the Scriptures do not see it, there is a marvelous blindness upon them.”⁸⁶

Froom also reports that Cotton Mather on three different occasions predicted the coming of the End Times, and the reign of the Anti-Christ. Mather’s three prophecies of 1697, 1716, and 1736 did not materialize.

John Wesley (1703–1791) was an eighteenth-century Anglican clergyman, Christian theologian, and founder of Methodism. In his *Anti-Christ and His Ten Kingdoms*, Wesley devotes considerable time and space to his view of the Anti-Christ. About the Final Enemy as the pope, Wesley wrote: “He is in an emphatical sense, the Man of Sin, and as he increases all manner of sin above measure. And he is, too, properly styled the Son of Perdition, as he has caused death of numberless multitudes, both of his opposers and followers . . . He is it . . . that exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped . . . claiming the highest power and highest honour . . . claiming the prerogatives that belong to God alone.”⁸⁷

King James (1566–1625) himself held the Papal Anti-Christ theory, as evidence by this comment: “‘The faithful praise God for the Popes destruction and their deliverance,’ and for “the plagues which are to light on him, and his followers. The Pope by his pardons makes merchandise of the souls of men: Heaven and the Saints rejoice at his destruction, albeit the earth and the worldlings lament for the same.”⁹¹

In the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, fascination with the figure of the Anti-Christ was at its height. The 1260 days/years of Daniel and the Apocalypse were calculated so that they were related to contemporary events, including the defeat of the Spanish Armada.

William Tyndale in his *The Obedience of a Christian Man*, makes the identification of the Whore of Babylon with Rome. Tyndale says Catholics “set up that great idol, the Whore of Babylon, Anti-Christ or Rome, whom they call the pope.”⁹⁴ Later, some Roman authorities, like Thomas More, for example, called Tyndale’s English translation of the Bible, “The Testament of Anti-Christ.”

A number of other sixteenth-century dramas, in both Latin and the vernacular, attacked the Pope as the Anti-Christ. McGinn tells us this: “At least fourteen other Anti-Christ dramas of the sixteenth century in Latin, German, English, and Italian, attacked the pope as the Final Enemy. Most of these were morality plays based on the Antitheses of Christ’s virtues and the vices of the Papal Anti-Christ.”⁹⁸

The identification of the Anti-Christ with the papacy continued in the Protestant Churches well into the nineteenth century. Presbyterian pastor Samuel J. Cassels from Norfolk, Virginia, in his book, *Christ and Anti-Christ*,¹³¹ presented one of the most comprehensive reviews of the Papal Anti-Christ theory. Cassel’s book was thoroughly endorsed by Presbyterian, Episcopal, Methodist, and Baptist leaders of the day.⁴

⁴ Vicchio, S. J. (2009). [The legend of the anti-christ: a history](#). Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock.

Will There be an "Antichrist"?

by Dave Miller, Ph.D.

The long history of failed attempts to identify the so-called "Antichrist" would be humorous if it were not really so tragic. Candidates for this personage have included Nero, Napoleon, Hitler, Mussolini, Stalin, Kruschev, and Saddam Hussein. The "mark of the beast" the Antichrist allegedly causes people to receive has been associated with social security numbers, UPC barcodes, WWW—the World Wide Web, and even the IRS (a more tempting postulation, to be sure). These endless shenanigans could be avoided if the Bible were taken seriously and impure motives were replaced by an honest pursuit of truth.

As a matter of fact, the term "antichrist" occurs in Scripture only **five times**, **only** in the writing of John, and **only** in two of his five books: 1 John 2:18,22; 4:3; 2 John 7. The implications are significant. Dispensationalists do not go to 1 and 2 John when they discuss the Antichrist. They go to Revelation, or 2 Thessalonians, or Daniel. They go to passages that do not even use the word Antichrist!

Contrary to current claims, John applied the term "antichrist" to **more than one** individual, and to individuals who were living **then**—in the first century! For example, 1 John 2:18 states that numerous antichrists had arisen in John's day, and he therefore contended that "it is the last hour" (i.e., the final period of religious history commonly referred to as "the last days," as in Acts 2:16-17). He then described their behavior as "not of God" (1 John 4:3). "Antichrists" were simply **anyone** who denied Christ (1 John 2:22). John, therefore, labeled any such deluded soul as "the deceiver" and "the antichrist" (2 John 7). Notice the use of the article. John was saying that people living in his own day who denied the incarnation of Jesus were to be regarded as the antichrist! Not just **an** antichrist—but **the** antichrist! The idea that the term "antichrist" is to be applied to some "future fuehrer" (Lindsey, 1970, pp. 87ff.) who will draw the world into a global holocaust is totally out of harmony with John's inspired use of the term.

The primary passage that is used to support the notion of an antichrist is **Revelation 13:1-10**. Several points regarding the context of the book of Revelation and its proper interpretation lead to the understanding that the seven-headed sea beast was a symbol for the **then** monstrous emperor of Rome who was responsible for unleashing horrible atrocities upon Christians of Asia Minor in the latter years of the first century A.D. (Summers, 1951, pp. 174-175; Swete, 1911, pp. 161ff.). The two-horned land beast (Revelation 13:11-18), who enforced worship of the sea beast, referred to the official governmental organization known as the Roman Concilia responsible for supporting and regulating all details relative to emperor worship (Summers, pp. 178-179; Swete, pp. 168ff.). This evil legal entity was authorized to instigate economic sanctions against those who refused to appropriate the “mark” of the beast, “mark” being a symbol for the proof of their submission to Caesar worship (vs. 17). With this understanding of Revelation 13, it is unscriptural and unbiblical to identify the sea beast in Revelation 13 with some future revived Roman dictator known as the “Antichrist.”

A second passage that some say predicts an Antichrist is **Daniel 9:24-27**. Notice carefully the content of this prophecy. During the prophetic period Daniel identified in terms of seventy symbolic weeks (vs. 24), transgression, sin, and iniquity would be “finished,” “ended,” and “reconciliation provided for.” This terminology clearly refers to Christ’s sacrifice upon the cross (Hebrews 9:26). The effect of Christ’s atoning work was that “everlasting righteousness” was ushered in. As Paul stated: “For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Corinthians 5:21; cf. Jeremiah 23:5-6). Because of what Jesus did, individuals may now stand before God completely righteous through obedient faith. Likewise, “vision” and “prophecy” would be “sealed up.” This refers to the inevitable termination of Old Testament prophecy and its fulfillment in Christ’s appearance in human history: “Yes, and all prophets from Samuel and those who follow, as many as have spoken, have also foretold these days” (Acts 3:24; Hebrews 1:1-2). Finally, the phrase in Daniel 9:24 that speaks of the “anointing” of the “most holy” refers to the public ministry and official crowning of Jesus as He took His place upon His throne to rule in His kingdom. Isaiah said: “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me, because the Lord has anointed Me to preach good tidings to the poor” (61:1). On the day of Pentecost, Peter said: “Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God” (Acts 2:33). Notice that Daniel summarized the entire seventy-week period by including all of these six factors in the seventy weeks.

Next, Daniel broke the seventy-week period into three segments: seven weeks, sixty-two weeks, and one week. Verse 25 pertains to the first two sections of the seventy-week period. During these two periods, that is during sixty-nine of the seventy prophetic weeks, a decree would go forth calling for the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the reconstruction of the temple that had been destroyed by the Babylonians (cf. Nehemiah 2:7-8; Ezra 1:1-3). Daniel made clear that these sixty-nine weeks of the prophetic period, during which the temple would be rebuilt and national Israel reestablished, would take one up to the appearance of the Messiah.

Verse 26 speaks of the **final** week of the seventy week prophetic period, for he said “**after** the sixty-two weeks.” “After” puts one **into** the final or seventieth week of Daniel’s remarks. Two significant events were to occur during this final week. First, the Messiah would be “cut off.” This definitely refers to Jesus’ death upon the cross: “He was cut off from the land of the living” (Isaiah 53:8). Second, a “prince” and his people would come and destroy the city & the sanctuary—an obvious allusion to the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple edifice in A.D. 70 by Titus and his Roman army.

Verse 27 alludes to the activation of the new covenant between the Messiah and “many,” that is, between Christ and those who are responsive to the demands of the new covenant. As the Hebrews writer said: “Behold the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah” (8:8; cf. Acts 3:25). The New Testament teaches that the cutting off of the Messiah, the crucifixion, was **the act** that confirmed the covenant (Matthew 26:28; Hebrews 9:15-29), and brought an immediate end to the validity of the Old Testament practices of sacrifice and oblation (Colossians 2:14; Luke 23:45; Hebrews 10:18-20). Then Daniel alluded to the ruthless invasion of Jerusalem in the phrase “abomination of desolation.” Jesus quoted this phrase in Matthew 24:15 and Luke 21:20, and applied it to the Roman desecration and destruction of the Jerusalem temple in A.D. 70.

Thus, the fundamental purpose of Daniel’s seventy-weeks prophecy was to show God’s final & complete decree concerning the Israelite commonwealth. **All** of the events described in the prophecy were literally fulfilled over 1,900 years ago. As far as God is concerned, the logical end of the Old Testament and Judaism has occurred. Now He deals only with the spiritual children of Abraham, whether Jew or Gentile (Romans 4:1 ff; 9:8). Daniel 9 gives no credence to the notion of a future Antichrist.

A third passage used to foster belief in an Antichrist is **2 Thessalonians 2:1-12**. Whatever interpretation is placed upon this passage, its use to refer to a future personage is doomed to failure since Paul explicitly stated that he was referring to a person who would be the product of the circumstances of **his own day**, i.e., “already at work” (vs. 7). How could Paul have had in mind a future dictator that still has not arisen, though 2,000 years have transpired? One need go no further to know that 2 Thessalonians 2 does not refer to a future Antichrist.

History is replete with a variety of interpretations of this passage, the most prominent one likely being the view that the papacy is under consideration (see Workman, 1988, pp. 428-434; Eadie, 1877, pp. 340ff.). Another possibility is that the “falling away” (vs. 3), or apostasy, referred to the Jewish rejection of the “new and living way” of approach to God (Hebrews 10:20). The Jews were the single most adamant opponents to Christ and the infant church (John 8:37-44; Acts 7:51-53; 13:45-50; Romans 10:20-21; 11:7; 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16). This rebellion, or falling away, would not reach its “full” (Matthew 23:32) climax until the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, and the resulting dispersal of the Jewish people. Paul had already alluded to this Jewish apostasy in 1 Thessalonians 2:15-16. The pouring out of God’s wrath was the logical consequence of the first century Israelite failure to make the change to Christianity.

The “man of sin” or “son of perdition” (vs. 3) would have referred to the personification of Roman imperialism, and would have been equated with “the abomination of desolation” that Jesus, quoting Daniel 9, alluded to in Matthew 24:15 and Luke 21:20. Verse 4 would refer to the Roman general who introduced his idolatrous insignia into the Holy of Holies in A.D. 70.

That which was “withholding” (vs. 6), or restraining, this man of sin, at the time Paul was writing 2 Thessalonians in approximately A.D. 53, would have been the presence of the Jewish state. The ingenious design of God was that Christianity would appear to the hostile Roman government to be nothing more than another sect of the Jews. Thus Christianity was **shielded** for the moment (i.e., A.D. 30-70) from the fury of the persecuting forces of Rome, while it developed, spread, and gave the Jews ample opportunity to be incorporated into the elect remnant—the church of Christ (cf. Romans 11:26). Thus the nation of Israel was rendered totally without excuse in its rejection of Christianity, while at the same time serving as a **restraining force** by preventing Christianity from being perceived by the Romans as a separate, and therefore illegal, religion (*religio illicita*). Once the Jewish apostasy was complete, and God’s wrath was poured out upon Jerusalem, Christianity came to be seen as a distinct religion from Judaism.

Increasingly, Christians found themselves brought into conflict with the persecution from “the wicked” or “lawless one” (vs. 8). In fact, after A.D. 70 (when the withholding effect of Judaism was removed), Roman opposition to Christianity gradually grew greater, culminating in the fierce and formidable persecution imposed by Caesar Domitian in the final decade of the first century.

Once the shield of Judaism was “taken out of the way” (vs. 7), and Christianity increasingly found itself subject to the indignities of governmental disfavor, the Lord was to come and “consume with the breath of His mouth” (vs. 8) the one who was responsible. This terminology is not an allusion to Christ’s **Second Coming**. Rather this verse refers to Christ’s **coming in judgment on the Roman power**. Such a use of the word “coming” to describe the display of God’s wrath upon people **in history** is not unusual (cf. Isaiah 19:1; Micah 1:3). Paul alluded to the government’s use of counterfeit miracles (vs. 9), and thus deceit (vs. 10)—reminiscent of the Roman Concilia’s employment of trickery and illusion to deceive people into worshipping the emperor in Revelation 13:13-15 during the last decade of the first century A.D. (see Barclay, 1960, 2:127-128; Hailey, 1979, pp. 294-295; Summers, 1951, pp. 178-179). Sufficient textual indicators exist in this passage to exclude the premillennial interpretation of a future “Antichrist.”

When studied in context, passages that are used to bolster the dispensational scheme provide no such support. Those over the centuries who have applied these passages to papal authority, Napoleon, Mussolini, Hitler, Saddam Hussein... have been shown to be wrong. Amazingly, the pattern continues among those who have not learned from the sad mistakes of the past.

REFERENCES

Barclay, William (1960), *The Revelation of John* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster).

Eadie, John (1877), *Commentary on the Epistles to the Thessalonians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1979 reprint).

Hailey, Homer (1979), *Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker).

Summers, Ray (1951), *Worthy Is the Lamb* (Nashville, TN: Broadman).

Swete, Henry (1911), *Commentary on Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1977 reprint).

Workman, Gary (1988), *Studies in 1 and 2 Thessalonians and Philemon* (Denton, TX: Valid Publications).

1 John 2:18—Who Is the Antichrist?

Dispensationalism, which is currently the most popular form of premillennialism, has much to say about “the Antichrist.” According to these theologians, the Antichrist is a man, now living, who will soon rise to the position of a world-wide dictator.

In his book, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, Hal Lindsey asserts that the Antichrist will come to power just prior to the return of Christ (1970, 140), which, he asserts, will occur during this generation (133).

This view finds absolutely no support in the Bible. The term antikristos is found five times in four New Testament passages—all in John’s epistles (1 John 2:18, 22; 4:3; 2 John 7). It is quite significant that Lindsey, though devoting a whole chapter to the Antichrist, never once alludes to these verses (87-102). The reason is obvious; the biblical information on this topic is not in harmony with his fanciful theory.

Consider the following factors:

First, there is **no one specific person** denominated “the antichrist” in the New Testament. Rather, John declares that “many antichrists” have arisen (1 John 2:18; 2 John 7).

Second, the Bible does not suggest that a mysterious antichrist is some sinister personage who is to appear in the late twentieth century. There were many antichrists **in the first century**. “[E]ven now,” affirms the apostle, “have there arisen many antichrists” (1 John 2:18; 4:3).

A careful analysis of John’s references to “antichrist” reveals that the term is a general designation employed to suggest a spirit of unbelief that can be manifested in a variety of ways, both in the past & present.

Thus, in 1 John 2:18, underline the term “antichrist,” and in your margin note: ***See v. 22; 4:3; 2 John 7. A general disposition of unbelief; not a specific person.*** – *Apologetics Press*

