

# Who is the Antichrist?

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Reading Time: 4 minutes

Who is the Antichrist? Our recent political discourse has proposed several solutions to this question including whether Obama or Trump is the Antichrist. The modern perception of the Antichrist holds him to be a singular, all-powerful, political ruler who opposes Christianity especially American Christian culture. Such views generally tie him to apocalyptic prophecy or end-times events such as the supposed millennial kingdom. Perhaps we should not be asking who in today's world (or recent history) is the antichrist. Instead let us ask this: What does the Bible say about the Antichrist? How many are there? Can we identify someone with the Antichrist?

## How Many Antichrists Are There?

John the Apostle, in his first two epistles, is the only writer to explicitly address the figure of the antichrist. There are possible allusions to him elsewhere, but John remains our primary source. He writes thus,

Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that **antichrist** is coming, so now many **antichrists** have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour.  
(1 John 2:18)

As the writer, John makes it clear even in his first reference to the entity (1 John 2:18), antichrists are a plurality. John explains to his readers that “now many antichrists have come.” It is immediately fair, then, to dismiss the idea of a singular antichrist figure who is to dominate Christianity and bring about the end of time. Even in the day of John’s readers, there were already those who were regarded as antichrists. So it is inappropriate to speak of a singular, capitalized “Antichrist” but instead as multiple, lower-case, antichrists who will threaten and challenge the church. This seems to be the view of the second-century church writer Polycarp which effectively echoes John’s own words in the epistles (Polycarp, To the Philippians 7:1).

## Who Are the Antichrists?

If we cannot identify a singular antichrist, then who then are these antichrists?

First, an antichrist **denies that Jesus is the Christ** (1 John 2:22). Indeed, they do not even confess Him (1 John 4:3). They are literally the fulfillment of the word’s meaning, “against Christ.” Perhaps such ones can see Jesus as some sort of benevolent and good teacher, but not as the Messiah of God.

Second, the antichrists are **deceivers and liars**. They are liars because they deny Jesus is the Christ (2:22) and they do not have the Father despite what they might have convinced themselves.

Third, they **deny that Jesus came in the flesh** (2 John 7). In the early church some taught Jesus came but not in the flesh. He only *appeared* to be flesh and only *appeared* to die and so on. Even though they can affirm the Christ (to some extent) they deny His humanity and are no different than those who oppose Christ.

John’s three characteristics of the antichrist effectively have but one common denominator: the antichrist is anyone who denies that Jesus is the Christ (in the flesh). This is a broader category than many of the recent political identifications would allow. Yet the proper interpretation of these passages has not prevented endless speculations around the “Antichrist” especially when considering other New Testament passages that *may* allude to

Him. These include the “deceivers” and “false christs” (Matt. 24:24; Mark 13:22), the “man of lawlessness” (2 Thess. 2:3), and the beasts in John’s vision (Rev. 13 & 16).

The man of lawlessness is described as a figure who “opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God” (2 Thess. 2:4). Yet Paul speaks of him as one whom the Thessalonians are aware of since they “know what is restraining him now.” This figure was “already at work” and will continue to do so until the Day of the Lord comes. This suggests *ongoing* work by this Satan-empowered effort.<sup>[1]</sup>

The beasts of Revelation, especially that of the second beast who is a “deceiver,” are also candidates for the antichrist.<sup>[2]</sup> However, given that John wrote both Revelation and the epistles, the beasts are never called “antichrists.” This view seems to have originated in the second century, particularly with Irenaeus, who links the antichrist to Daniel 7 and the man of lawlessness (*Against the Heresies* 5.15). While these figures do certainly have characteristics of the antichrists as described in John, the passages under consideration do not explicitly support the modern conception of the singular, monolithic “Antichrist.”

## Are Antichrists Political Figures?

Based on the biblical identification of the antichrist as a person who is *against* Christ, we should now realize that this is a question of *theology* rather than politics. It is entirely possible that a political denier of Christ will arise and stand against Christians. Many of them have already come and *will continue to come*. First-century Christians endured the persecutions by Christ-deniers such as the Jerusalem Jewish leadership, local synagogue leaders, Roman officials, and others. They attempted to suppress the preaching and teaching of the gospel, which the apostles so boldly resisted (Acts 4:18).

Missionaries today face oppressive government regimes. Working Christians grapple with superiors who disdain the faith and disrespect times of worship. These are antichrists present in our own lives and actively working in the world. But antichrists can be found in unexpected places too. Maybe even your church.

## Antichrists Could Be Sitting In Your Pew

External threats are easy targets for criticism since they are “over there.” But often the greatest threats come from within. John discusses how some had “gone out from us, but they were not of us” (1 John 2:19). Who are these people? John calls them antichrists. These

are not foreign rulers or oppressive political leaders. They sit in our pews and fellowship with us.

Jesus warned of such persons who come in sheep's clothing (Matt. 7:15) and others mention those who infiltrate the people of God to deceive them (2 Cor. 11:13-15; 2 Pet. 2:1; Jude 1:4). We have to be on our guard so that we are not caught in their mechanizations because within our churches *there are antichrists among us*. They threaten the unity of the body, oppose Christ, and deny the Father.

## Conclusion

Antichrists have come. Antichrists will come. Antichrists are here now. They deny our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. They may sit in seats of power or they may sit in our pews. They may persecute us or offer a veil of peace. We may work with them or under them. Wherever they may be found, such persons "are not of us." Lord willing, as in the case of John, they will go out from us.

<sup>[1]</sup> For more see Doug Burleson, "Who is the Man of Lawlessness?" in *The Patience of Hope: First and Last Things in Thessalonians*, ed. David Lipe (Henderson, TN: Freed-Hardeman University, 2014). Available online at <https://www.academia.edu/15408801/WhoistheManofLawlessness2Thess.23?source=swpsh> [are](#).

<sup>[2]</sup> Charles E. Hill, "Antichrist," *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible* ed. David Noel Freedman (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 66-67.