

ANTICHRIST

The word “antichrist” comes from the Greek αντιχριστος. In Greek the formation of a new word by putting αντι– at the beginning of a word may give the meaning either of “an opponent/enemy of” (as in English) or “a rival of”, i.e. one who sets himself up to take the place of the first person. Commentators have disagreed on which is correct in the case of “antichrist”. A study of the contexts in which the word occurs suggests that the meaning “an enemy of” is most likely.

In the New Testament the actual word “antichrist” occurs only five times, all in the letters of John. But the idea of an antichrist is also clearly present in 2 Thessalonians 2:3–4 and Revelation 13 and may well be referred to in other passages too.

1 John 2:18 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.

Where the word *αντιχριστος* occurs (1 John 2:18 twice, 22; 4:3; 2 John 7), the meaning is probably “one who opposes the Christ (the Messiah)”. Christians had been taught to expect one particular person, *the* antichrist, a man who would have supernatural power from Satan. John is warning them that there are people who teach that Jesus is not the Christ and that the Christ never became a human being. John says that kind of teacher can be called an antichrist, i.e. an enemy of Christ (1 John 2:18b), and that they have the spirit of the antichrist (1 John 4:3). He even calls them *the* antichrist (1 John 2:22; 2 John 7). This does not imply that they are the great enemy of Christ who will one day appear on earth, merely that they are the same kind of person.

Note the slight but important difference between “antichrist” and “false Christ” (Matt. 24:24; Mark 13:22). An antichrist is an enemy of the Christ, that is, an enemy of the Messiah. A false Christ (false Messiah) is someone who deceives people by falsely claiming to be the Christ (Messiah).

For discussion of the meaning of the title “Christ”, see the article on [CHRIST](#).

Suggestions for translating “antichrist”:

an/the enemy of the Christ

an/the enemy of the Saviour whom God appointed [past tense]

For further study

Haas, C., M. de Jonge and J. L. Swellengrebel. 1972. *A Translator's Handbook on the Letters of John*. London: United Bible Societies, especially pages 62–63.

Morris, L. Article 'Antichrist' in *The Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, Vol. 1, pages 69–70 (= *The New Bible Dictionary*, 2nd ed., pages 50–51).

