

ANTICHRIST

A term occurring first in [Christian literature](#) but as conception of a powerful being [opposed](#) to [God](#) at the end of the world found in earlier Jewish apocalyptic literature (e.g., D. 7:7ff.; 11:40). This probably originated in Iranian eschatology (the battle of Ahura Mazda with Angra Mainyu), and from there influenced Jewish apocalyptic writings. There were many variations within Judaism reflecting dualist ideas current at the time. The powerful being is sometimes called Satan or Belial (e.g., *Testament of Levi 18.12* in Charlesworth, 1983, p. 795), and is described as “the prince of this world.” The Qumran sect believed that Belial would be at the head of the army of the Sons of Darkness against whom the Sons of Light wage war.

In one of the Qumran hymns (16.15) there occurs the prayer: “[Suffer](#) not Belial to arise and immerse himself in Thy servant’s spirit” (trans. Gaster, 1976, p. 202). Sometimes this powerful being was identified with historical persons (e.g., Caligula, who had threatened to desecrate the Jewish [Temple](#) in A.D. 39/40). A cycle of traditions also arose around the belief that [Nero](#) would return with a Parthian army to take vengeance on Christian as well as Jewish apocalyptic literature took up this belief and identified Nero with Antichrist (Rev. 13, 17; *Sibylline Oracles 5; Ascension of Isaiah 3.13-4.18*).

In Christianity the opponent of Christ (the Messiah) in the last days, whether human or demonic, was identified as Antichrist (Mk. 13:14; 2 Thes. 2:3-12; 1 Jn. 2:22, 4:3; 2 Jn. 7). Later Christian thought sometimes identified Antichrist with a Jewish figure (so Hippolytus and Irenaeus). Various enemies such as [ARIUS](#) and Muhammad were also equated with this figure, and [Emperor Constantius II](#) was denounced by Bishop Lucifer of Cagliari as “the forerunner of Antichrist.”

In Coptic eschatological thought, which is strongly influenced by Judaism, earlier ideas of a powerful being [opposed](#) to [God](#) and Christ predominate,

and the identification of heresy, especially Nestorianism, with Antichrist came easily to the Copts.

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