

# *Portraits of Antichrists*

Antichrist Traditions From  
The *Enuma Elish* to Tertullian



**John Boruff**

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ANTICHRIST TRADITIONS  
FROM THE *ENUMA ELISH* TO TERTULLIAN**

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*Dedicated to the glory of God  
the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit:  
in the Name of Jesus Christ our Lord.*

## Contents

1. Different Views of the Antichrist.....	5
2. The Babylonian Dragon Tradition (1,700 B.C.).....	9
3. The Gog and Magog Tradition (580 B.C.).....	10
4. The Antiochus IV Epiphanes Tradition (167 B.C.).....	11
5. The Antimesiah Tradition (350 B.C. - A.D. 135) .....	13
6. The False Jewish Messiah Tradition (A.D. 51).....	14
7. The Roman Persecutor Tradition (A.D. 100) .....	20
8. The Simon Magus Tradition (A.D. 150) .....	23
9. The Anti-Docetic Tradition (A.D. 90 - A.D. 220).....	25
10. Keep the Faith, But Know the Signs!.....	28
Bibliography.....	30

## Chapter 1

### Different Views of the Antichrist

Like any other eschatological (end times) topic, there has probably never been any unanimous agreement in either Jewish or Christian communities about the doctrine of the Antichrist. To the surprise of many modern Evangelical Christians, (who usually buy into the Antichrist portrait of the *Left Behind* series), throughout church history, teachings about the Antichrist have changed—and in some cases, quite drastically. I am going to attempt to demonstrate, the best I know how, the diversity of Antichrist traditions throughout early church history. I will briefly mention every Antichrist tradition that I'm currently aware of, but I will focus my attention on the Antichrist traditions dating from the Gospel of Mark, which was written around A.D. 55, to Tertullian's *On the Resurrection of the Flesh*, which was written a little before A.D. 220. Therefore, we will be taking a close look at the ideas that were floating around about the Antichrist for about the first 190 years of Christianity.

There is a problem for theologians, religious professors, pastors, and laypeople when trying to figure out information about the Antichrist. That problem can be asked this way: **Which version of the Antichrist is the correct version?** Was the Antichrist an evil tyrant from ancient history such as Antiochus IV Epiphanes, Caligula, Nero, or Domitian? Or was he the magician Simon Magus? Is the Antichrist a demonic spirit or even the devil himself? Or is “antichrist” simply a word that applies to heresy in gen-

eral? Will there be one singular tyrant Antichrist in the future, who will establish a one world government? These are some of the questions that people have raised throughout church history about the Antichrist. And as you can see above the 6 question marks at the end of each question, these only lead to more question marks.

Why is it that there is so much confusion and uncertainty about who or what the Antichrist is? I think it is because the Antichrist topic is a mystical topic, a doctrine that has its origins in the visions of prophets like Ezekiel, Daniel, the pseudepigrapha, and Paul and John. Such visions are laden with prophetic symbolism, and perhaps can only be accurately interpreted by having a dream or vision oneself, like when Daniel's dream interpreted Nebuchadnezzar's dream (Dan. 2:19, 23). If, as I maintain, having your own mystical experience is the only way to know for sure who the Antichrist is, that is by faith, then why try speculating about the Antichrist? Some may ask that question as an excuse for not studying about the end times.

Speculating about the Antichrist is good when speculation does not turn into dogma, because it causes you to think about the topic, and meditate on the implications of the doctrine(s). From a faith perspective, Antichrist speculation may lead one to seek God for answers. From an academic perspective, Antichrist speculation may lead one to conclude which Antichrist tradition has the best argument. Most Biblical critics, those who are "preterists," judge that the *Nero redivivus* myth is the Antichrist tradition with the best argument: "The critical consensus is that Nero is intended by the beast of the Apocalypse" (Thomson, 140).

Though there are several beasts of the Apocalypse, *the* beast of the Apocalypse—that is, in the Book of Revelation, usually refers to the Beast Out of the Sea in Revelation 13:1-10. John said, “I saw a beast rising out of the sea, having ten horns and seven heads; and on its horns were ten diadems, and on its heads were blasphemous names” (Rev. 13:1). *The Reflecting God Study Bible*, a Wesleyan Arminian adaptation of the immensely popular Evangelical *NIV Study Bible*, says the following about Revelation 13:1: “According to some, the beast symbolizes *the Roman Empire*, the deification of secular authority. According to others, he is *the final, personal antichrist*” (Barker, 1939). In the critical tradition, however, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible* only mentions the Roman Empire interpretation of Revelation 13:1-10: “The beast from the sea combines the powers of the four beasts of Dan. ch. 7 and represents the Roman Empire” (May and Metzger, 1504). Since it is so that some of the popular Evangelical minds accept the Beast Out of the Sea as the “final, personal Antichrist,” this passage provides a nice segue into our discussion of Antichrist traditions.

As it can be seen in the *Reflecting God* comment about Revelation 13:1, there was even disagreement on that one verse: Is the Beast Out of the Sea the Roman Empire or the singular final Antichrist? It can't be both, can it? That little comment alone symbolizes the complexity of Antichrist traditions. As we review these traditions, I want to be modest and say that these may not be *all* of the Antichrist traditions that ever came to be in the early church, but these are the ones I have become conscious of during my research. I mentioned a variety of Antichrist traditions in

my “question marks” paragraph on page 5. Before we take a look at the early church’s Antichrist traditions, I will briefly mention some of the Antichrist ideas that likely developed in Old Testament times, and in turn spilled over into the minds of the New Testament and patristic writers.

## Chapter 2

### The Babylonian Dragon Tradition (1,700 B.C.)

What might be called “the first Antichrist tradition” is one that is popular among Biblical critics, and has its origins in Hermann Gunkel’s 1895 work, *Schöpfung und Chaos*. He argued that the Babylonian dragon myth from the 3,700-year-old *Enuma Elish*—the chaos creation myth that deals with the monster Tiamat and her wrestle with Marduk, and results in her loss and the creation of the world—“migrated to Canaan in very ancient times, was transferred by the Israelites to the latter end of the world, and was applied in various forms also to political enemies of the people” (Beckwith, 194). Therefore, according to Gunkel, the “great red dragon” of Revelation 12ff is a continuation of the ancient Babylonian Tiamat, was turned into “the devil and satan” (Rev. 12:9), who in turn becomes the Antichrist through incarnation. This tradition is accepted by Wilhelm Bousset as well, the author of the indispensable 1896 book *The Antichrist Legend*. He said, “In some respects I might describe my work as a modest continuation of Gunkel’s inquiry” (Bousset, 13). Bousset’s book has become a classic resource for study about the Antichrist.

### **Chapter 3**

## **The Gog and Magog Tradition (580 B.C.)**

The next identifiable Antichrist tradition comes from the prophet Ezekiel. Around 580 B.C., the Lord speaks to the prophet about King Gog, from the land of Magog: “Mortal, set your face toward Gog, of the land of Magog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal. Prophecy against him” (Ezek. 38:2; cp. 38:3, 14, 16, 18, 21; 39:1, 11). This became identified with the idea that an anti-Israel king from the north will come to judge Israel for its unbelief and rebellion. King Gog became a representative of “the opinion [that] was formed that before the Kingdom of God is completed it is to be attacked by the godless world” (Beckwith, 194). This tradition is echoed in Revelation 20:7-8: “When the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison and will come out to deceive the nations at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, in order to gather them for battle.” Some Evangelicals such as John Hagee accept this tradition as evidence that the Antichrist will emerge from Russia, the northern land, and then lead armies to attack Israel.

## Chapter 4

### The Antiochus IV Epiphanes Tradition (167 B.C.)

When the Seleucid king Antiochus IV Epiphanes captured Jerusalem and plundered the temple in 169 B.C., the Jews began to demonize him (McGinn, 1994: 26; cp. 1 Macc. 1:20-28; 2 Macc. 5:11-27). “In 167, for motives that are still unclear, Antiochus went further and banned Jewish religious practices altogether” (McGinn, 1994: 26-7). 1 Maccabees 1:41-43 says, “Then the king wrote to his whole kingdom that all should be one people, and that all should give up their particular customs. All the Gentiles accepted the command of the king. Many even from Israel gladly adopted his religion; they sacrificed to idols and profaned the Sabbath.” Then in Jerusalem, he went way too far by erecting a statue of Zeus in the Jewish temple: “Now the fifteenth day of the month Casleu [Chislev], in the hundred forty and fifth year, they set up the abomination of desolation upon the altar” (1 Macc. 1:54, KJV).

I quote the KJV here, because it renders the crucial phrase “abomination of desolation,” which became the traditional expression of *an Antichrist idol* being placed in the Jewish temple. This is referred to by the prophet Daniel: “Forces from him will arise, desecrate the sanctuary fortress, and do away with the regular sacrifice. And they will set up the abomination of desolation” (Dan. 11:31, NASB). This Antichrist tradition enters the New Testament through Mark 13:14 and Matthew 24:15, as Jesus reappropriates

Daniel 11:31 for a “final tyrant” at the end of the world  
(McGinn, 1994: 26).

## **Chapter 5**

### **The Antimessiah Tradition (350 B.C. - A.D. 135)**

Messianism and apocalypticism are referred to as aspects of the Jewish “religion of supernaturalism” that flourished from 350 B.C. to A.D. 135 (May, 1948: 127). It is worthy of note that the Antiochus IV Epiphanes tradition emerged in 167 B.C. during this time period. As the idea of a Messiah began to develop, so also did the idea of an Antimessiah. “Christ” is the Greek expression for the Hebrew expression “Messiah;” therefore, the word “Antichrist” comes from the idea of an Antimessiah, which was a doctrine that was probably taking form hundreds of years before the New Testament was written. “The expectation of an Antichrist had its origin on Jewish ground. Thus the tradition might have been traced back to a period prior to that of the New Testament writings” (Bousset, 112). I do know that there were “imperial persecutor” ideas of an Antimessiah in this period, but I haven’t found any evidence of a false Jewish messiah idea in this period—however, it is a possibility. The Antimessiah tradition laid the groundwork for all subsequent Antichrist traditions.

## Chapter 6

### The False Jewish Messiah Tradition (A.D. 51)

The “false Jewish messiah” concept most probably originated in the early Christian community—since they were breaking away from Pharisaic Judaism. In A.D. 51, Paul wrote **2 Thessalonians 2:1-12**, the first manifestation of this tradition. There are many ideas that develop in this Antichrist tradition, as it became what I maintain to be **the dominant view of the Antichrist among the early church fathers**. As a general rule, in the False Jewish Messiah tradition, the Antichrist is the exact opposite of Jesus Christ, yet in a counterfeiting, copying sort of way. For example, he claims deity, in the yet-to-be rebuilt third temple in Jerusalem: “He opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, declaring himself to be God” (2 Thess. 2:4; cp. Dan. 11:36).

In A.D. 95, I maintain that **Revelation 13:12-13** contains the next explicit statement about the False Jewish Messiah tradition, in reference to the **occult power** of the Beast Out of the Earth, or the false prophet of the Antichrist: “It makes the earth and its inhabitants worship 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.” Theoretically, this he does to *deceive* the Jewish people, and anyone else who has a messianic or supernatural worldview (Rev. 19:20). I maintain that the next written manifestation of this False Jewish Messiah

tradition emerged around A.D. 120 in *Didache* 16.4: “The world-*deceiver* will be manifest as a son of God. He will perform signs and wonders, and the earth will be delivered over into his hands. He will perform lawless deeds, unlike anything done from eternity” (Ehrman, 217). Though there is no reference to Judaism in this verse, I believe that the elements such as deceiver, son of God, signs and wonders, and lawless deeds, are evidence of false Jewish Messiah.

The next appearance of writing in the False Jewish Messiah tradition came around A.D. 135 in the *Apocalypse of Peter* 2.6-9. This is the longest passage written in this Antichrist tradition since 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12. The passage says that lawless false Christs will come in the last days, and will turn Jewish Christians away from the faith (*Apoc. Pet.* 2.6-7). But some of those Jewish Christians will be successful in rejecting the Antichrist (one of the false Christs who is called the “*deceiver*”), and they will be martyred with the sword (*Apoc. Pet.* 2.8; cp. Rev. 20:4). And “Enoch and Elijah shall be sent to teach them that this is *the deceiver who must come into the world* and do signs and wonders in order to deceive” (*Apoc. Pet.* 2.9a; Ehrman, 282; cp. Rev. 11:1-13).

Around A.D. 150, the *Ascension of Isaiah* chapter 4 mentions information about the Antichrist, naming him “Beliar.” He is the devil incarnate; and the devil is portrayed as **a demonic principality that lives in the sky**: “After it is consummated, Beliar the great ruler, the king of this world, will descend, who hath ruled it since it came into being; yea, he will descent from his firmament in the likeness of a man, a lawless king, the slayer of his mother: who himself (even) this king” (4.2). “At his word the sun

will rise at night and he will make the moon to appear at the sixth hour” (4.5). “There will be the power of his miracles in every city and region” (4.10), perhaps on account of his demon-possessed apostles. Not only will the Antichrist have an image in Jerusalem, but “he will set up his image before him in every city” (4.11).

Justin Martyr was the next man to write in this Antichrist tradition, around A.D. 155, in reference to the Second Coming of Christ, he penned the following in *Dialogue with Trypho* 110.4: “In which He shall come from heaven with glory, when **the man of apostasy**, who speaks strange things against the Most High, shall venture to do unlawful deeds on the earth against us the Christians” (cp. Dan. 7:25). The reason why I think that this falls into the False Jewish Messiah tradition is because it refers to the Antichrist as the man of “apostasy;” a word which means *to fall away or depart from one’s religion*. This might imply that this portrait of the Antichrist portrays him as the son of Jewish Christians—who then abandoned the faith.

**Irenaeus**—one of the most outstanding and orthodox of the church fathers, in A.D. 180, adopts the False Jewish Messiah tradition, and in *Against Heresies* 5.25 wrote the most about the Antichrist that had yet ever been written in this tradition. Everything else up until this point consisted of passages and references, but this was an entire treatise, though a short one, entitled: “**The Fraud, Pride, and Tyrannical Kingdom of Antichrist, as Described by Daniel and Paul.**” In this Irenaeus says once again that the Antichrist will be a blasphemous apostate king (5.25.1a, 5a). He will be demonically empowered: “He (Antichrist) being endued with all the power of the devil...as a robber,

concentrating in himself [all] satanic apostasy” (5.25.1b-c). He destroys all idols except himself (5.25.1c), **takes his seat in “the temple in Jerusalem”** (5.25.2a), will have a 10-king kingdom (5.25.3a), will have a 3 ½ year reign (5.25.3g, 4j-k; cp. Dan. 9:27), and Jesus Christ will kill him when He returns (5.25.3i-j; cp. 2 Thess. 2:8).

Finally, the last writer in the False Jewish Messiah tradition is **Hippolytus of Rome**, who around A.D. 200 wrote a treatise called *On Christ and the Antichrist*—the greatest amount that had ever been written by anyone on the Antichrist subject, and “gave a handy summary of belief and legend” (McGinn, 2005: 394). But in Hippolytus, some unique developments occur. **He argues that although the Antichrist will be a false Jewish messiah, he will emerge as a tyrant out of the Roman Empire, but his seat of government will be in Jerusalem.** This is a mixture of the False Jewish Messiah tradition and the Roman Persecutor tradition, which I will discuss later.

With the idea in hand that the Antichrist is the anti-type of Jesus, Hippolytus says that **he will have counterfeit similarities to Jesus** in order to deceive people that he is the messiah. Jesus was a “*Lion*,” so the Antichrist will be a “lion” (6.1), Jesus is a *King*, so the Antichrist will be a king (6.2a), Jesus was a “*Lamb*,” so the Antichrist will appear to as a “lamb”—but will be a “wolf” in disguise (6.2b), Jesus was a *Jew*, so the Antichrist will be a Jew (6.3a), Jesus sent out *apostles*, so the Antichrist will send out apostles (6.3b), Jesus *gathered people from abroad*, so the Antichrist will gather people from abroad (6.4a; 54.2), Jesus puts His *seal* upon the redeemed, so the Antichrist will put his 666 seal upon those whom he deceives (6.4b;

cp. Rev. 13:18),<sup>1</sup> Jesus became a *Man*, so the Antichrist, although he is the devil, will become a man (6.5a), Jesus raised the *Temple* of His Body upon the cross, so the Antichrist will raise the third temple in Jerusalem (6.5b).

Genesis 49:9 says, “Judah is a lion’s whelp,” and Deuteronomy 33:22 says, “Dan is a lion’s whelp.” Hippolytus says, “As Christ springs from the tribe of Judah, so **Antichrist is to spring from the tribe of Dan**” (14.3a). He has a unique view of Revelation 13. Revelation 13:11 says, “I saw another beast that rose out of the earth; it had two horns like a lamb and it spoke like a dragon.” Hippolytus interprets: “By the beast, then, coming up out of the earth, he means the kingdom of Antichrist; and by the two horns he means him and the false prophet after him” (49.1). Many modern Evangelicals would interpret the Beast Out of the Earth itself as the false prophet of the Antichrist, rather than the Antichrist’s kingdom: “According to some, he symbolizes religious power in the service of secular authorities. According to others, he is the personal false prophet...[two horns like a lamb]: He attempts to appear gentle and harmless” (Barker, 1939). Moderns also interpret the horns as symbols of gentleness, rather than as the false prophet like Hippolytus does.

Revelation 13:15 says, “It was allowed to give breath to the image of the beast so that the image of the beast could even speak and cause those who would not worship the image of the beast to be killed.” While some Evangelicals

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<sup>1</sup> Which some Evangelicals are convinced could be fulfilled in modern times through **implantable microchips**, such as RFIDs. I see this as probable. See *Mystery Babylon* and *The Last Golden Calf* by Henry Vandergriff, which deals with this subject extensively.

interpret, “Belief in statues that could speak is widely attested in ancient literature. Ventriloquism and other forms of deception were common” (Barker, 1939). Others, such as myself, believe that supernatural occult power will be involved—that is, that an evil spirit would enter into the Antichrist statue and speak from it. But Hippolytus refers to the image of the beast not as an idolatrous statue, but as the Roman Empire. And by giving breath to that image, he *revives the Roman Empire*, which is the kingdom of the Antichrist, the Beast Out of the Earth (49.6).

## Chapter 7

### The Roman Persecutor Tradition (A.D. 100)

*The Sibylline Oracles*,<sup>2</sup> Book 5, arguably begin with writing what is the beginning of the Roman Persecutor tradition. Though I am aware that there is strong evidence for reference to Roman persecution in general in the Book of Revelation, I do not believe that means that the Book of Revelation portrays an Antichrist as a Roman emperor to the exclusion of being a false Jewish messiah. I think I can agree with Hippolytus' mixture of the two, but **I could never agree with a view that removed the false messiah element from the Antichrist. To me, the Biblical and patristic evidence presents too strong of a case for the Antichrist as a false messiah.**

But generally speaking, there emerged the view among both Christians and Jews that the Antichrist or Antimesiah, depending on your religion, would be or is a current **Roman emperor**. This was easy to believe, because the Roman Imperial Cult demanded worship of the emperor. Caligula, Nero, and Domitian were all nasty emperors that intolerantly forced *Roman emperor worship*. They were all considered candidates as the Antichrist, but Nero won out, because his persecutions and blasphemies were the most

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<sup>2</sup> Arguably a pagan scripture that unwittingly prophesies about true events that are paralleled in the Bible. Such a thing is not unheard of, for even God prophesied through Balaam, who was a pagan sorcerer (Num. 24). Some of the church fathers viewed the *Sibylline Oracles* as at least *partially inspired* by God.

severe. According to church history, Nero also killed Peter and Paul. Later on, Nero committed suicide by stabbing himself in the throat, and was then mythologized as an Antichrist and Antimesiah. “A rumor developed that Nero had not died but escaped across the Euphrates; it was thought by some that he had indeed died, but that he would be restored to life. In either case it was predicted that he would invade and devastate the Empire, also that he would besiege Jerusalem. Elements of this Neronic saga are found in the *Sibylline Oracles*” (Rist, 141). This has come to be called the **Nero redivivus** myth, or the Nero restored-to-life myth.

*Sibylline Oracles* 5.192-98 says, “Applause for his sweet songs shall put to death with his own wretched mother many men. From Babylon shall flee the fearful lord and shameless whom all mortals and best men abhor; for he slew many and laid hands upon the womb; against his wives he sinned and of men stained with blood had he been formed.” All of these things reflect activities Nero did in his life, and these oracles claim to be prophecies of an Antichrist. *Sibylline Oracles* 5.488-91 says, “From the limits of the earth shall come fleeing and pondering sharp things in his mind, a matricidal man who every land shall overpower and over all things rule.” In about A.D. 130, the *Epistle of Barnabas* quotes Daniel 7:24: “The prophet says, ‘Ten kingdoms will rule the earth and a small king will rise up afterwards; he will humble three of the kings at one time’” (4.4; Ehrman, 222). Though this could potentially mix with the False Jewish Messiah tradition, since 4.4-5 and 21.3 are the only things Antichrist-related, I be-

lieve that Barnabas' political emphasis (for what it's worth) falls into the Roman Persecutor tradition.

## Chapter 8

### The Simon Magus Tradition (A.D. 150)

In Acts 8:4-25, Philip the Evangelist is preaching and performing miracles in Samaria. In Samaria, there was a magician named Simon who had deceived the people into thinking that he was a prophet of God. But after seeing God's miracles worked through Philip, and hearing him preach the Gospel, "Even Simon himself believed" (8:13a). And "when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the Word of God, they sent Peter and John to them. The two went down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit" (8:14-15). When Simon saw the supernatural power that flowed through Peter and John as they laid their hands on people to receive the Holy Spirit, he offered them money for this power (8:18-19). To this, Peter responded, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain God's gift with money!" (8:20). Repenting, "Simon answered, 'Pray for me to the Lord, that nothing of what you have said may happen to me'" (8:24).

Expanding on this story, around A.D. 150, a book called the *Acts of Peter*<sup>3</sup> tells a story about miracle battles between Peter and Simon, who in light of this tradition becomes called Simon Magus, or Simon the Magician. Even though Acts 8:24 indicates that Simon repented of his sim-

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<sup>3</sup> Although this book might have been a Gnostic scripture, it could have had some historical grains of truth—concerning the supernatural contest between Peter and Simon.

ony before God and Peter, the *Acts of Peter* presumes that Simon had backslidden since then, and was proclaiming himself to be God incarnate. By now he had deceived the people of Rome into believing that he was God by the act of levitating or flying at great heights, by **the power of sorcery** (4.4, 8). In *Acts of Peter* 32, Simon Magus challenges Peter in front of doubting Christians, and deceived Romans, that he will prove himself to be God as he ascends into Heaven, just like Peter says Jesus did (32.5).

Simon Magus begins to fly and astonish the people once more (32.6), then Peter prays, “Make haste, O Lord, show your mercy and let him fall down and become crippled but not die; let him be disabled and break his leg in three places” (32.10; Ehrman, 151). And it was so. The believers were strengthened, people turned to Christ, and Simon Magus died following an operation on his leg (32.16). On page 150 of *The Antichrist Legend*, Wilhelm Bousset identifies this in similarity with satan’s fall from Heaven in Revelation 12:9: “The great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and satan,” and in Luke 10:18: “I watched satan fall from Heaven like a flash of lightning.” Simon Magus therefore, became an archetype of the Antichrist, in light of the supernatural deception he used on the Romans. **He had them under a spell.**

## Chapter 9

### The Anti-Docetic Tradition (A.D. 90 - A.D. 220)

It is believed by scholars that it was around A.D. 90 that **John** penned 1 and 2 John. It is only in these letters that the actual word “antichrist” appears in the Bible (1 John 2:18, 22; 4:3; 2 John 1:7). In 1 and 2 John, the Anti-Docetic tradition begins to manifest. **Docetism was a proto-Gnostic heresy that said Jesus didn’t have a physical body, but He was only a ghost.** To this, John responded, “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 the *deceiver* and the antichrist!” (2 John 1:7). Notice the familiar association of the word “deceiver” with antichrist—a word that was often found in the False Jewish Messiah tradition.

Here John associated Docetism with the demonic spirit of the antichrist, which he mentions in 1 John 4:3: “Every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. And this is **the spirit of the Antichrist**, of which you have heard that it is coming; and now it is already in the world.” When he says, “Of which you have heard that it is coming,” he is not negating the coming of an devil-incarnate false Jewish Messiah, but he is referring to the disincarnate spirit of the Antichrist already present in the earth, and letting them know that it is not only in the future that this evil spirit will be present in the world. 1 John 2:18 says, “Children, it is the last hour! As you have heard that Antichrist is coming,

so now many antichrists have come. From this we know that it is the last hour.”

**I do not see a negation of a single Antichrist here, but rather in addition to the future single Antichrist, John is also saying that plural antichrists are already in the world in the form of Christ-denying heretics.** Finally, in 1 John 2:22 it says, “Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son.” This is a curse on proto-Marcionism, which was a form of Docetism. Marcion denied that the God of the Old Testament (the Father) and the God of the New Testament (the Son) were one and the same God. John says it is “antichrist” to believe like that.

In A.D. 130, Polycarp, the church father who was a disciple of John, continues this Anti-Docetic tradition when he quotes 2 John 1:7 in *The Epistle of Polycarp to the Philip- pians* 7.1. And around A.D. 220, **Tertullian**, the great apologist, writes a lot against Marcionism—a developed form of Docetism and Gnosticism. Among these are *On the Resurrection of the Flesh*, *Against Marcion*, and *Pre- scription Against Heresies*; and in these works, there is some brief mentioning about the Antichrist in the Anti-Docetic tradition. Again, as I argued before, **the Anti-Docetic tradition is not exclusionary to the False Jewish Messiah tradition, but mixes with it.** Tertullian affirms the Anti-Docetic tradition: “Marcionites, whom the apostle John designated as antichrists, when they denied that Christ was come in the flesh” (*Against Marcion* 3.8.2-3).

Tertullian also affirms what appears to be the False Jew- ish Messiah tradition: “That the city of fornication may

receive from the ten kings its deserved due and that the beast Antichrist with his false prophet may wage war on the Church of God” (*On the Resurrection of the Flesh* 25.3). So firmly does Tertullian believe in a single last days Antichrist, that he even uniquely believes that the Roman Empire restrains him from coming: “What obstacle is there but the Roman State, the falling away of which, by being scattered into ten kingdoms, shall introduce Antichrist upon (its own ruins)?” (*On the Resurrection of the Flesh* 24.19).

## Chapter 10

### Keep the Faith, But Know the Signs!

Now that we have reviewed all of these **different Antichrist traditions** from the early church, some of **the confusion should be clarified** when thinking about the topic. In my opinion, Wilhelm Bousset's *The Antichrist Legend* (1896), while masterful in its treasury of sources and data, fails to distinguish between Christian Antichrist and Jewish Antimesiah traditions, which can be very confusing. It can be equally confusing for modern Christians who confuse different Antichrist traditions; and we haven't even investigated the Reformation period (which views the Catholic popes as antichrists). But hopefully now that we know this variety of traditions, we can make informed decisions about which arguments are the best in early church thought.

The reason why I wrote this treatise on the Antichrist is probably the same motive that Irenaeus and Hippolytus had when they wrote theirs. **This is a forewarning to the last generation of Christians.** I'm supposing that the information in this humble treatise will spread to at least some Christians in the future. I hope it will serve to help their **spiritual discernment**. There is so much confusion about the Antichrist, but Jesus would have His church to have a clear vision of who this archenemy of God is—and of the *occult powers* that move him. It is not fitting that the Antichrist issue should be so shrouded in mystery as to be unknowable. Perhaps **the New Age movement**, which is a popular occult movement, in conjunction with political

organizations such as **the United Nations**, will succeed in crowning the Antichrist. Perhaps it is for generations to come. *But it will come!* And it is necessary for Christians to know the signs of his coming, as well as the signs of Christ's return. Be blessed my Christian brothers and sisters; and do not fear, for our God is mighty. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

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