

Antecedents for an Antichrist

Several New Testament writings speak of an ultimate enemy of God who will arise in the last days to deceive many people and establish himself as an object of worship. In 2 Thessalonians this person is called “the lawless one” (2:3–9); elsewhere he is referred to as the “beast” (Rev. 13:1–18) or the “antichrist” (1 John 2:18).

Christian teaching about this eschatological foe has prototypes in biblical and secular history:

- The king of Babylon is depicted as God’s archenemy in Isaiah 14:12–15.
- The prince and king of Tyre are described as setting themselves against God in Ezekiel 28:1–19.
- A beast that opposes God is referred to in the writings of Daniel (7:7–8, 19–27; 8:9–14, 23–25; 9:26–27; 11:21–45; note especially the abomination in the temple in 11:31; cf. Matt. 24:15; 2 Thess. 2:4).
- In 39–41 CE the Roman emperor Caligula decided to put a statue of himself inside the Jerusalem temple for the Jews to worship; he died before actually doing so, but Jews and Christians remained appalled by the intended abomination.
- In the years following Nero’s death in 68 CE, rumors circulated that the emperor would rise from the dead as a god opposed to the Jewish-Christian God; this myth of *Nero redivivus* seems to have inspired some comments about the beast in Revelation 13.