

## Prophetic Profiling: Pinning Down the Antichrist

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Pop-prophecy frequently constructs a *profile of the Antichrist* that doesn't fit the *Biblical picture of the Antichrist*. Using hopscotch hermeneutics<sup>1</sup> and zigzag exegesis, the prophecy pundits dance right past the only passages that actually *define the Antichrist*. Additionally, they skip over passages that should ground our understanding, preferring texts that never speak of the Antichrist at all.

To see this method in action, let's look at a typical pop-prophecy profile and contrast it with the Bible's own portrait of the Antichrist.

### The Antichrist Story According to Greg Laurie

Greg Laurie is an outstanding Bible teacher in many respects,<sup>2</sup> but not when it comes to eschatology. On his website *Harvest.org*, Laurie gives us his *Profile of the Antichrist*.<sup>3</sup> As can be expected, a number of Scriptures make it onto his profiling list:

Daniel 8:25; 9:27; 12:11

Matthew 24:15

Luke 21:28

2 Thessalonians 2:3, 8

Revelation 6:2; 13:3–4, 8, 16–18; 17; 19:11–13, 20; 20:4

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<sup>1</sup> “Hopscotch hermeneutics is the unwarranted practice of stringing together passages from all over Scripture based on similar language, but with little or no regard to context. It generally results in invalid associations. Similar language and ideas can be used to describe different things at different times. Each description, metaphor, and analogy needs to be understood first and foremost in its own context. For example, Paul uses the planting and sowing analogy twice in his first letter to the Corinthians (3:5-9; 15:36-38), but he is describing two different things, using two different nuances. To assume that descriptions or metaphors always mean the same thing each time they appear is unsound practice. Proper hermeneutics dictates that linking passages is only appropriate when the contexts themselves are equivalent” (Daniel E. Harden).

<sup>2</sup> For example, his book *How to Share Your Faith*, available here <https://amzn.to/4qIFqnB>

<sup>3</sup> Profile of the Antichrist <https://bit.ly/3Lob1vF>

Typically, Scripture lists like this link together various passages that all share something in common. That's the whole reason for the list, after all. Accordingly, these passages indeed have something in common – *none of them use the word "Antichrist!"* The term never appears in any of those passages. Not even once.

In this sense, Laurie's article has much in common with most other pop-prophecy treatments of the Antichrist. As is often the case, the prophecy pundits' *Big Bad Biblical Bad Guy* is talked about a lot, but the passages that actually use the word "antichrist" almost never get discussed. Basically, the pundits' obsession with the figure of the Antichrist is matched only by their neglect of the very texts that name him.

### **An Amalgamated Antichrist**

Par for the course, an amalgamation of other texts dealing with different subjects is pieced together to create pop-prophecy's composite supervillain. Daniel's Little Horn (Dan. 8) is retrofitted onto Paul's Man of Lawlessness (2 Thes. 2) and then spliced into Revelation's Sea Beast (Rev. 13). As B.B. Warfield observed:

"We read of Antichrist nowhere in the New Testament except in certain passages of the Epistles of John (1 John ii. 18, 22; iv. 3; 2 John 7). What is taught in these passages constitutes the whole New Testament doctrine of Antichrist. It is common it is true, to connect with this doctrine what is said by our Lord of false christs and false prophets; by Paul of the Man of Sin; by the Apocalypse of the Beasts which come up out of the deep and the sea. The warrant for labeling the **composite photograph** thus obtained with the name of Antichrist is **not very apparent.**"<sup>4</sup>

In essence, they create a sort of eschatological Frankenstein, cobbled together from mismatched passages and sent lumbering onto the end-times scene. This would be great for a kaiju mashup movie,<sup>5</sup> but this isn't exactly great exegesis. Rather, it is in fact truly a *mashup* because none of these verses actually *match up* with what the Bible really says about the Antichrist.

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<sup>4</sup> B. B. Warfield on "Antichrist" — The Riddleblog <https://bit.ly/3Lxnzky>

<sup>5</sup> Kaiju – Wikipedia <https://bit.ly/49lk7wD> ;

## The Missing Verses in the Mashup

Out of the 31,102 verses in the Bible,<sup>6</sup> only four actually use the term *antichrist*, and all four conspicuously missing in pop-prophecy's monster mash.<sup>7</sup> When those passages themselves are taken into account, the prophecy pundits' approach is left in doubt. As Gary DeMar writes,

First, we must find a biblical definition of antichrist. The word "antichrist" appears only in John's epistles (1 John 2:18, 22; 4:3; 2 John 7). "What is taught in these passages constitutes the whole New Testament doctrine of Antichrist." John's description of antichrist is altogether different from the modern image. John's antichrist is

- Anyone "who denies that Jesus is the Christ" (1 John 2:22).
- Anyone who "denies the Father and Son" (1 John 2:23).
- "Every spirit that does not confess Jesus" (1 John 4:3).
- "Those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the antichrist" (2 John 7)

None of what John writes relates to the modern doctrine of the antichrist as previously outlined. John's antichrist doctrine is a theological concept related to an apostasy that was fomenting in his day. John did not have a particular individual in mind but rather *individuals* who taught that Jesus Christ is not who the Bible says He is.<sup>8</sup>

Echoing DeMar's observations here, Judith Lieu comments, "John looks not to the world stage but to something much more immediate to their experience; so *an* antichrist becomes 'many antichrists.'"<sup>9</sup> In other words, the antichrists were something that John and

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<sup>6</sup> "There are 31,102 verses in the Bible, which is made up of 23,145 verses in the Old Testament and 7,957 verses in the New Testament" (How Many Chapters & Verses are in Each Book of the Bible <https://bit.ly/3YwoRPJ>).

<sup>7</sup> As Ken Gentry points out, the term *Antichrist* "appears only four times in all of Scripture: in 1 John 2:18, 22; 4:3; and 2 John 7" (*He Shall Have Dominion: A Postmillennial Eschatology*, 3rd ed. revised and expanded [Chesnee, SC: Victorious Hope Publishing, 2021], 377).

<sup>8</sup> Gary DeMar, *Last Days Madness: Obsession of the Modern Church* (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision, 2019), 267.

<sup>9</sup> Judith Lieu, *I, II, & III John: A Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 100.

his readers were already experiencing within the context of their own time. With that said, these antichrists within the context of their time are not hard to find. When we amalgamate the four verses that actually address the topic, the antichrists were those who denied that “Jesus is the Christ” (1 Jn. 2:22). Or put another way, they denied that “the Messiah is Jesus.”<sup>10</sup> In other words, the antichrists were denying the fundamental confession of the Christian community, within a first-century Jewish context (cf. Jn. 20:31; Acts 5:42; 18:5, 28).<sup>11</sup>

Of course, the first-century Jewish community overall naturally would have been at odds with the Christian community over the question of Jesus’s Messiahship. So that’s to be expected. The twist, however, is that these antichrists were once part of the believing community itself – affirming that fundamental Christian confession. Albeit insincerely. But they were outwardly part of the confessing Church nonetheless. As John says, “They went out from us, but they were never really of us” (1 Jn. 2:19).

In other words, they were Jews who had once embraced Jesus as the Messiah but now renounced their former confession to return to Judaism.<sup>12</sup> As Lieu writes, “Since those who made the denial once ‘belonged to us, they cannot have been Jewish opponents with no prior connection.’”<sup>13</sup> Terry Griffith sums it up succinctly: “...we are dealing with the apostasy of Jewish Christians back to Judaism.”<sup>14</sup>

In this regard, there is an Old Testament passage that actually dovetails with the antichrist phenomenon, but it’s not Daniel 8 – as per Laurie’s list above.

### **Deuteronomy 13: A Pattern Re-Seen**

To avoid *hopscotch hermeneutics* and make a true Biblical connection, from one text to the next, there must be something that actually connects within each text. In his first epistle, John is very much tracking on the Deuteronomic polemic against apostate Israel’s idol

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<sup>10</sup> See: Terry Griffith, “‘Little Children, Keep Yourselves from Idols’ (1 John 5: 21)” (*Tyndale Bulletin* 48.1 [1997]), 189 <https://bit.ly/4qAwM3X>

<sup>11</sup> See: Griffin, “Little Children,” 190.

<sup>12</sup> For detailed examination of the ancient historical evidence for this thesis, and an in-depth and innovative exegesis of the key passages, see: Daniel R. Streett, *They went out from us: The Identity of the Opponents in First John* (New York, NY: De Gruyter, 2011).

<sup>13</sup> Lieu, *I, II, & III John*, 105.

<sup>14</sup> Griffin, “Little Children,” 189.

worship when he says, “**they went out from us**” (1 Jn. 2:19). Notice the striking similarity of John’s words to those recorded by Moses in Deuteronomy’s *warning against idolatry*:<sup>15</sup>

“Some worthless men have **gone out from among you** and have seduced the inhabitants of their city, saying, ‘Let’s go and serve other gods’ (whom you have not known)” (Deut. 13:13).

These words in Deuteronomy speak of people within the covenant community itself enticing their fellow Israelites to worship false gods.

Fast forwarding in Old Testament history to shortly before the northern kingdom was conquered by the Assyrians, the prophet Amos indicts the apostates for doing this very thing:

“You also carried along Sikkuth (Molech) your king and Kiyyun (Saturn), your images, your star gods, which you made for yourselves. <sup>27</sup>Therefore I will make you go into exile beyond Damascus,” says the Lord, whose name is the God of armies” (Amos 5:26-27).<sup>16</sup>

Next, let’s fast forward to the New Testament when Stephen was indicting the apostate leaders of his own day.<sup>17</sup> Notice how he recounts the disobedience of their fathers (Acts 7:39) and quotes this passage from Amos:

“You also took along the tabernacle of Molech, and the *star* of the god Rompha (Saturn), the images which you made to worship them, but I will deport you beyond Babylon” (Acts 7:43).

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<sup>15</sup> As this chapter in Deuteronomy is famously known and reflected in the chapter’s subheading in most versions of the Bible. For example: Deuteronomy 13 NLT - A Warning against Idolatry – Bible Project <https://bit.ly/498uQQP>

<sup>16</sup> Amos 5:26-27 NASB - Bible Gateway <https://bit.ly/4izejbT> , see marginal note C on the phrase “star gods.” Likewise, the rendering of the phrase in the ESV.

<sup>17</sup> See: Robert E. Cruickshank, Jr., Asteroids, Dreams, and Wormwood (Revelation 8:10-11) - The Burros of Berea <https://bit.ly/4brjRU1>

Finally, Stephen drops the hammer down and tells them: “...you are doing just as your fathers did” (Acts 7:51). Those words got him killed (Acts 7:54-60), but Stephen held his ground to the end, and his message was clear: they might not have been worshipping false gods anymore, but they might as well have been. In short, the rejection of Jesus as the Messiah was equivalent to idolatry, and this comports well with what John says about the antichrists. They denied that “Jesus is the Christ” (1 John 2:22), and they denied “the Father and Son” (1 John 2:23).

So, the Deuteronomy 13 pattern repeats, and the Old Testament really does have relevance for 1 John after all<sup>18</sup> – just not the Old Testament passages that the pundits use, such as Daniel 8. This is the difference between proper hermeneutics and pop-prophecy’s hopscotch hermeneutics. Knowing what passage John was tracking on helps us to know what’s going on – when he talks about the antichrists.

Additionally, it also helps clarify what’s going on with the mysterious *sin unto death* (1 Jn. 5:16) that has plagued interpreters for quite some time.

### **Deuteronomy 13 and The Sin Unto Death**

What is the sin unto death? Over time, much ink has been spilled and many pages have been filled wrestling with this issue. And the attempts to explain it follow the same hopscotch hermeneutic and zigzag exegesis as the attempts to identify the antichrist, but Deuteronomy 13 is once again the key that unlocks the mystery.

In Deuteronomy 13, the result of leading true believers astray by leading them away from the Lord and into idolatry was the death penalty (Deut. 13:5, 9-10). This was not a minor doctrinal misstep or a minor lapse in judgment. The gravity of the offense is as unmistakable as the punishment for the offense. In every way, this very much was “a sin leading to death” (1 Jn. 5:16b). To be clear, John isn’t telling his readers to take matters into their own hands and enforce this civil sanction against the offenders, but he is telling his readers not to pray for them because they have committed this death-warranting sin (1 Jn. 5:16c).

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<sup>18</sup> As Streett comments, “The depiction of the false prophets in 1 John 4:1–6 and 2 John 7 appears to have its source in Deuteronomy 13 and 18:15–22, which warn Israel of ‘lawless’ ones who ‘go out’ to deceive the nation into worshipping idols” (*They Went Out From Us*, 110, see also: 145, 147-150, 232). As Street puts it, Deuteronomy is acting as a “subtext” for John (147).

The *antichrists*, who had once confessed Christ but now led others astray, were exactly those committing this *sin unto death*. Just as God's Old Testament people needed to root out those who lured them away from the Lord and into idolatry, John's readers also needed to recognize the deadly seriousness of apostasy. They were not even to pray for those who once accepted Jesus as the Messiah but now rejected Him. That may seem harsh by today's standards, but it perfectly reflected the teachings of Christ:

“You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet.” (Matt. 5:17).

All of this, in turn, makes sense out of John's perceived enigmatic ending to the epistle: “Little children, guard yourselves from idols” (1 Jn. 5:21).

### **Deuteronomy 13 and John's Closing Statement**

To many, 1 John's final verse seems abrupt, unexpected, and completely unrelated to the previous context. As one Bible reference tool puts it, the concluding words appear “odd,” “blunt,” and “sudden.”<sup>19</sup> In fact, it's been noted that commentators have long struggled “to explain the introduction of the unexpected topic of idols as the very last word.”<sup>20</sup> But if we track on what John's been tracking on all along, there is nothing odd, sudden, or unexpected about his conclusion at all.

Just like the covenant apostates of Deuteronomy 13:13 who lured God's people into idol worship, the antichrists had arisen from the midst of the believing community itself – attempting to lead true believers astray by denying that Jesus was the True Messiah. In the minds of the New Testament leadership (like Stephen and John), this was no different than bowing to idols or worshipping false Gods – *because Jesus was the True God, and He was the Son of the True God*. Taken in this light, the meaning of the final verse then opens up, and the entire letter snaps into focus.

“Little children, guard yourselves from idols” (1 Jn. 5:20) is not a misplaced appendix, but the theological climax of the entire epistle. When we understand John's words this way,

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<sup>19</sup> Bible Reference 1 John 5:21 <https://bit.ly/3N5shqd>

<sup>20</sup> Griffith, “Little Children,” 187.

everything falls into place and the entire epistle makes sense. John's closing warning about idols, his reference to the sin unto death, and his teaching on the antichrists are all part of a cohesive theme, working off Deuteronomy 13. The antichrist's renunciation of Jesus as the Messiah was the death grip of apostasy, which was equivalent to idolatry.

## Recap

In sum, looping back to Deuteronomy 13 helps us: 1) identify what is meant by the term *antichrist*, 2) understand what is meant by *the sin unto death*, and 3) make sense out of the reference to *idols* in John's closing verse. Everything in the epistle ties together, and it is all interrelated. This seamless symmetry is a stark contrast to pop-prophecy's clunky, composite-antichrist – amalgamated from texts that are unrelated.

When dealing with the topic of antichrist, we need to deal with the four passages in the Bible that actually address the topic. Additionally, we need to draw from the Old Testament passage that John himself draws from in the epistle (Deut. 13), rather than unrelated passages that he doesn't (i.e., Dan. 8, 2 Thes. 2, Rev. 13, etc.).

John's Antichrist is not Daniel's Little Horn, or Paul's Man of Lawlessness, or Revelation's Beast of the Sea. In fact, John himself wrote Revelation, so he was quite capable of using the term "antichrist" if he wanted to when he penned the Bible's closing book. He didn't.

Laurie's Profile of the Antichrist is more like profiling Al Capone, John Dillinger, and Lucky Luciano into one super-gangster. All bad guys? Yep. All the same bad guy? Nope.

If we want to *pin down the antichrist*, we need to *stick* with the passages that actually pin him down. If we're going to truly *profile the Antichrist*, we need to *stick* with Scripture's profile of the Antichrist. When we do that, the prophecy pundits' *profile* doesn't *stick*.