

diagrams to illustrate, and providing a running outline of the seven acts with guidance for director, producer, and actors.⁴³ Raquel’s essay shows the promise of Revelation read as drama. Reading her neatly organized, creative performance helps visualize the possibilities.

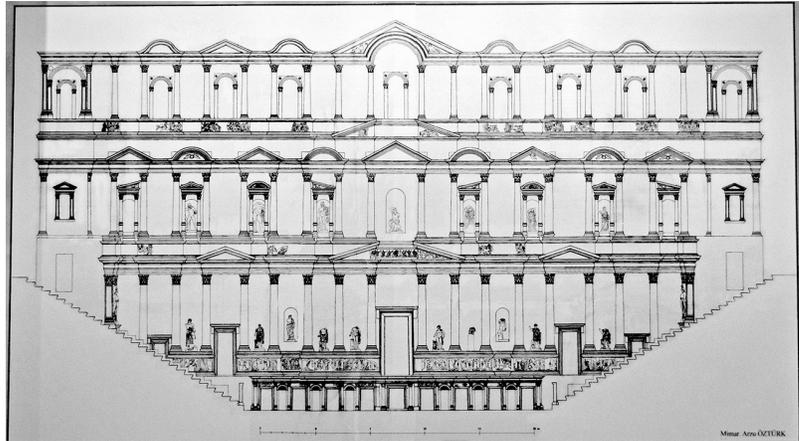


FIGURE 9.32. *Scaenae Frons* of Perge Theater. An artist’s depiction of the backdrop, or *scaenae fons*, of the theater at Perge in Pamphylia (AAM).

Antichrist Character

One famous character is missing from Revelation’s drama. His name is Antichrist. You may have met him before. He’s a pretty popular fellow in futurist dramas. Amazing how legend can take a single sheet of blank paper and cut out an intricate origami masterpiece never seen in the original. As we saw in our history of interpretation, already by the time of Adso the Antichrist legend in Medieval Europe had grown into a full body armor “Iron Man” apocalypse movie star better than Marvel Comics could conjure, even with elaborate Hollywood CGI special effects. One never ceases to be amazed how flights of fancy in apocalyptic traditions evolve out of one single verse of Scripture, or at most, a few, and those often are in the same solitary paragraph—an entire doctrine with extraordinarily elaborate details, no less! We see this phenomenon with ideas such as the millennium, Armageddon, and Antichrist. What is the real story of Antichrist? Most certainly not what you probably think.

⁴³Ibid., 166–74.

The term “antichrist” occurs in only four verses in all of Scripture, and all four are in 1–2 John (1 John 2:18, 22; 4:3; 2 John 7). How about we let the author of these epistles tell us what he means by the figure—because he does. The two verses of 1 John 2:18–19 teach four major truths about the figure of “antichrist” completely ignored in the popular Antichrist legends. The Antichrist you know is not biblical.

- First, John’s *realized* eschatology is unquestionable; the last hour is present: “Little children, it is the last hour.” Futurism not even in the slightest is on the horizon for this statement. John’s “antichrist” teaching is in the context of this realized eschatology.
- Second, John’s *exclusive* teaching is for his own community: “just as you heard that antichrist is coming.” This specialized tradition and technical terminology is not to be found in any other early Christian community or literature. Not even the Pauline “man of sin” (2 Thess 2:3) qualifies. Paul is precise; he emphatically does not say “antichrist.” Further, Paul’s context is crucially different on multiple counts. The most important is a future reality, not present. Paul expressly says this “man of sin” has *not* arrived, but the apostle John expressly says the “antichrist” *has* arrived.
- Third, John’s *multiple* number of “antichrists” is explicit: “and now many antichrists have come about.” John’s teaching of “antichrist” is a conceptual role to be fulfilled, not the name of one person.
- Fourth, John’s *identification* is about heretical teachers. John identifies precisely who are the multiple “antichrist” figures in the very next verse: “They went out from us” (1 John 2:19). These separatists are known heretics formerly aligned with John’s churches but now separated in their own communities. They teach a false Christology, which dominos into their ethical and pneumatic aberrations. John denies their false teachings forcefully: “Who is the liar except the one who denies Jesus is the Messiah” (1 John 2:22)? Again, he says, “and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not of God, and this person is of the antichrist, which you heard that it is coming, and now is in the world already” (1 John 4:3). This “antichrist” is the spirit of heresy. John restates the “antichrist” teaching in the second letter: “For many deceivers are gone forth into the world, even they that confess not that Jesus Christ comes in the flesh. This one is the

deceiver and the antichrist” (2 John 7). Once again, this teaching is about a *present* situation among *multiple* individuals who teach or affirm christological *heresy*. Context makes clear the concept is the heresy of false Christology that denies Jesus as having come in the flesh. Many persons can fulfill the role of directly opposing Jesus through heretical teachings—the essence of John’s “antichrist.” For John, being “antichrist” is being “anti-Jesus” in Christology.

Four verses in two Johannine epistles is the sum total of what the Bible has to say of “antichrist.” The teaching is this: exclusively Johannine, now present in John’s community, multiple persons teaching heresy. The legendary character “Antichrist” never appears in the real drama of Revelation. John the Seer never even uses the term. The figure is a wild fantasy of apocalyptic imagination having accrued personhood, personality, and plot over multiple millennia of mythical evolution, but one for whom John writes no script in his play.

The problem with obsessive focus on the Antichrist character is more serious than believing a myth. Antichrist is a distorted caricature that, while supposedly personifying evil, trivializes evil into a comic-strip character. Antichrist also exteriorizes evil “out there,” allowing a dissociation from our own persons. We think whatever the problem of evil is, that is the Antichrist and has nothing to do with us. Antichrist legend is a projection of the Satan any human soul can incarnate. Antichrist mythology anesthetizes conscience by distracting us from looking in the right direction for what is wrong with the world and preventing us from dealing with evil where evil truly resides (Jas 1:14).

Structure

The structure of Revelation is an Excedrin headache. Consult the critical commentaries. Immediately, you are in a morass. Some outlines even have arranged the entire book as one gigantic chiasm.⁴⁴ Some

⁴⁴The name chiasm comes from the Greek letter chi, which looks like an “X.” The outer points of the two legs of the letter can be arranged variously, such as A1, A2, B1, B2 or A1, B1, B2, A2. Symmetry is the point. If A1 is a scene with angels, then A2 is some similar scene with angels. Or, if B1 has a central feature of a command, then B2 will have a command element. Ancient writers arranged material this way to aid the hearer in following the “flow” of material through recognizable elements of symmetry.