

Question: In 1 John 4:3 how can the Antichrist be “already in the world” and yet still “to come?” I understand that the Antichrist would be a literal person. Wouldn’t this person be extremely old and very noticeable in the world if he existed back then and exists now? What about the phrase “the spirit of the antichrist?” Does that mean this spirit is just “hanging around” until the person in whom he is to possess appears on earth?

Answer: In the book of Revelation, the apostle John (the author of 1 John) refers to the Antichrist by the title “the false prophet” (Rev 13:11–17; 16:13; 19:20; 20:10). In 1 John 4:1 John writes, “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.” In John’s mind, the Antichrist is the ultimate manifestation of false prophecy and the many “false prophets” (1 John 4:1) are his precursors. This is confirmed by 1 John 2:18: “Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have appeared; from this we know that it is the last hour.”

John is saying that teachers that do not confess Jesus (1 John 4:3) are antichrists with a small “a.” The Greek word *anti* means “against” or “in place of.” Thus, antichrists may refer generally to any apostate teacher who is against Christ or who claims to be Christ (Matt 24:23–24; 1 John 2:18; 4:3). The Antichrist refers to the final and horrible world ruler of the tribulation. He is one who stands both against Christ and who seeks to usurp Christ’s place as the False Messiah of the Jews (see 2 Thess 2:3–4).