Understanding 1 John 2:18: The Greek Meaning of “That” and “Antichrist”

Introduction

Few words in the Bible have carried as much theological weight and misunderstanding as the word *Antichrist*. In modern Christianity—especially within futurist or dispensational frameworks—the term is often used as a title for a single, end-times individual who will oppose Christ and deceive the world. However, a closer look at **1 John 2:18**, both in the original Greek and in English translations, reveals that this popular interpretation rests more on translation choices than on what the apostle John actually wrote.

This study examines two critical translation details in **1 John 2:18**—the conjunction *“that”* (Greek: **ὅτι / hoti**) and the noun *“antichrist”* (Greek: **ἀντίχριστος / antichristos**)—and shows how the addition of the English article *“the”* and the capitalization of *“Antichrist”* in some versions subtly shaped later theological assumptions.

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1. The Greek Text of 1 John 2:18

> ***Greek (transliterated):*** *Paidia, eschatē hōra estin; kai kathōs ēkousate hoti antichristos erchetai, kai nyn antichristoi polloi gegonasin; hothen ginōskomen hoti eschatē hōra estin.*
> ***Literal rendering:*** *“Little children, it is the last hour; and*

> *as you heard **that** antichrist comes, even now many antichrists have arisen; from this we know that it is the last hour."*

Two terms are particularly important for accurate understanding:

- *hoti* (ὅτι) – translated "that"
- *antichristos* (ἀντίχριστος) – translated "antichrist"

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2. The Greek Word "ὅτι" (hoti) – "That"

The conjunction **ὅτι (hoti)** is one of the most common words in the New Testament. It functions primarily in two ways:

1. **Declarative / Content clause:** introducing the *content* of what someone has heard, said, or believed. Example: "You heard **that** antichrist comes."
   → meaning "You heard *the statement that* antichrist is coming."
2. **Causal:** meaning "because," depending on context.

In **1 John 2:18**, *hoti* is clearly **declarative**. It introduces what the believers had previously been taught. Thus, the translation "you heard that antichrist comes" accurately reflects the Greek construction.

In English, "that" functions identically as a conjunction introducing the content of what was heard. The NKJV correctly retains the word "that," aligning perfectly with the original Greek meaning.

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3. The Greek Word “ἀντίχριστος” (antichristos) – “antichrist”

The noun **ἀντίχριστος** is a **compound word**:

- *anti* = “against” or “in place of”
- *christos* = “Christ” (the Anointed One)

Thus, *antichristos* means **“one who is against or instead of Christ.”**
It is a **common noun**, describing a type or class of person, not a specific name or title.

Importantly, **the Greek text does not contain the definite article** (“ὁ,” *the*) before *antichristos*.
John wrote simply:

> *ὅτι ἀντίχριστος ἔρχεται – “that antichrist comes”*

This construction is called **anarthrous** (without the article), which normally indicates an indefinite or qualitative sense rather than a specific individual.
In other words, John was referring to the *spirit or type* of person who opposes Christ, not naming a singular, titled figure.

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4. Why Some English Versions Add “the” and Capitalize “Antichrist”

Greek and English handle definite articles differently. Greek often omits them where English requires them for smoothness or clarity. Translators sometimes supply *the* when:

- referring to something familiar or previously taught,

- or to make English syntax flow naturally.

The NKJV translators, assuming John referenced a well-known eschatological figure, **inserted "the"** and **capitalized "Antichrist."**
This decision, though grammatically unnecessary, carries significant theological weight: it converts a **common noun** into a **proper noun**, implying a single identifiable individual rather than a general category.

Other translations such as the KJV, NASB, ESV, and CSB avoid this interpretive step, leaving *antichrist* in lowercase and without the article, thereby maintaining John's broader intent.

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5. Translation Comparison Table

Version	Text (focus portion)	Notes
Greek (NA28/TR)	*ὅτι ἀντίχριστος ἔρχεται* – "that antichrist comes"	No article; lowercase; general noun.
KJV (1611)	"as ye have heard that **antichrist** shall come"	Follows Greek closely – no article, lowercase.
NKJV (1982)	"as you have heard that **the Antichrist** is coming"	Adds *the* and capitalizes – implies a singular person.
NASB (1995 / 2020)	"just as you heard that **antichrist** is coming"	No article; lowercase – faithful to Greek.
ESV (2016)	"as you have heard that **antichrist** is coming"	Lowercase; no article.

Version	Text (focus portion)	Notes
NIV (2011)	"as you have heard that **the antichrist** is coming"	Adds *the* but not capitalization — interpretive.
CSB (2020)	"you have heard that **antichrist** is coming"	Lowercase; no article; Greek-consistent.

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6. The Impact of Translation Choices

By **capitalizing "Antichrist"** and adding **"the"**, the NKJV subtly changes how the verse is perceived.
It transforms John's statement from a warning about *a spirit and many deceivers* into what appears to be a prophecy of *a single eschatological figure*.

This interpretive choice has historically reinforced the **futurist notion** of *"The Antichrist"*—a lone world deceiver to appear at the end of the age. Yet John's own writing immediately clarifies his meaning:

> *"Even now many antichrists have come" (1 John 2:18b).*

Thus, John defines *antichrist* not as one individual but as many who embody opposition to Christ, both in spirit and in doctrine.

Conclusion

The difference between "antichrist" and "the Antichrist" may seem minor, but it profoundly affects interpretation.
In **Greek**, John wrote of a **type**—anyone opposing or replacing Christ.
In **English**, the NKJV's capitalization and added article **shift**

the sense toward a **specific, singular person**, effectively turning a **common noun** into a **proper title** that the Greek grammar does not support.

Understanding this nuance helps clear away centuries of theological assumption and refocuses the reader on John's actual concern: the spirit of deception already present in the first century.

> *"Even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time" (1 John 2:18).*

The apostle's warning remains timeless—not about anticipating one great deceiver in the future, but about discerning the ongoing presence of those who deny Christ and His truth in every generation.
