

THE BEAST AND THE FALSE PROPHET

Revelation 13

Introduction:

This is the 21st message in our sermon series on the book of Revelation. We have been at it off and on since last July. I have to admit that many times I have felt like I was in over my head as I have been preparing these messages. There are so many things in this book that are difficult to understand and there has been much controversy over the meaning of this book throughout the centuries.

However, I believe that it is important that we have at least a cursory understanding of what the Bible has to say about the end times. There is so much prophetic truth laid out in the Scriptures—not only in Revelation, but scattered throughout the Gospels and epistles as well—that it is clearly important. In fact, Matthew uses two lengthy chapters to record for us some teaching of Jesus about the events that were to come. Some of his prophecies speak of events soon to happen at the hands of the Romans, but much of it still lies ahead, even though we are now almost 2000 years into the future from when he spoke those words.

At the beginning of this series on the book of Revelation, I gave a bit of information about various views regarding the chronology of the end times. We have talked about things like the Tribulation and the Millennium, the Rapture and the Return of Christ. Perhaps some of those terms are still confusing to you. I would like to take a few minutes to briefly review or outline the order of coming events from my understanding of the Scriptures. Not everyone agrees with my views.

If you still have the chart from David Levy which I distributed a few months ago, you will find it helpful at this time. On it you will see, at the very left side, the Church Age – represented by the seven churches of Rev. 2-3. That is where we are right now. We are living in the church age. It began with the coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, ten days after Jesus ascended into heaven following his resurrection.

That is almost 2000 years ago now. We do not know how long this church age will continue, but at the appointed time on God's timetable it will come to an end and the time of the end will begin.

It will begin with what we call the Rapture. In 1 Thess. 4, the Apostle Paul describes this event by saying, *"...the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord."* The church—those who are truly believers in Jesus—will be caught away to be with Jesus.

This will be soon followed by the seven year period we call the (Great) Tribulation. During this time those who are left behind will face a time of tribulation and hardship like this world has never seen. A powerful world ruler will burst onto the scene, promising peace and security, but that peace will soon be broken down as the world moves from one catastrophe to another. In a few moments we are going to have a closer look at this false Messiah whom we call the Antichrist.

At the end of the seven-year Tribulation, as the nations of the world gather for war against Israel, Jesus Christ will return to this earth as Messiah and King to conquer the enemies of God in a great war known as the Battle of Armageddon. At that point he will establish his kingdom of truth and righteousness which will continue for a thousand years—the millennium. Satan and his minions will be cast into the bottomless pit, where they will be held for the thousand years.

Following the thousand-year reign of Christ, Satan will be released for a brief period and given one last chance to deceive the nations. After that, he will be cast into the Lake of Fire for all eternity. The unsaved will be raised to face the judgement of God, and will find their place alongside Satan in eternal punishment for their unbelief and rebellion against God and his Son Jesus Christ.

Once evil has been forever put away, the current earth and heavens will be destroyed by fire. God will create a new heaven earth, where those who have been washed by the blood of Jesus will spent eternity.

Well, that is a very brief overview of the end-time events. Not everyone would agree with the order or the timeline. There are many who view many of the timeline numbers and events as figurative rather than literal, saying that events like the 1000-year reign of Christ are not literal events. But I prefer to believe that the Bible means just what it says. There is certainly a great deal of figurative language in the book of Revelation and other prophetic passages, but when clear terms are given we need to take it for what it says.

Having said all of that, let us now go back to look at two significant end-time individuals who are described to us in Revelation 13. These two persons are similar in character, but fulfil somewhat different roles. One is a political ruler, and the other is more of a religious ruler. We know them as the Antichrist and the false Prophet. They are described in Rev. 13 as two beasts. *Begin by reading Revelation 13.*

The Man of Lawlessness – the Antichrist

In the first 10 verses we see the first beast. He comes up out of the sea – a reference to the Gentile nations – the sea of Gentile humanity. The beast is identified as a man later on in v. 18. Looking at the description in vv. 1-2 we cannot help but notice the connection to the visions of Daniel. In Daniel 7 he sees a vision of four beasts, the first like a lion, the second like a bear, the third like a leopard and the fourth unlike anything on earth, terrifying and dreadful. When you look at John's description of this beast it matches a combination of the first three beasts in Daniel, except in reverse order.

His mouth is like a lion's mouth – symbolic of Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian Empire and speaks of majesty, power and fierceness. His feet like a bear's – symbolic of the Medo-Persian Empire and speaks of strength, stability and tenacity. He was like a leopard – symbolic of the Greek Empire under Alexander the Great and speaks of swiftness. This beast in Revelation has all those characteristics rolled into one.

His power and authority come from the dragon, who is Satan. He will be energized by Satan and will have greater authority and power than all successive world empires before him. He will be a pawn in the hand of Satan to rule and control the world.

This beast, the Antichrist, will attract the worship of the inhabitants of the earth, along with the dragon, as he has received his power and authority from the dragon. Verses 5-8 speak of the beast's blasphemous speech as he rails against God, blaspheming his name and his dwelling (or tabernacle). He will make war against anyone who follows God and refuses to bow to him and his wishes. He will be given authority over all those who dwell on the earth – every tribe and people and language and nation. Anyone who has not made the choice to follow Christ will be caught up in the lie that this is the Messiah, and they will worship him. Those who refuse will pay for it with their lives, at least in most cases.

But there is one thing I want you to note. Even though his power and authority come from the dragon, that is Satan, yet he is still under the control of God himself. Even Satan can only go as far as God allows. The exercise of his authority is restricted to 42 months – 3 ½ years. This is the last half of the Tribulation period. The time will come when God will cut off his power and bring his authority to an end and his empire will crash and burn just like every other empire before him.

The False Prophet

Well, we need to get to the second person in this unholy alliance that is seeking to conquer and control the earth. John says, "I saw another beast..." The word "another" that is used here means another of the same kind. This beast possesses the same nature and characteristics as the first beast, but he functions in a supporting role as a religious prophet.

This beast is rising up out of the earth. Some have interpreted that to mean that he is from the nation of Israel. If the sea refers to the Gentile nations, then the earth is symbolic of Israel. If that is the case then this would point to an apostate Jew who will lead Israel to make a covenant with Antichrist and then lead the people in his apostate beliefs and practices. However, there is really nothing to indicate the racial or ethnic identity of this person.

There are a few important things to note about this second beast:

1. "It had two horns like a lamb..." Horns speak of power and authority. Jesus is often referred to as "the Lamb of God" and in Rev. 5:6 he is revealed as the Lamb with seven horns. The False Prophet will look like a lamb with two horns, indicating that he will have less power than Jesus Christ. He appears like a lamb, but in reality he is a wolf in sheep's clothing, whose only goal is to kill and destroy. Jesus warned, "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves." (Matthew 7:15)
2. "...it spoke like a dragon." David Levy says, *"Although docile in appearance, his speech will be subtle, seductive, and satanic, structured to lead people away from belief in Christ and into the cunning, corrupt worship of the Antichrist. His word will be law and those who defy it will pay with their lives."*
3. "It exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence (or 'on his behalf')..." That word, "exercises" is used 8 times in vv. 12-18 and it means "to do, to cause, to make, to perform..." The False Prophet's work will be to make sure the Antichrist is in full control.
4. "... [it] makes the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast." This is the False Prophets main objective. David Levy says, *"By exercising great power, the false prophet will consolidate worldwide religion, economy, and commerce under his control (vv. 13-17). Notice the chain of authority: The first beast will promote Satan's desire for worldwide domination and worship; the second beast will promote the first beast's desire for the same by manifesting "great wonders" (v. 13).*

There is an interesting analogy in this pseudo religious system established by Satan. Not only do we see a false Christ, but what we are really seeing here is a false trinity. The real Trinity is God the Father, the Son, Jesus Christ whose goal is to do the will of, and carry out the purposes of, his Father and the Holy Spirit, whose purpose is to empower believers and to lead people to worship the Father and the Son. In this false trinity you have the dragon, Satan, the Antichrist, whose goal is to promote the work and desires of the dragon on earth, and the false prophet, who does great signs and miracles and leads people to worship the dragon and the first beast—the Antichrist.

Verses 13-17 give us a rundown of the activities of this second beast—the false prophet. His activity includes great miracles and signs, down through the power given to it by the dragon:

- Making fire come down from heaven
- Giving breath and voice to an image of the first beast
- Controlling the economy and the commerce of the earth by forcing everyone (regardless of social, economic or cultural status) to receive a special mark in order to buy or sell.

In doing this, he will bring complete control over the earth and the people into the hands of the Antichrist.

There is one other thing that we must look at for just a moment—the mark of the beast. *Read vv. 16-18 again.*

We are not told what this mark is, or how it is to be administered. This has been the subject of much speculation over the years. In recent years, it seems that every advancement in technology is seen by some as the coming of the mark – *expand*. I think we need to be careful with these speculations. There is no indication that anything we see in the world today can be connected to the mark that is mentioned here.

The other part of this control has to do with the number 666. Ancient people often assigned numbers to the letters of their alphabets. Thus names could be associated with a number. John tells us that this mark is the name of the beast, or the number of his name—666. Many have tried to identify who this might be – ancient Roman emperors, Catholic popes, Hitler, Stalin. The most likely interpretation is that this is a future man who will not be recognized until the time of the Tribulation. It is futile to try to determine today who this number might stand for.

Conclusion

Well, again we come to the question, so what? What can we take from this chapter this morning?

A couple of obvious answers to that: first, just the fact that God has promised in the book of Revelation, a blessing on those who study and seek to understand the contents of this book. Second, there is an urgen-

cy, because of the suddenness with which these things will come upon the earth, to be prepared for the Rapture and to be warning others to be ready, so they will not have to face the hatred of the Antichrist or the wrath of God.

But there is one other thing that we need to be aware of. I would like to read one more paragraph from David Levy's book (he has a wonderful way of putting things into perspective). He says:

"John has revealed a pervasive satanic system that will control the world during the Great Tribulation. Discerning believers are acutely aware that seeds of this movement are being sown today and could blossom in the very near future, Jesus not only warned of pseudo christs and prophets, but admonished, "Take heed that no man deceive you" (Matthew 24:4). In other words, be aware of the times so that you will not be led into deception. We must take this warning seriously and admonish others to do likewise.

The Apostle John said in his first letter that the spirit of antichrist is already in the world. I want to close by reading a passage from his letter.

Read 1 John 2:18-20; 26-3:3