

Sermon outline and notes:

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Sunday, October 24, 2021

Revelation 12-13, 17-18 (read 12:1-12) “Signs of the End Times: Deception and Dominance”

Intro. I find it interesting that in the last of v.12 we read the following statement concerning the devil, “he knows that he has a short time.” The word translated “time” is not *chronos*, in terms of days, weeks, months, or years but *kairos*, which refers to an appointed or fixed time or season, or it refers to a climatic time. At some point during the tribulation period the devil will realize that the prophetic climax of the second coming of Jesus and the devil’s judgment is not far away. Evidently, the devil knows the signs of the end times. My question for you is do you know the signs that point the return of Christ?

Tonight, we will continue to examine some of the signs of the end times that are found in the book of Revelation. Some of these signs will not be fulfilled until after the seven-year (Dan. 9:24, 27) tribulation begins, but others will begin to be fulfilled, especially in terms of potential, even before the tribulation begins. For example, last week we considered the universal requirement of taking “the mark of the beast.” The mark will contain a number and it will be used for identification, to monitor and control monetary transactions, which will probably be tied to digital currency. It could also include your health information, including vaccination status. Ours is the first generation that such a system could be implemented using super computers, 5G wireless Internet, implanted microchips, etc. so even though the sign of the mark of the beast has not been fulfilled, the technology for it is already upon us, and great strides have been taken during the pandemic to make populations compliant.

Tonight, we are going to look at two more types of signs of the end times found in the book of Revelation. The first is:

I. WORLDWIDE DECEPTION

Do you have the feeling that you don’t know who to believe anymore? We are used to politicians lying and deceiving, but now you can’t seem to trust the news media, public officials, business leaders, and so forth. Well, there are indications that in the last days there will be widespread deception of unbelievers. Jesus said in Mt. 24:11, “Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many.” 2 Thess. 2:9-10 speaks of, “The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved.” Likewise, vv.11-12 goes on to say, “And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.” Doesn’t that describe people today? They do not receive the love of the truth but have pleasure in unrighteousness. Such people will be prime targets for the deception that will overcome the world in the last days. Friend, if you are not a repentant, born-again believer in Jesus, you better get saved now before those days of deception arrive and you will be lost forever.

A. The Source of This Deception – V.9 says, “So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world....” This is one of the primary works of the devil. Jesus said of the devil in John 8:44, “...he is a liar and the father of

it.” Then in the last of v.12 we see when this deceptive work of Satan will especially take place on earth, “Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time.” The deception will be especially strong during the 7-year tribulation.

B. The Minister of Deception - If you turn over to chapter 13 we see who will lead the effort to deceive the whole world into embracing the antichrist and his New World Order. In v.11 we read, “Then I saw another beast coming up out of the earth, and he had two horns like a lamb and spoke like a dragon. And he exercises all the authority of the first beast [antichrist] in his presence....” Notice “he had two horns like a lamb....” He will appear to be religious, gentle and harmless like a lamb. This description may support the belief that he has ties to the apostate Christian church. However, looks can be deceiving. The apostle Paul warned of this in 2 Cor. 11:14-15, “And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness....”

Those who are perceptive will recognize from his words that he does not speak from God but from the devil, for that verse goes on to say that he “spoke like a dragon.”¹ His true nature is beastly and demonic. Three times in the book of Revelation he is called “the false prophet” (16:13; 19:20; 20:10). His oratory will be hypnotic, for he will likely be able to move the masses to tears or whip them into a frenzy. Unbelievers will love to hear him.

1. His Ultimate Goal: Worship the Antichrist – His job will be to lead everyone in worship of the antichrist. The last of v.12 says that he “causes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed.” Indeed, the antichrist will be so dynamic and articulate, that v.8 says, “All who dwell on the earth will worship him, whose names have not been written in the Book of Life....” Yes, unbelievers will deceive to the point that they will actually worship this man, and even worship Satan who empowers him according to v.4. According to v.14 they will also worship his image. That image is referred to seven other times in Revelation,² and will be the abomination of desolation predicted in Daniel 9:27 and also referred to by Jesus in Mt. 24:15. The antichrist and his false prophet probably will not demand exclusive worship, but that you simply add the antichrist or his image as another god that you worship, as the Roman emperors were added to the pantheon of gods. By the way, we saw last week that such worship will be mandated, even with the threat of death. The last of v.15 says that he will “cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed.” No true believer could engage in such worship no matter what the penalty.

2. His Primary Means of Deception – This man will have amazing abilities to work miracles. Look at vv.13-15, “He performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men. And he deceives those who dwell on the earth by those signs which he was granted to do in the sight of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who was wounded by the sword and lived. He was granted power to give breath to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak....” In addition to calling down fire from heaven like Elijah and the two witnesses of Chapter 11, he will even appear to give life to the image of the beast. I believe this will be nothing more than deception or an example of advanced humanoid technology. Likewise, chapter 19, v.20 says of this false prophet, he “worked signs..., by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast....” The devil *does* have power to do miracles. I imagine this

¹ The fact is he is “another beast,” where “another” means “another of the same kind.”

² 13:15; 14:9, 11; 15:2; 16:2; 19:20; 20:4.

false prophet will be seen on television and various streaming services. People will share on social media video clips of his amazing miracles.

It is not clear to me whether he will have anything to do with another deceptive miracle that will take place. V.3 says, “And I saw one of his heads as if it had been mortally wounded, and his deadly wound was healed. And all the world marveled and followed the beast.” This miracle is also referred to in the last of v.12, and the last of v.14, where the instrument of his death is identified as a sword, not the battle sword, but the short sword that would be used in a stealth assassination. A comparable comparison is between an army rifle and a handgun. The antichrist will even imitate the resurrection of Jesus!

Even today we should be careful about this. Just because a miracle occurs, that does not mean that the person performing it is from God. That’s why 1 John 4:1 says, “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.”

C. The Religious System that Promotes Deception - Deceiving people into embracing false religion will be a major aspect of this deception. For example, in 14:8 we read, “Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she has made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.” We saw last week that Babylon is a code word for the kingdom of antichrist and its capital city, but also the false religious system that will support the Antichrist. You see, as Babylon of old was the birthplace of the cultic false religion and became the center of false religion, which deceived the nations, even so the nations will become spiritually drunk, as stated in 17:2, as they turn from the true God to embrace false religion, thus committing spiritual fornication.

Likewise, turn over to chapter 17. There John sees a woman, riding on a beast, which represents secular authorities (vv.10, 12) that support her. In v.5 John saw written on her these words, “MYSTERY,³ BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.”⁴ The fact that she is called a harlot points to the fact that she represents the dominant false religion of the last days. Notice also that she is called, “the mother of harlots.” Not content with their own evil vice, she spawns her harlotry and abominable practices throughout the world, leading others to engage in a departure from the true God, committing spiritual adultery or harlotry. V.2 says, “with whom the kings of the earth committed fornication...” Thus there will be an unwholesome union of church and state. Then in chapter 18, the last of v.23 says, “... by your sorcery all the nations were deceived.” Then, v.9 of chapter 17 suggests that the city of seven hills, Rome, could be the spiritual center of this unified false religion. Indeed, the iniquitous and pagan rights of Babylon crept into the Roman church especially during the Middle Ages. Then v.18 says, “And the woman whom you saw is that great city which reigns over the kings of the earth.” To the first century reader, that would clearly be a reference to Rome. Yet the spirit of Babylonian religion will be far more pervasive than the church centered in Rome. 2 Thess. 2:3 warns that even much of the rest of the church will become apostate in the last days, including ones that were at one time evangelical (see also Mt. 24:4-5; Luke 18:8; 1 Tim. 4:1; 2 Tim. 4:3). The religion of the last days will be ecumenical, experiential, and view the antichrist as a savior. It will focus on man’s achievement rather than God’s grace.

³ The use of this word suggests a connection to the mystery religions of old.

⁴ Rev. 18:3 says, “For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her...”

Yet I want to show you something interesting. Though in v.3 we see that secular authorities will support the false religious system of the last days, notice what v.16 says, “And the ten horns which you saw on the beast, these will hate the harlot, make her desolate and naked, eat her flesh and burn her with fire.” Secular authorities will use religion and religious passion to gain and solidify their power. They will put their hand on a Bible, and say things like, “God bless America.” The religious revolutions in Islamic countries are excellent examples of how political power often needs the power of religion to be most successful. Yet they can and will turn against the religious establishment once they are no longer useful or become contrary to their ultimate purposes. The beast will treat the harlot like an orange. He will suck all of the juice out of her, and then when she is empty throw her away. These religious fools will deserve their judgment.

So as we move toward days of stronger deception, be sure you are grounded in the Word and filled with the Holy Spirit, so you will not be among those who are deceived or become part of the apostate church of the last days (2 Thess. 2:3).

The second sign from Revelation to look for is a movement toward:

II. WORLD DOMINANCE

Yes, according to prophecy, our world is moving toward some form of a one world government ultimately led by the antichrist, a charismatic, articulate (v.5), and powerful (v.4b) leader. The primary prophecy of this in Revelation is found in chapter 13. There we read of the rise of a “beast,” a term also used in Daniel of a powerful and bloodthirsty secular authority and his kingdom. In the last of v.2 we read that “the dragon gave him his power, and his seat, and great authority.” He will give to the antichrist what the devil offered Jesus (Mt. 4:8-9). So the antichrist will sell his soul to the devil in exchange for political and economic power. Notice that the last of v.3 says, “...all the world marveled and followed the beast.” The world will go delirious with delight at his manifestation. He will be the seeming answer to all of the world’s problems. *Time* will have him on their cover as “Man of the Year.” Like Hitler, he will be a soul-captivating orator. He will be the idol of mankind. He will be a supreme humanist, believing passionately that man can solve his own dilemmas.

His rise to power will be enabled by other powerful secular authorities. Turn over to chapter 17. We read in vv.12-13, “The ten horns which you saw are ten kings who have received no kingdom as yet, but they receive authority for one hour as kings with the beast. These are of one mind, and they will give their power and authority to the beast.” Ten (cf. Dan. 7:7) of the world’s greatest political leaders of the Western world will lend their support and allegiance to the antichrist. Though he will begin by gaining authority over the Western world of the old Roman Empire, that will not be enough to satisfy his lust for power. He must dominate the globe. Indeed, the last of v.7 says, “...power was given him over all kindreds, and tongues, and nations.”

You may think this could never happen. Yet I believe we are moving in this direction, and I believe this prophecy could be fulfilled within the next decade. For over 30 years now there has been serious talk of a “New World Order.” The pandemic has enabled authoritarian rule by governors, presidents, and other secular authorities. In fact, past Chicago mayor, Rahm Emanuel, said this, “You never let a serious crisis go to waste. And what I mean by that it’s an opportunity to do things you could not do before.”⁵ He probably borrowed that idea from Saul Alinsky's

⁵ <https://www.theintelligencer.net/opinion/letters-to-the-editor/2020/03/virus-an-opportunity/>. This is one of Saul Alinsky's tactics.

Rules for Radicals, page 89. I believe the world will face both real and manufactured crises that will cause political leaders and the world to look to a powerful leader that shall arise and be viewed as the savior of the world. They are already talking about climate change being an existential threat to our very existence, calling for drastic changes.

There is another explanation for how the antichrist will rise to such world-dominating power. God will simply providentially see to it that this prophecy is fulfilled. Look at v.17, “For God has put it into their hearts to fulfill His purpose, to be of one mind, and to give their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God are fulfilled.” That verse is extremely important. At times it may appear that the devil is in charge or the world is spinning out of control, but here we see that our sovereign God is the ultimate ruler and he will accomplish His purposes.

Finally, I want to close with a word of hope and victory. Note with me:

III. THE SAINTS VICTORY OVER DECEPTION AND DOMINANCE

Jesus predicted this victory over deception. He said in Mt. 24:24, “For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.” Yet the testimony of the book of Revelation is that the saints of God will not be deceived into forsaking God’s Messiah to follow Satan’s counterfeit messiah. They will not accept the mark of the beast.

They also will have victory over the mandates and threats of the antichrist. As implied in chapter 13, v.10, the antichrist and his henchmen will use threats of imprisonment and even death. But look back at chapter 12, v.11, “And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death.” The atoning death of Christ on the cross is the only weapons sufficient to defeat Satan. If you compare v.17 you will see that “their testimony” is about Jesus, and what He has done for them and what He has promised them.⁶ No doubt they give testimony of the atoning sacrifice of Jesus and how Jesus conquered death, and has removed the fear of death with the hope of eternal life in heaven. They may quote 1 Cor. 15:55, “O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?” They will also testify of our sure hope that Jesus will come again and have a great victory over His enemies to rule the earth. We will share in that victory. In fact, chapter 17, v.14 says, “These will make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, for He is Lord of lords and King of kings; and those who are with Him are called, chosen, and faithful.”

Sources: W. A. Criswell, *Expository Sermons on Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1962-1966); George Eldon Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1972); Hal Lindsey, *There’s a New World Coming* (Santa Ana, CA: Vision House Publishers, 1973); Dr. James Merritt (notes from his sermons on 13:1-10; 17:1-18); Robert H. Mounce, *The New International Commentary, The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1977); Page Patterson, *The New American Commentary: Revelation* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2012); John Philips, *Exploring Revelation* (Chicago: Moody Bible Institute, 1974); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [Ver. 4:23] (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2012); John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Chicago: Moody Bible Institute, 1966). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

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⁶ See Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21.

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