

*In every great movie where the classic storyline is that of “good versus evil”, you need a hero or maybe several heroes, and you need at least one bad guy – an evil villain who opposes the hero. Now, depending on the type of story, this opposition by the villain may involve engaging the hero in direct combat or by pulling strings behind the scenes to cause trouble. It could include intimidating and stalking, or throwing obstacles in the hero’s path, or by deceiving the hero – pretending to be an ally when they are not. And, if you think about these movies with a “good versus evil” theme, you can usually identify who the villain is, but there are those occasions where it is not so obvious – as the cunning villain may at first appear to be a hero, who like a Judas, seems to fool everybody.*

Last week we finished **Revelation 12** – a very symbolic chapter, whose common theme was largely devoted to the activities of Satan against Israel during the Tribulation period. This morning, we are moving on to our next chapter – an equally symbolic chapter, where the Apostle John sees two very cunning villains, partnered with Satan in this future end-times conflict of good versus evil.

So, if you have your Bible, turn to **Revelation 13** and we will begin with **verse 1**.

**And the dragon stood on the sand of the seashore. Then I saw a beast coming up out of the sea, having ten horns and seven heads, and on his horns were ten crowns, and on his heads were blasphemous names.**

Last week we talked about the **dragon**, who was specifically identified as Satan, and in this verse, John sees Satan standing on the **seashore** as if waiting for something, and sure enough – something comes – a **beast**, an unnamed beast who is commonly identified as the Antichrist.

Now, we have talked about him before, and if you recall, the word “Antichrist” means “*against Christ*” and in the Greek it also means “*in place of Christ.*” So, the Antichrist opposes Christ – he’s a villain in this conflict of good versus evil, and yet he initially presents himself as a hero. He presents himself as the Savior.

During the breaking of the first seal at the beginning of the Tribulation period, the Antichrist is the rider on the white horse, and we all know that good guys ride white horses. Like a hero, he will bring peace to the Middle East and make a way for Israel to rebuild their temple. The inhabitants of the world will love this guy because he seems to have the answers to the world’s problems, and because he is one of them. John said he **comes up out of the sea**, but I don’t think we’re talking about saltwater here – instead, I think it is symbolic of the sea of humanity, the

churning waters of multitudes of troubled people, and nations, and tongues. In other words, the **sea** symbolizes the Gentiles, and I believe it's from the Gentiles that Satan will bring forth his Antichrist.

John tells us this beast has **ten horns and seven heads, and on his horns were ten crowns**. Again, this is very symbolic and if you recall the description of Satan as the dragon from last week, he too had ten horns and seven heads which I take to mean the Antichrist is a chip off the old block. He is like his father. They come from the same stock although Satan is a fallen angel and the Antichrist is a man, who at some point in his life, will be possessed by a powerful demon from the abyss.

**So, what's up with the ten horns and the seven heads?** Well, as you might imagine, this is open to a lot of speculation – making it challenging and even confusing, but I think with some careful thought, some good study, and some Godly insight, we can figure it out.

Let's first consider the **ten horns** with the **crowns** on them. In the Bible, *horns* represent *power*, and the number *ten* may be a literal number or it may be an expression symbolizing *completeness*; however, in context, I think the **ten horns** actually represent ten future powerful kings or kingdoms, hence the *crowns*, and I say that because of some other references in the Bible that speak to this. First, let's look at **Daniel 7:24**. We read,

*“As for the ten horns, out of this kingdom ten kings will arise; and another will arise after them, and he will be different from the previous ones and will humble three kings.”*

Now turn to **Revelation 17:12**, where John tells us,

*“The ten horns which you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but they receive authority as kings with the beast for one hour.”*

Based on this, the Antichrist, will come out of a future alliance of ten powerful kings or kingdoms, or said in a contemporary way – he will emerge out a union of ten powerful nations. The Antichrist will be a leader within this union in some capacity, a leader amongst the other leaders, but in his rise to stardom and power, he will have to subdue three of the nations in this union, setting himself apart from the others as a “super leader” and setting his sights on world domination.

So, the ten horns represent a union of ten powerful nations – that’s where the Antichrist will emerge from, **but what about the seven heads?** Well, that takes us a little deeper into the family tree. In the Bible, the *head* represents leadership, and when it comes to these **seven heads**, thankfully, the Apostle John gives us some help. In **Revelation 17**, beginning with **verse 9**, we are told

***<sup>9</sup> Here is the mind which has wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits, <sup>10</sup> and they are seven kings; five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; and when he comes, he must remain a little while.***

I don’t want to chase rabbit trails here, but just to avoid any potential confusion, the **woman** symbolized here is not the same woman we talked about last week who represented Israel. This is a different woman – a harlot who represents false religion during the Tribulation period, and we will deal with her in a few weeks.

Anyway, back to the **seven heads**. We are told they are symbolic of seven mountains who are actually **seven kings** – or better understood, they are symbolic of seven great world empires which are presented to us in a sequential order, given in this way – **five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come**.

At the time of John’s writing, there were **five** great world empires that had previously **fallen**. They were Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, and Greek. These were empires, Gentile empires that ruled the known world – but they had all come and gone. Then there is the **one that is** – the one that would be in existence at the time of John’s writing, and that would be the Roman Empire. These were great world empires that ruled the known world in the past, but then we are told, there is one that **has not yet come** – a future empire, a seventh empire, and it’s out of this seventh world empire that the Antichrist will rise to create his own empire.

In a roundabout way, John has symbolically given us the family tree of the Antichrist. He’s like his father Satan, and he will emerge from this future seventh world empire – an empire consisting of ten parts – a union of ten powerful nations, and because of the reference to **blasphemous names**, we know the Antichrist will stand in open defiance of God, claiming his own deity.

So, we have been given the origin of the Antichrist, we see where he comes from, now let’s move to **verse 2** to get a description of his own empire.

**And the beast that I saw was like a leopard, and his feet were like those of a bear, and his mouth like the mouth of a lion. And the dragon gave him his power and his throne, and great authority.**

In this passage, John tells us about the empire of the Antichrist using symbolism gathered from a prophecy in **Daniel 7**, telling us that the empire of the Antichrist will embody the characteristics of three previous world empires that opposed God and His people. Like a **leopard**, his domination of the world will be swift and quick. Like a **bear**, he will possess incredible power to crush his enemies, and like a **lion**, the Antichrist will be fearsome and have a ravenous appetite for conquest. The rule of the Antichrist will embody these qualities, all the while, empowered by Satan to lead the mother of all evil empires.

In many ways, the Antichrist seems unstoppable, he is Satan's master villain, but something incredible happens. Let's continue beginning with **verse 3**.

**<sup>3</sup> I saw one of his heads as if it had been fatally wounded, and his fatal wound was healed. And the whole earth was amazed and followed after the beast; <sup>4</sup> they worshiped the dragon because he gave his authority to the beast; and they worshiped the beast, saying, "Who is like the beast, and who is able to wage war with him?"**

Satan's desire has always been to be worshiped. He wanted to be like God. He wants to be God, and he is the great imitator of God, masquerading as an angel of light. Everything good God has ever done Satan has tried to mimic in order to deceive the world, to even fool the elect, and just as God raised Jesus from the dead after He was crucified, just as God will raise the two witnesses from the dead from the streets of Jerusalem – Satan is going to deceptively revive the Antichrist, **as if** he had been **fatally wounded**, and the world is going to eat it up.

The inhabitants of the world will be in awe of this deceptive "death to life" experience in stark contrast to their denial of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. People who had refused to acknowledge that Jesus was resurrected from the dead, will be **amazed and follow after the beast** because of this apparent miracle. Satan will deceive the whole world and people will worship him and follow his Antichrist.

Now, beginning with **verse 5**, John tells us what the Antichrist does during the last three and a half years of the Tribulation period. John says,

**<sup>5</sup> A mouth was given to him speaking arrogant words and blasphemies, and authority to act for forty-two months was given to him. <sup>6</sup> And he opened his mouth in blasphemies against God, to blaspheme His name and His tabernacle, that is, those who dwell in heaven. <sup>7</sup> It was also given to him**

**to make war with the saints and to overcome them, and authority was given to him over every tribe, people, language, and nation. <sup>8</sup> All who live on the earth will worship him, everyone whose name has not been written since the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slaughtered.**

During the last three and a half years, the Antichrist, now at full strength, demolishes all competing religion, he sets himself up in the rebuilt temple in Jerusalem, and he demands to be worshiped. He speaks blasphemies against God, he creates his own cult, he establishes his own evil world empire – an eighth empire, and he makes **war with the saints** and **overcomes them** which would include the defeat of the two witnesses in Jerusalem.

If you recall, the two witnesses had been protected by God during the first half of the Tribulation period, but after their task is completed, the Antichrist will kill them and publicly display their bodies in the street for all the world to see. At this point, at the beginning of the last half of the Tribulation period – the Antichrist, demonically possessed and empowered by Satan, will have victory over the saints, or said in another way – *“In this timeless drama of good versus evil, God lets the villains get the upper hand for a short moment.”*

Now we come to **verses 9 and 10** which speaks to the certainty of the things we have just talked about.

**<sup>9</sup> If anyone has an ear, let him hear. <sup>10</sup> If anyone is destined for captivity, to captivity he goes; if anyone kills with the sword, with the sword he must be killed. Here is the perseverance and the faith of the saints.**

This passage teaches the inevitable coming of the unjust suffering of the saints through the Antichrist, and this is similar to what Jesus taught His disciples when He said, *“You will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me.”*

Many believers will be locked up, and many will be killed, but all are encouraged to endure and persevere. This is not fatalism but rather our recognition and submission to the sovereignty of God. In other words, *these things must happen.*

So, this Antichrist is truly a beast, but he has a trusty sidekick – another beast. Let's continue with **verse 11**.

**<sup>11</sup> Then I saw another beast coming up out of the earth; and he had two horns like a lamb, and he spoke as a dragon. <sup>12</sup> He exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence. And he makes the earth and those who live on it worship the first beast, whose fatal wound was healed. <sup>13</sup> He performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down out of the sky to the earth in the presence of people. <sup>14</sup> And he deceives those who live on the earth because of the signs which it was given him to perform in the presence of the beast, telling those who live on the earth to make an image to the beast who had the wound of the sword and has come to life. <sup>15</sup> And it was given to him to give breath to the image of the beast, so that the image of the beast would even speak and cause all who do not worship the image of the beast to be killed.**

This is our introduction to the one called the False Prophet – the right-hand man of the Antichrist, and he is the completion of the unholy trinity – Satan is the counterfeit Father, the Antichrist is the counterfeit Savior, and the False Prophet is the counterfeit Holy Spirit. If you think about this, one of the ministries of the Holy Spirit is to glorify Christ and to lead people to trust and worship Him. In the same way, the False Prophet will point to the Antichrist and compel people to worship Him.

We are told he comes **up out of the earth** or the land depending on your translation. If you recall, the Antichrist came from the sea, which I believe refers to the Gentiles, but this is not the case for the False Prophet. He comes from the earth, which many believe to be a reference to the Promised Land, suggesting he is of Jewish descent. In all honesty, I don't know what to make of it, and so in this case, I think it might be best to simply leave it as a mystery.

In his vision, John tells us this beast has **two horns like a lamb**, and if you remember, horns represent *power* – so he has some power, but the absence of a crown indicates that his power is not in the political or the military realm – instead with the character of a harmless **lamb**, he will be an influential religious leader who speaks with great authority – serving as a *witness* for the Antichrist. So, you have a powerful religious leader in cahoots with a powerful world ruler, and together they deceive and they dominate.

Jesus said in **Matthew 24** that in the end times there would be false prophets, and this one will be the most cunning of them all. John says, this False Prophet **performs great signs**. When Jesus ministered on the earth, Jewish leaders often asked Him to perform some sign to prove that He was indeed their Messiah – and Jesus refused. But the False Prophet will perform great deceptive signs and

miracles and even mimic some of the signs performed by the two witnesses, such as **making fire come down out of the sky**.

This brings up a good point. Don't assume that just because people perform miracles – they are from God. Remember in the book of **Exodus**, just like Moses performed miracles before Pharaoh, initially, Pharaoh's own magicians did the same thing. Just like Moses, they turned their rods into snakes, they turned water into blood, and they brought frogs upon the land. So, don't assume anything.

So, lastly in our passage, John tells us the False Prophet makes an **image**, an idol that represents the Antichrist, and he gives it **breath** and causes it to **speak**. This is what John sees in his vision, and it has prompted a lot of interesting speculation.

Some have suggested this is some form of magic or an illusion, or maybe something similar to a hologram or animatronics, or maybe even artificial intelligence, and that might be the case given the deceptive nature of those involved, but my only sticking point to those suggestions is that word "**breath**" which literally means "*spirit*" – presumably an evil spirit. But whatever the case may be, however it happens, the inhabitants of the world will be compelled to worship this image of the Antichrist, and those who do not will be **killed**.

Okay, if you think that last passage was a head-scratcher, this next one is a real dozy. Let's pick up beginning with **verse 16**.

**<sup>16</sup> And he causes all, the small and the great, the rich and the poor, and the free and the slaves, to be given a mark on their right hands or on their foreheads, <sup>17</sup> and he decrees that no one will be able to buy or to sell, except the one who has the mark, either the name of the beast or the number of his name. <sup>18</sup> Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for the number is that of a man; and his number is six hundred and sixty-six.**

This passage has probably created more speculation, more conspiracy theories, and more confusion than any other passage in the Bible, and I don't want to add to it.

Simply put, from this passage, we can see that the False Prophet, in partnership with the Antichrist, is going to control a global, likely cashless, economy, and in order to participate in this global cashless economy, he's going to require that everyone have some kind of **mark** or number on their **right hand** or on their **forehead** – locations of the body which are publicly visible.

Satan knows what the Bible teaches – and just as our faith is to be a public thing, so this mark will serve a similar purpose. First, it will publicly identify those who participate in this global economy, but more importantly, the mark will identify those who publicly declare their devotion to the Antichrist. So, this will not be a situation where someone says, “*I did not know what I was doing when I took the mark.*” If the mark is taken, it will be no accident but the result of a clear and deliberate choice. Now on the flip side, refusing to take the mark will expose one to severe persecution, to include the inability **to buy or to sell** – meaning no purchase of groceries in stores, no clothing, no medical services, no fuel, no electricity, no phone service – no nothing. All transactions will be solely computerized and digital in nature and require access only by accepting the mark.

John continues and says this mark is associated with the **number of the beast** which is **six hundred and sixty-six**. Let me tell you, this number has drawn the attention of countless calculations throughout history trying to unravel its mystery and discover the identity of the Antichrist, but despite all of the effort, we must admit that no one really knows its meaning, and unfortunately, in our fruitless effort to pick apart this three-digit number, we sidestep the terrible reality that a cruel test of faith is coming for many believers during this last half of the Tribulation period.

*Imagine for a moment that you live in a day in which confessing to be a Christian is outlawed and punishable by death. You hide in your residence at night as the soldiers can be heard on sidewalks and streets as people in your neighborhood are arrested – suspected of being Christians. Suddenly you hear a knock. As you pray that the soldiers will pass you by, they force themselves through the door. Lights flash around the room, boots stomp across the floor, and suddenly you find yourself staring into the barrel of an assault rifle.*

*“Tell me”, shouts the man pointing his rifle at you, “are you a Christian?” You have a choice to make. Either deny Christ and live, or confess Him and die on the spot. Chances are, most believers would like to think, “Of course, I’d confess Christ. That soldier can’t threaten my faith in the Lord!”*

*Now let’s twist the scenario. Imagine that you aren’t alone. Instead, when the soldiers barge into your residence, they point their weapons not at you, but at your spouse and your children and your grandchildren. “Reject Christ or they die!”*

*Dying for your faith is one thing, but letting others die for your faith is quite another – and yet, in a roundabout way, this is just the kind of scenario Satan will*



*inspire during the Tribulation period as believing parents will have to choose between taking the mark and providing for their struggling family or refusing the mark in defense of their faith and thereby forcing their family to suffer the terrible consequences.*

*And if you think this is too far-fetched, remember something similar to this was actually being experienced in John's day when the early church when confronted with the requirement to declare their devotion and worship of the Roman Emperor or else. So, this is nothing new and it's coming again.*

As I look back at this chapter and see how the terrible future will unfold during the Tribulation period, I can also clearly see **today** that the stage is being set for this terrible future. As I see it, the wheels are already in motion – case in point:

*This comes from the NY Post in July 2019, “Thousands of people in Sweden are having futuristic microchips implanted into their skin to carry out everyday activities and replace credit cards and cash. More than 4,000 people have already had the sci-fi-ish chips, about the size of a grain of rice, inserted into their hands — with the pioneers predicting millions will soon join them as they hope to take it global. “It’s very ‘Black Mirror,’” Swedish scientist Ben Libberton told The Post of the similarity to the TV series highlighting futuristic scenarios. Like glorified smartwatches, the chips help Swedes monitor their health and even replace keycards to allow them to enter offices and buildings. They have particularly caught on, however, by enabling owners to pay in stores with a simple swipe of the hand, a big deal in a forward-looking country that is moving toward eliminating cash. The microchips were pioneered by former body piercer Jowan Österlund, who calls the technology a “moonshot” — and who told Fortune magazine that he’s been hit up by hopeful investors “on every continent except Antarctica.”*

I’m not saying this technology is evil, but what I am saying is that this is an indication we are surely moving in the direction, and it’s just a hop, skip, and a jump before these things mentioned in **Revelation 13** become a very real reality in our world, and so with that said, if I can leave you with a bit of advice, I want you to be clear-headed and mindful of those political, and economic, social, and yes, even religious forces and pressures that tempt you to pull away from God, from His kingdom, from His will, and from the truth found in His Word.

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