

The False Prophet

Revelation 13:11-18

Introduction: 1) If I had to pick one word to describe the most effective devise of the devil in building his empire I would pick the word deceiver. Our Lord himself tells us in John 8:44, “he is a liar and the Father of lies,” and it is in Revelation 13 that we see his masterpiece of deception put on full display through the Antichrist (the sea beast) and the false prophet (the land beast).

2) In his excellent study of the apocalypse, Grant Osborne helps us get a handle on just what this 13th chapter is all about as Satan seeks to usurp God’s kingdom with his own. He writes,

“Satan’s final rebellion will be waged relentlessly. To fight this great battle against God and his people, he parodies the Holy Trinity and establishes his own false trinity: the dragon (himself), the beast from the sea (the Antichrist), and the beast from the earth or false prophet (the religious leader of the movement). The dragon uses these creatures to gain control of both the governmental and religious apparatus, creating both a one-world government (with the Antichrist as “king of kings”) and a one-world religion (with the Antichrist as idol of the world). This combination of political and religious control is the core of the absolute power of the false trinity over the nations. This has always been Satan’s method, from the Egyptians in Moses’ time to the Babylonians and Persians of Daniel’s day to the Romans of John’s day to the Nazis and Stalin in the twentieth century. The

people of God have always been both persecuted and led astray into idolatry and immorality by the same evil forces (Rev. 2:14, 20). In other words, the material here about the final Antichrist also fits the many “antichrists” that have preceded, of both the political and the religious variety.

The first beast gains control by parodying Christ’s death and resurrection but in a far more public forum. When he returns from the dead, his associate, the false prophet, will use the event to forge a new world religion with the beast, and behind him the dragon (13:3-4, 12), as its focus....Again, this tendency for world leaders to arrogate to themselves divine powers and to pretend that their actions are answerable to no one (note the “lawless one” of 2 Thess. 2:3-4) is seen everywhere today as well. The message of 13:5-8, 14-15 is critical. Though the beast and his followers believed their “authority” had been given by Satan (13:2), it is clear that the ultimate authority had come from God. The blasphemous names (13:5-6), the worship of the nations (13:7b-8), the power to perform miracles and deceive (13:14-15), and even the persecution of the saints (13:7a) happened only because God allowed it. There is no true power in evil. God is in firm control, and it can do no more than is part of the divine will. Nothing in the world, from Croatia to Rwanda to the moral wasteland that is modern America, escapes his notice, and it will end at his predetermined time. At the end of history, the Antichrist will control the economics of the world. Nothing will be bought or sold without his “mark,” and many “Christians” will capitulate to

the pressure (the “great apostasy” of Matt. 24:4-5 and 2 Thess. 2:3). But that also is seen today, where the idol of too many Christians is the dollar sign and so many in our churches put economics success ahead of following God...the passage describes [then] the final “tribulation period” of history, when the beast/antichrist comes to power and the second beast/false prophet becomes the prime minister, or high priest, of the evil empire, forcing the world to make a choice between Christ and the beast. After the Antichrist is assassinated and comes back to life, the false prophet will erect a statue and bring it to life, thus inaugurating the period when every person will either accept the “mark” or die. It will become a capital crime to refuse to participate in the universal worship of the beast. While at the present period in history it seems unthinkable that such a state of affairs could occur, we must remember that we are only seventy years removed from the rise of Hitler and Stalin, and it is pure arrogance to think something similar could not happen again. If anyone could solve the terrorist crisis, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, and the unrest in Africa and bring peace to our troubled world, people would rush to worship such a person.” (507-08, 522).

3) The second beast of Revelation 13:11-18 is correctly identified as the false prophet (cf. 16:13; 19:20, 20:10). There are similarities and differences between him and the first beast, the Antichrist of 13:1-10.

Comparison of the Two Beasts in Revelation 13	
First Beast Antichrist	Second Beast False Prophet
Rises from the sea (13:1)	Rises from the land (13:11)
Seven heads with blasphemous names (13:1, 3)	One head (13:11)
Ten horns with crowns (13:1)	Two horns like a lamb (13:11)
Authority given to him by the dragon (13:2)	Exercises authority of the first beast (13:12)
The whole earth worships the dragon because of the beast (13:3-4)	Causes people to worship the first beast (13:12)
Speaks blasphemies against God for forty-two months or 3½ years (13:5-6)	Performs amazing signs to deceive the whole world into worshipping the first beast's image (13:13-15)
Makes war with the saints and for a time overcomes them (13:7)	Forces the world to receive the mark of the beast or suffer severe persecution (13:16-17)

Adapted from Swindoll, p. 183

4) So, as we navigate verses 11-18 what will we discover? It will be through the instrumentality of this second beast empowered by Satan that a one-world government, one-world religion, and one-world economy will come to fruition. Humanity will willingly submit to it. This individual called the false prophet will be given power by Satan to perform miracles (13:12-15). He will apparently duplicate the miracles of that one who comes in the spirit of Elijah (v. 13, cf. 11:5-6), perhaps deceiving the world into believing that he is the one who fulfills the prophecy of Malachi 4:5. Further, he apparently will cause some type of lifeless image of the beast to come alive and to speak, and he will force the world to worship it.

Paul pointed out in 2 Thessalonians 2:11 that during the Tribulation, the Day of the Lord, God will send the world a powerful delusion so that they should believe the lie. I believe the lie is that antichrist, who will rule over a one-world government, one-world religion, and one-world economy, is actually the world's messiah, the world's god.

Walking through these 8 verses we discover 7 defining characteristics of the Antichrist's "minister of propaganda." These are very valuable lessons for every generation of Christians who encounter false messiahs and false prophets and false teachings.

I. The false prophet will be a deceiver 13:11

John sees another beast of the same sort as the first. He comes up out of the land. Some believe this refers to the land of Israel and means the false prophet will be a Jew. Others say the land is a reference to the abyss. The difference in origin from the 1st beast may be intended to help us distinguish the two beasts from each other. It is also possible that the land, in contrast to the turmoil of the sea, implies the false prophet is calmer, more peaceful and more subtle than the Antichrist. Note as a lamb he has the appearance of a friend.

He has "two horns like a lamb." The two horns signify strength, but not great strength. The antichrist is very powerful with 10 horns (v.1). The false prophet

is one with much less strength. And, he has the appearance of a “lamb” (Gr. *arnio*). The word appears 29 times in Revelation. 28 times it refers to Jesus. This is the one time it doesn’t. There is deceptiveness in this person and once more we are reminded of the truth, “looks can be deceiving!”

II. The false prophet will speak the words of Satan 13:11

With the appearance of a lamb, this beast gives the impression of being harmless and gentle. However Jesus warned us in Matthew 7:15, “Beware of false prophets, who come in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves.” Here is the most ravenous wolf of all who is nothing less than a mouthpiece, a megaphone, for Satan. “He spoke like a dragon”. This is not the roar of an intimidating dragon, but the beguiling, deceitful and deceptive speech of the serpent who deceived Adam and Eve in the garden (Mounce, 256). Jim Hamilton rightly affirms, “This beast speaks like Satan, and Satan speaks against God’s word, blasphemes Jesus, and tells lies meant to result in the death of Jesus and his people. Christians do not tell lies to get other people killed....watch out for lambs who talk like dragons” (Hamilton, 270-271).

III. The false prophet will promote false worship of Antichrist 13:12

- Two affirmations are made about the false prophet in verse 12. First, “he exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence.” Second, he

“makes the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose mortal wound was healed.” The false prophet is empowered by Satan and loyal to Antichrist. With delegated authority, he is the representative of the beast. He is his witness and advocate. Further, he is the promoter of gross idolatry. He makes or causes earth dwellers to worship the first beast who parodied our Lord’s sufferings, death and resurrection. As Kistemaker says, “These two anti-Christian forces are united in their effort to overthrow the rule of Christ” (NTC, Rev., 389).

- Here is the establishment of false religion on a worldwide scale (Christians, Muslims, Jews, Buddhists, Hindus, Animists, etc...). All persons of faith will join hands and heart in worship, praise and adoration of Antichrist. No doubt each faith will retain certain particular emphases that characterize their faith, but they will, they must, unite in their devotion and dedication to the Beast. This will be the most dishonoring form of idolatry the world will ever know. Its seeds are continuing to be sown today. The fruit it will bear will multiply as the world as we know it draws to a close.
- In an article entitled “U.N. Faithful Eye Global Religion”, James Harder writes, “the secretary-general of the United Nation’s Millennium Peace summit thinks that all religious apples fall from the same tree and are equally delicious. At a recent international meeting, he told 1,000 delegates

that religions need to accept the validity of all religions or else it will be difficult to attain world peace. Recently, the notion has emerged that the pathway to peace necessitates the unification of religions. The Universal Religion Initiative (URI) recently convened with 300 people present representing 39 religions and signed a charter, which officially launched the movement. The goal is that there will come a day in which “religious people will no longer insist on a single truth.” Episcopal Bishop Swing, a leader in the movement, goes even further: “There will have to be a godly cease-fire, a temporary truce where the absolute exclusive claims of each [religion] will be honored but an agreed upon neutrality will be exercised in terms of proselytizing, condemning, murdering, or dominating. These will not be tolerated in the United Religions Zone.” (*Insight*, Oct 2-9, 2000; Vol. 16, No. 27; Pages 22-23).

- The North Carolina Evangelist, Vance Havner well said, “A house big enough for all of us is too big.” [Source Unknown].

IV. The false prophet will use miracles to deceive the world 13:13-14

- Not everything that appears to be a miracle is a miracle. And, not everything that is a miracle is a miracle from God. That is true today, and it will clearly be true during the reign of Antichrist. Our text tells us that the false prophet will “perform great signs” (Gr. *semeia megala*). This same

phrase is used for the miracles of Jesus in John 2:11, 23; 6:21. The false prophet is also something of a false Christ.

- One specific sign miracle he performs is “making fire come down from heaven to earth in front of people.” Here he duplicates the miracle of Elijah (1 Kings 18:28: cf. Mal. 3:5-6) and the two witnesses (11:5). The spectacular nature of these miracles mesmerizes and deceives the earth dwellers. Amazingly, they reject the true fire of 11:5 for a false fire in 13:14. But, their deception and seduction does not stop here.
- The false prophet tells them to make an image, an idol, to “the beast that was wounded by the sword and yet lived” and that is exactly what they do. Like Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 2, a great idol will be erected, this time to honor and worship Antichrist. This will take place probably near the midpoint of the Tribulation, possible in a rebuilt temple in Jerusalem (Matt. 24:15; 2 Thess. 2:2-12).
- Swindoll says, “Blinded by unbelief and sin, the world will easily fall prey to the second Beast’s deceptive message and methods. Intellectually attracted to him, emotionally drawn by his appealing style and convinced by his amazing sins, they will voluntarily submit and obey [and worship.]” (p.184).

V. The false prophet will persecute those who follow the lamb. 13:15

- Verse 15 is a mixed bag in terms of interpretation. The first part is extremely difficult as to the meaning, whereas the second half is straightforward and transparent. The false prophet is allowed [by God] to breathe life into the image, the idol, of the Antichrist. The image is said to even speak. The miraculous and the mysterious merge. Some believe this is false trickery utilizing ventriloquism that makes it seem like the image comes to life. Others believe through Satanic and demonic enablement the statue, the image, will come to life and speak (Osborne, 515-16). Alan Johnson, makes a sound application when he says, “In speaking about giving “breath” (*pneuma*) to the image, John implies the activity of the false prophets in reviving idolatrous worship, giving it the appearance of vitality, reality, and power (cf. Jer. 10:14). Curiously, the two witnesses were also said to receive “breathe” (11:11).” [EBC, p.713].
- Idols normally cannot hear or speak, walk or see. They also do not murder. However, this is not a normal idol. Breathing and talking, it goes on a vicious campaign, a Christian holocaust, a Christian pogrom. Duvall is on target, “the demonic idol demands worship on penalty of death (cf. 16:14; 19:20). Christians may either give allegiance to false gods and “live” or stay faithful to Christ with the real possibility of physical death” (Duvall, 186).

No doubt the temptation to compromise and give in will be great. The power of the gospel to endurance and persevere will never be more needed.

VI. The false prophet will mark those who worship Antichrist 13:16-17

Determined to coerce and enforce worship of Antichrist, the false prophet will engage in a global movement, a plan and program, to bring everyone into submission. All the various categories of humanity (v. 16) will receive some type of mark, some form of identification on their right hand or their forehead. Without it, they will not be able to buy or sell. What exactly is this mark? We don't know. Why do they get it? To mark them as belonging to Antichrist and so they might be able to do the things necessary to live. Will anyone receive it unknowingly? No. Everyone will know exactly what they are doing. Believers will face economic boycott and social alienation in that day. Interestingly, the beast counterfeits the mark, the seal, of God in 7:3; 14:1. God marks His and Satan marks his too! John tells us the mark "will consist of either the name of the beast or the number of his name. Antichrist will have a universal designation, his name within a numbering system. The exact identification of that phrase is unclear. What is clear is that everyone will be required to have the identifying mark or suffer the consequences" (MacArthur, vo.2, 63). David Platt is right, "Mark it down: there will always be a price to pay for believers who do not worship the idols of this world. Life will not

be easy in this world when you fight the idolatry of this world, plain and simple.”

(Sermon)

VII. The false prophet will lead the world to worship a mere man 13:18

- More paper, ink, and worry has been wasted on this verse than perhaps any other verse in the Bible. What is “the mark of the beast” and the “number of his name?” The ancient Hebrew game called gematria recognized that letters could also stand for numbers. Hence a series of letters could form a word and at the same time indicate a number. Hence the 666 of verse 18 has given us the identification of the Antichrist: 1) from ancient times it was said to be the Roman emperor, Nero Caesar particularly, and his priest who enforced Caesar Worship, or 2) from modern times some say Ronald Wilson Reagan. Some saw the mark in Social Security Cards, others credit cards. Still others, identified it with the coming of computers. Some have noted that taxi license plates in Israel begin with 666. Of course many during the time of the Reformation were certain the “mark of the beast” involved being a follower of the Pope and the Roman Catholic Church. Still others spiritualize both beasts seeing the 1st as representing evil political power, and the 2nd representing evil religious power wedded to the 1st. Speculation has not been helpful and in many instances it has been rather harmful.

- Verse 18 issues a call for wisdom. Perhaps the wise person would avoid this hermeneutical quicksand all-together. But, there is an important phrase in the verse that might lead us to make a cautious suggestion. The phrase is “it is the number of a man, and his number 666.” I think the number is more of a description than an identification. 6 is the number of man. He was created on the 6th day. He is to work 6 days. In contrast, the number of perfection is 7 and the superlative of 7 is of course 777.

The beast is the greatest man, but still a man. He is a 6 not a 7. He along with Satan and the false prophet is a 666, a trinity of imperfection. Not now or ever will they be a 777! He is the best man can produce, but he is still just a man! He is “the completeness of sinful incompleteness,” the ultimate in “coming up short.” Good enough to deceive many? Yes! Good enough to displace Jesus? Never!” [Greg Beale, “Why is the Number of the Beast 666?”, Gospel Coalition Blog, Feb. 2015]

Conclusion

Some people put their trust in government. Some people put their trust in money and the economy. Many people put their trust in religion. The Bible teaches that none of these will meet your expectations. None of these is the answer. Rather, our faith and confidence should be put in the Kingdom of God, a bloody cross and

an empty tomb. We should put our trust in King Jesus and His gospel. Tragically, the world would rather believe a lie than the truth. They would rather align with Antichrist than Jesus Christ. They are more quick to follow a false prophet than a true prophet of God. Don't be deceived. Follow Him who is the way, the truth and the life. Don't seek the mark of the beast. Seek to have the seal of the Savior of all men. Seek to bear the true mark, the mark of Jesus Christ. The decision is yours and it is an important one.