

UNDERSTANDING THAT WEIRD BOOK OF REVELATION - Part fourteen

Sunday, January 28th, 2018 - 6:00 p.m. - Teaching #2026

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WHAT EVERY CHRISTIAN NEEDS TO KNOW ABOUT THE ANTICHRIST

Revelation 13:1-10 - "And I saw a beast rising out of the sea, with ten horns and seven heads, with ten diadems on its horns and blasphemous names on its heads. [2] And the beast that I saw was like a leopard; its feet were like a bear's, and its mouth was like a lion's mouth. And to it the dragon gave his power and his throne and great authority. [3] One of its heads seemed to have a mortal wound, but its mortal wound was healed, and the whole earth marveled as they followed the beast. [4] And they worshiped the dragon, for he had given his authority to the beast, and they worshiped the beast, saying, "Who is like the beast, and who can fight against it?" [5] And the beast was given a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words, and it was allowed to exercise authority for forty-two months. [6] It opened its mouth to utter blasphemies against God, blaspheming his name and his dwelling, that is, those who dwell in heaven. [7] Also it was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them. And authority was given it over every tribe and people and language and nation, [8] and all who dwell on earth will worship it, everyone whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb that was slain. [9] If anyone has an ear, let him hear: [10] If anyone is to be taken captive, to captivity he goes; if anyone is to be slain with the sword, with the sword must he be slain. Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints."

It's important to remember where we are in our study of the book of Revelation. Chapter thirteen continues the interlude between the sounding of the seventh trumpet and the pouring out of the seven bowls of God's wrath. In this interlude, John has seen visions describing the events of the very end times.

That's why you find that repeated time notification, which comes in slightly different forms - 1260 days, forty-two months, time-times and a half a time. All of these symbolic references draw our attention to the fact that we are coming now to the very end. The events of the final phase of what is called the Great Tribulation are coming about in rapid, sudden succession. Another way of saying it is these interlude chapters unfold the events of the "*days of the trumpet call to be sounded by the seventh angel*" (10:7).

Last week we studied chapter twelve, with its detailed picture of the nature and activity of Satan, the great dragon. This is John's way of unfolding the *meaning* behind the terrible events of the last days. There's a spiritual side to the earthly persecution and trial. We're not, as Paul taught earlier, just wrestling with flesh and blood. There are principalities involved. Satan himself is behind it all. Nowhere is this more true than in the activities of the last days.

Now we come to the first ten verses of chapter thirteen. And here we learn something else - something very important. We learn that Satan, while *behind* many of the events of the last days, does not do most of his work *openly*. He works through *means*. He exercises direct control over other *agencies* and *personalities*. You and I will never actually *see* a great big red dragon. That was just a picture in John's vision. We will never see the kinds of strange beasts John describes in this thirteenth chapter. These are merely symbolic pictures of other forces and personalities the Devil *will* work through during the last days.

Now, almost all interpreters are agreed that the first beast John sees is a representation of the antichrist. Some people think the antichrist is not going to be a specific person, but is merely representative of governments, dictators, and wicked powers down through history. Others think of the antichrist as *only* being fulfilled in one end-time person, empowered and used by the Devil.

My own feeling is, if the New Testament is read carefully, that *both* these ideas are absolutely essential in understanding the nature and role of the antichrist. Look at some of the ways John describes antichrist in his epistles:

1 John 2:18 - "Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist *is coming*, so now many antichrists *have come*. Therefore we know that it is the last hour."

1 John 2:21-23 - "I write to you, not because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and because no lie is of the truth. [22] Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son. [23] No one who denies the Son has the Father. Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also."

1 John 4:2-3 - "By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, [3] and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already."

2 John 1:7 - "For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist."

This is a fascinating collection of verses. John almost seems to be saying several things at the same time. And we need to hold all of these truths *together in proper balance* if we're going to have a New Testament understanding of John's beast in Revelation thirteen:

- a) ***Antichrist is coming and yet many antichrists have already appeared*** - **1 John 2:18** - "Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour."

However confusing that may seem to us at first glance, John insists we hold on to this truth. There have been *many* antichrists throughout the history of the church. But there is still *the* antichrist who is to come. Both these concepts are important if we're to make sense of Revelation chapter thirteen.

- b) ***There is a sense in which anyone who denies Jesus Christ as God's Son, the promised Messiah, is antichrist*** - **1 John 2:21-23** - "I write to you, not because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and because no lie is of the truth. [22] Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son. [23] No one who denies the Son has the Father. Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also."

Here we see the primary end-times pre-occupation of antichrist. It is to cause people to *deny Christ*, and through that denial of Christ, to miss out on truly *knowing God as Father* in a saving way.

- c) ***Antichrist is described both as being a person and also a spirit at work in the hearts and minds of individuals*** - **1 John 4:2-3** - "By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, [3] and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already."

So we learn that the *work* of antichrist can and does thrive long before *the* end-time antichrist appears on the scene. More people are actually *loyal* to antichrist than we would ever imagine.

- d) ***Sometimes many deceivers and false teachers are lumped in together by John and are actually called the antichrist*** - **2 John 1:7** - "***For many deceivers*** have gone out into the world, those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist."

Now, with all that background in mind, we're in a better position to study John's vision of antichrist in Revelation chapter thirteen. Remember, the dragon of chapter twelve, the Devil, is off to wage war against those who **"...keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus."**(Revelation 12:17).

How is he going to do this? How will he wage this war against the church? That's what chapter thirteen is going to begin to unfold:

- 1) **THIS BEAST IS DESCRIBED IN TERMS MUCH LIKE THE GREAT RED DRAGON, BUT NOT EXACTLY LIKE HIM**

Revelation 13:1-2 - "And I saw a beast rising out of the sea, with ten horns and seven heads, with ten diadems on its horns and blasphemous names on its heads. [2] And the beast that I saw was like a leopard; its feet were like a bear's, and its mouth was like a lion's mouth. And to it the dragon gave his power and his throne and great authority."

Notice how similar this is to the description of the great dragon - Satan - described in **Revelation 12:3** - "And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads seven diadems."

This similarity is not accidental. This **"beast coming up out of the sea"** is *similar* in description to Satan because he is *empowered* by Satan himself. This will enable the antichrist to do some absolutely incredible things. There will be a definite *supernatural* element to his deeds that will be very enticing and deceiving to Christians not grounded in doctrinal truth:

2 Thessalonians 2:8-12 - "And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his

mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming. [9] The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, [10] and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. [11] Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, [12] in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.”

As John has already taught in his epistles, there have been many antichrists already gone out into the world. But this *final* manifestation will be particularly *supernatural* in its appearance. This will cause many people to mistake his work for something of God.

2) THE DESCRIPTION OF THIS BEAST FROM THE SEA IS REALLY A COMPILATION OF THE FOUR BEASTS OF DANIEL'S PROPHETIC VISION

This too is a very significant similarity: Revelation 13:1-2 - “And I saw a beast rising out of the sea, with ten horns and seven heads, with ten diadems on its horns and blasphemous names on its heads. [2] And the beast that I saw was like a leopard; its feet were like a bear's, and its mouth was like a lion's mouth. And to it the dragon gave his power and his throne and great authority.”

Compare that text with Daniel 7:2-8 - “Daniel declared, "I saw in my vision by night, and behold, the four winds of heaven were stirring up the great sea. [3] And four great beasts came up out of the sea, different from one another. [4] The first was like a lion and had eagles' wings. Then as I looked its wings were plucked off, and it was lifted up from the ground and made to stand on two feet like a man, and the mind of a man was given to it. [5] And behold, another beast, a second one, like a bear. It was raised up on one side. It had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth; and it was told, 'Arise, devour much flesh.' [6] After this I looked, and behold, another, like a leopard, with four wings of a bird on its back. And the beast had four heads, and dominion was given to it. [7] After this I saw in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, terrifying and dreadful and exceedingly strong. It had great iron teeth; it devoured and broke in pieces and stamped what was left with its feet. It was different from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns. [8] I considered the horns, and behold, there came up among them another horn, a little one, before which three of the first horns were plucked up by the roots. And behold, in this horn were eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking great things.”

Now it becomes important to remember some of the things John said about antichrist in his epistles. John said there is a sense in which antichrist is yet to come, and another sense in which antichrist has already been around for quite a while. This is what we see when we compare the description in **Revelation 13** with Daniel's vision in **Daniel chapter 7**.

Daniel saw four great world powers coming on the scene. We see their identity later on in the book of Daniel. But the significant thing about the “*beast from the sea*” in Revelation 13 is *he is an amalgamation of the traits of the creatures of Daniel's vision*. The exact same animal-like descriptions are given - leopard, bear, lion, and then a creature with ten horns.

So there have been manifestations of the power of antichrist in these great world powers. They have come and used their powers against God and His people over and over again. The end-time antichrist will merely be the *ultimate* personal expression of this world's power system, given supernatural strength by the Devil himself.

3) THE MORTAL WOUND AND THE RETURN TO LIFE AND POWER

Revelation 13:3 - “One of its heads seemed to have a mortal wound, but its mortal wound was healed, and the whole earth marveled as they followed the beast.”

Some people see this verse as a reference to the death and resurrection of the one person - the physical antichrist in the last days. That is one interpretive option, but I don't think the context requires this kind of literalism. Especially when one considers that John has just set the description of the end-time antichrist in the *context* of the worldly powers of Daniel's prophetic vision, it seems to me there is a better way to handle this third verse.

John's description of the antichrist is framed in the context of Daniel's vision of *world empires, governments and power structures*. The future rise of antichrist will be something like the rise of these world powers - but strongly organized against Christ's Church.

In other words, I think we're probably to understand that, while one of the heads of John's beast from the sea perishes it will experience a form of resurrection. There will come a revival (resurrection) of such a worldly governing power or body. Its rise to power will **amaze** people. It will be something they thought could never happen again - something like the Holocaust would be a good example.

The early church would have thought of Nero and the Roman empire when they read these words from John. The rise of antichrist will look something like that. A world power will arise, out of which the end-time antichrist will gain a platform and a voice to dominate the world's scene. This sets up the kind of adoration John describes in the next few verses:

4) THE WORSHIP AND ADORATION OF THE ANTICHRIST

Revelation 13:4-8 - "And they worshiped the dragon, for he had given his authority to the beast, and they worshiped the beast, saying, "Who is like the beast, and who can fight against it?" [5] And the beast was given a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words, and it was allowed to exercise authority for forty-two months. [6] It opened its mouth to utter blasphemies against God, blaspheming his name and his dwelling, that is, those who dwell in heaven. [7] Also it was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them. And authority was given it over every tribe and people and language and nation, [8] and all who dwell on earth will worship it, everyone whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb that was slain."

The antichrist and his underlings will enjoy great success and power - almost **unrivaled** dominion on the earth. His governance will be marked by supernatural manifestations and incredible **arrogance and pride** - **Revelation 13:5-6** - "And the beast was given a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words, and it was allowed to exercise authority for forty-two months. [6] It opened its mouth to utter blasphemies against God, blaspheming his name and his dwelling, that is, those who dwell in heaven."

It's important to understand these verses properly. When John says the antichrist will speak "**blasphemies against God,**" and will "**blaspheme His name,**" he doesn't mean this beast will **curse** God, or **deny** God, or even **mock** God. Rather, he will **speak as though he is God**. He will claim the kind of worship and power and adulation that **properly belong to God alone**. This is why people will actually begin to worship and follow him **as** God. In other words, there will be a **religious** fervency in the devotion of the people to the antichrist.

5) WE MUST NEVER FORGET THAT JOHN'S DESCRIPTION IN THIS CHAPTER ONLY DESCRIBES WHAT SEEMS TO BE THE WHOLE PICTURE ON THE EARTHLY SIDE OF THIS GREAT BATTLE

This chapter will seem almost hopeless if this wonderful truth is forgotten: **Revelation 13:7** - "Also it was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them. And authority was given it over every tribe and people and language and nation...."

Those could be very depressing words. But John never intends for us to take them as a description of the **whole** story, or even the most **important part** of the story. Only on this earthly scene, and only for a brief time (notice again the same repeated use of the **42 month** time span in verse 5) will the antichrist prevail.

John has already provided a glimpse into the greater, already accomplished victory in Christ for all the faithful, patient church: **Revelation 12:5** - "She gave birth to a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught up to God and to his throne...." The Lamb already rules on the throne.

Revelation 12:11 - "And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death." Persecution and even martyrdom do not erase the accomplished victory and future of those who follow the slain Lamb - **Revelation 15:2** - "And I saw what appeared to be a sea of glass mingled with fire—and also those who had conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name, standing beside the sea of glass with harps of God in their hands."

John underscores the nature of this final victory at the close of the description of antichrist: **Revelation 13:9-10** - "If anyone has an ear, let him hear:[10] If anyone is to be taken captive, to captivity he goes; if anyone is to be slain with the sword, with the sword must he be slain. Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints."

Two thoughts are selected here. One calls for **“perseverance”** and the other gives **“faith”**. **First**, there will be no escaping trial and persecution if one is to remain faithful to Jesus Christ. As we've underscored over and over in this study, the chief purpose of the end-time events will be to **force a decision from all who dwell on the earth**. People will either be passionately driven to Christ or they will renounce Him and side with the end-time rebellion against the true God.

Second, we are given the promise that all who take the sword against the followers of the Lamb will **themselves** face the sword of the Lord's judgement at the time of the Second Coming. There is no ultimate defeat for Christ and His church. And there is no ultimate victory for those who reject Jesus.