

The Rise of the False Prophet

Revelation 13:11-18

We return once again to the book of Revelation. We have arrived now in chapter 13. In a few minutes we will look at verses 11 through 18.

The study of Bible prophecy is absolutely astounding. In our age of doubt the fulfillment of Bible prophecy should forever silence the skeptics. But, of course, they reject the Bible because people love their sin more than truth even though the Word of God can be verified, especially as we look at the prophetic Scriptures.

For example, the Old Testament is filled with promises concerning the coming Messiah, the deliverer, 333 to be precise. And more than 100 of these prophecies were fulfilled literally at the first advent of Christ. This is easily verified. In fact, during the Messiah's last 24 hours on earth 33 specific detailed prophecies were fulfilled.

I was reading somewhere where a mathematician calculated the probability of just eight of those prophecies being fulfilled by chance in one man. And the result was that this could only happen in one in 10^{17} power. That's a one with 17 zeros after it. To grasp the enormity of this number he said that you could cover the state of Texas with silver dollars two feet thick and just mark one of those silver dollars and then stir them all up and pick that particular silver dollar. That is the probability of just those prophecies being fulfilled.

Down through history God has used his prophetic Word both to authenticate the message as well as the messenger. As a stubborn world hears the truth of the Word of God, certainly these prophecies should cause them to say, "My goodness, there must be some merit to this."

I might add that this is another reason why I believe it is very dangerous to spiritualize the prophetic Scriptures, because this subtly eliminates the power of the Word of God to authenticate itself to a world that is watching. In fact, I would argue that when you spiritualize the prophetic literature you literally demote prophecy to a lesser rank, to that of allegory. And then you can make it mean whatever you want it to mean.

Yet despite the accurate predictions of Bible prophecy people still refuse to believe. I find it interesting that in Isaiah chapter 41 verses 21 and 22 we see where God challenges the pagan world to a duel with prophecy as the weapons of choice. There he says,

"Present your case... Bring forward your strong arguments," The King of Jacob says. "Let them bring forth and declare to us what is going to take place."¹

And in chapter 44 of Isaiah beginning at verse six he says:

Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: "I am the first and I am the last, And there is no God besides Me. Who is like Me? Let him proclaim and declare it; Yes, let him recount it to

¹ Isaiah 41:21-22.

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Me in order, From the time that I established the ancient nation. And let them declare to them the things that are coming And the events that are going to take place.”²

Beloved, only a sovereign God, an omnipotent God can proclaim the end from the beginning and he has done so in his Word. This is why we study the Scriptures in such detail so that we can know the truth and we can live the truth to the praise of his glory, longing for his return when, “The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory the LORD, as the waters cover the sea,”³ as the prophet Habakkuk tells us in chapter two and verse 14.

Now please understand. Bible prophecy gives a lens, shall we say, with which to view the age in which we live. So we have a proper theological perspective of Fox News or what’s happening anywhere around the world. Imagine what life would be like if we did not have the Word of God, if we did not have the prophetic Word, if we had no idea—and I know this is hard for us as Christians—but imagine if we had no idea regarding what was going to ultimately happen, we were just kind of hoping in hope that God is going to do something. Well, frankly, this is the darkness in which the world walks.

Think about it. Think about our world for a moment. We know, as Christians, that judgment is coming some day, and yet the world is obsessed with entertainment, with sports and reality shows. They worry about everything from terrorists to the economy, billions of dollars are spent on global warming and we are all being taught how to go green and have a smaller—what is it—carbon footprint. People are obsessed with these types of things. They are obsessed with homosexual rights and animal rights. I saw the other day on the news that this organization called PETA is now attacking McDonalds. They go after children now with some disgusting bloody box that is called an “unhappy meal.” It has a picture of Ronald McDonald that looks like some ferocious looking clown brandishing a knife.

It is inconceivable, isn’t it, to think that Jesus is coming to judge the living and the dead and people are worried about how chickens are slaughtered. That is the insanity of the world in which we live. The world places their hope in themselves. The world hopes in technology. The world hopes in politicians. And ours is in Christ alone.

And the prophetic Word gives sight to our faith. The prophetic Word gives certainty to our hope. The world is blind. The world believes that somehow we can make everything get better. We know as Christians, because of the Word, that just the opposite will be true. They are convinced that there has never been judgment and that there will be no judgment. Peter speaks of this in 2 Peter three where he admonished the church saying:

You should remember the words spoken beforehand by the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior spoken by your apostles. Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with their

² Isaiah 44:6-7.

³ Habakkuk 2:14.

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mocking, following after their own lusts, and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation."⁴

Then Peter goes on to say:

For when they maintain this, it escapes their notice that by the word of God the heavens existed long ago and the earth was formed out of water and by water, through which the world at that time was destroyed, being flooded with water. But by His word the present heavens and earth are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.⁵

Indeed, the world scoffs at this, but for the Christian as we know these truths we can live for the glory of God.

As Paul tells us in Ephesians five and verse 15:

Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil. So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.⁶

Before we examine our text this morning let me help you clean your prophetic lenses a little bit so we can better understand what the will of the Lord is, so we can better understand the age in which we live and truly make the most of our time. And I believe this will also provide the necessary context for the text that we will look at here in a moment.

So let's put on our prophetic lenses.

We are currently living in what we would call the church age. That began at Pentecost in Acts two, and this will continue until the Church is removed or translated into heaven which is many times called the rapture. We read about that in 1 Corinthians 15 and 1 Thessalonians 4. Although the rapture is imminent—meaning it is forthcoming as the next thing to occur on the prophetic time table—there are no specific prophetic signs to indicate when this will happen.

However, toward the end of their earthly ministries, God did reveal to the apostles the general conditions and trends of the world that the Church would experience during what is called "the last days" or "the latter times," a phrase that is used in the New Testament to denote the period of time between Christ's ascension and his return to the earth.

⁴ 2 Peter 3:2-3.

⁵ 2 Peter 3:4-7.

⁶ Ephesians 5:15-17.

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We know, as we study the Word of God, that this time will be marked by increasing apostasy. 1 Timothy chapter four verse one we read, “But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith.”⁷ Literally people will depart or abandon the orthodox doctrines of the Christian faith. It goes on to say they will “[pay] attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons.”⁸ Literally, the original language helps us understand that people will cling to deceptive doctrines that originate in demons.

It goes on to say in verse two of 1 Timothy four that they will:

...[pay] attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron.⁹

This is referring to false teachers, false preachers, predators in pulpits, literally, “hypocritical lie speakers” who will feel no guilt over the lies that they teach because their conscience has been seared by the branding iron of demonic deception.

One hundred years ago these kinds of deceptions trickled into the Church, but now we see them flooding the Church. We are being deluged by error. It is impossible to keep up with it. I gave you an example not too long ago. There is another book out. You have heard of it. It is called *The Shack*, a novel, supposedly a Christian novel. And here you have a best selling book that glamorizes a god that bears no resemblance to the god of the Bible. And it presents another gospel. And yet I hear that many churches are now using it as curriculum for their Sunday schools

2 Timothy three verse one we are told, “But realize this, that in the last days difficult [literally perilous or savage] times will come.”¹⁰ It is the idea that there will be an accumulation of deceptive epochs, layer upon layer of heresies. As we look back across Church history, for example, we can see these movements that continue to layer themselves upon each other and wreak havoc within the Church. First there was what we would call sacramentalism where the Church replaced God; and then rationalism where reason became god; and then orthodoxism where ritualism rendered God impersonal and impotent. And then there was politicism where the state became god; and then ecumenism where tolerance became god; then experimentalism where experience becomes god; and then subjectivism where personal feelings become god; and then mysticism where intuition and emotion are used to validate truth claims; and then pragmatism where methodology replaces theology and the ends justify the means and Bible doctrine is jettisoned. Now we have post modernism with the new age church, the new emergent church that denies that truth is propositional as set forth in the Bible and chooses, instead, to redefine truth according to cultural and communal understanding along with a lot of candles and a glass of chardonnay.

⁷ 1 Timothy 4:1.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ 1 Timothy 4:1-2.

¹⁰ 2 Timothy 3:1.

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Well, God predicts also that false teachers will proliferate as the age goes on and they will demand strict obedience to their leadership as well as to the things that they teach. They will be accountable to no one and yet they will expect people to be accountable to them. They will be motivated by greed and power and sexual immorality. Peter tells us in 2 Peter two beginning in verse one, “But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly...”¹¹ That verb in the original language means “to creep in” or “to sneak in under a false pretense.”

[They] will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves. Many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned; and in their greed they will exploit you with false words.¹²

Beloved, this is pandemic today. All you have to do is turn on your television.

The apostle John warns us of the spiritual seduction and heretical counterfeits of the many antichrists that will pave the way for the final antichrist that will occur in what he calls “the last hour,” 1 John 2:18. Chapter four and verse one he warns us to test these false teachers who are influenced by demonic spirits. And in verse two of that chapter we see that that test must apply to their teaching regarding the Lord Jesus Christ. He says:

Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world.¹³

Dr. Randall Price comments, and I quote, “The most basic doctrines on which Christians should take a stand are those that relate to Christ. Do these teachers who claim to be prophets—manifest signs and wonders and parade prosperity as their proof of blessing—speak correctly concerning the doctrines of Christ’s deity, his hypostatic union, his incarnation, his kenosis, his penal substitutionary atonement and his bodily resurrection? Do they even understand these terms?” end quote.

The answer is no, they don’t, especially in our day of self appointed pastors and shepherds and self promoting entrepreneurs. I’ve read them. I listen to them. I have talked with a number of them. But theologically they are as shallow as water on a plate. They have the theological acumen of a third grader.

But, dear friends, the composite of all of these false teachers will one day rest in the quintessential false teacher that will serve the antichrist. The Lord calls this person “the false prophet,” “the beast out of the earth.”

¹¹ 2 Peter 2:1.

¹² 2 Peter 2:2-3.

¹³ 1 John 4:2-3.

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It is interesting—as different ones have said—that the events of Bible prophecy tend to cast their shadows forward. Therefore, as we approach the Lord’s return we will continue to see these kinds of conditions gain momentum as the world is being prepared for the coming antichrist and his general, the false prophet. With that as an introduction let me read the text to you, Revelation 13 beginning at verse 11.

And I saw another beast coming up out of the earth; and he had two horns like a lamb, and he spoke as a dragon. And he exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence. And he makes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast, whose fatal wound was healed. And he performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down out of heaven to the earth in the presence of men. And he deceives those who dwell on the earth because of the signs which it was given him to perform in the presence of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who had the wound of the sword and has come to life. And there was given to him to give breath to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast might even speak and cause as many as do not worship the image of the beast to be killed. And he causes all, the small and the great, and the rich and the poor, and the free men and the slaves, to be given a mark on their right hand, or on their forehead, and he provides that no one should 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. 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.¹⁴

I would like to divide this text into three different compartments. We will look, first of all, at *his character*; secondly, *his con*; and, finally, *his control*.

First, *the character of the false prophet*, verse 11. “And I saw another beast coming up out of the earth.”¹⁵ This, in the original language, is “another” of the same kind, another as the first beast who was a human being, a man. In fact, later we will see both of them—according to chapter 19 and verse 20, “thrown alive into the lake of fire which burns with brimstone.”¹⁶

Now notice. Unlike the first beast that came up out of the sea, this one comes up out of the earth. Now some would argue that the sea—when we studied the antichrist—is emblematic of the Gentile nations as we see it referenced in Daniel seven verses two and three. So, therefore, they would say that the antichrist will be a Gentile. And since the Greek word for “earth” can sometimes be used as a technical expression for “the land of Israel,” people will assume that the false prophet will be a Jew. I, frankly, do not find this compelling. I think that is reading into the text more than is there.

¹⁴ Revelation 13:11-18.

¹⁵ Revelation 13:11.

¹⁶ Revelation 19:20.

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Regarding the antichrist you will recall that the ancients considered the sea to be a reservoir of evil. It is likened to the biblical abyss. In Revelation 11:7 and chapter 17 verse 8 we see this beast is not only coming up out of the sea, but it says that it he is coming up out of the abyss. So we could understand that the sea and the abyss would be virtually synonymous here.

But the ancients also considered the earth as being the land that is suspended over the sea or over the ocean. In Psalm 24:2 we read how they describe the earth as being “founded upon the seas.” And in chapter 136 verse six of Psalms we read, “To Him who spread out the earth above the waters...”¹⁷ So this is the mindset of the ancient. In fact, certain wastelands were considered to be the domain of noxious spirits, the natural habitat of demons, the place where many of the pagans considered various local deities to abide.

It is fascinating how Satan has carried these types of superstitions, this kind of thinking into witchcraft. We see some of this today. In fact, some of my Scottish ancestors would certainly remember what is called the “Gudeman’s Croft,” referring to the “Goodman’s Croft.” Gudeman was the devil of the witches. It was also known as “Halyman’s Rig” or “the Black Faulie.” This was a small patch of land dedicated to land spirits or fairies or the witches of the Gudeman; a place where neither spade nor plow was ever permitted to touch, an uncultivated area, supposedly to be a place reserved for the devil. Usually on the corners of fields.

So when you trace back some of the origins I believe the Lord’s statement here, “the beast coming up from the earth,” refers to the way the first century individual would understand this to be: that mysterious ground suspended above the sea. We might call it the underworld, a place that is foreboding, but certainly not as evil as the sea itself. So I would suggest that here the “earth” is emblematic of a less vile place than the sea, that place that remains under the curse, the earth certainly a stark contrast to heaven.

Now, certainly the false prophet will be demonized, but as we study the Word of God we see that he will be less ferocious than the antichrist. You will recall that the first beast, the antichrist had 10 horns, seven heads, 10 crowns and seven blasphemous names as we studied last week. But the second beast, the false prophet, notice verse 11, will have “two horns like a lamb.”

Now remember horns, biblically, are symbolic of strength and power. So this man will have less strength and power than the antichrist. Rather than being the rapacious and savage person like the antichrist, whose character, you will recall, will be the amalgam of the leopard and the bear and the lion, the false prophet will appear to be as gentle as a lamb. He will be winsome. He will be a mild mannered seducer, a silver tongued orator.

But, dear friends, he will be a beguiling siren of hell that will lure the world into worshipping the antichrist. Notice the Lord tells us “he spoke as a dragon,” the dragon

¹⁷ Psalm 136:6.

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referring to Satan. So we see here that his words will be satanic. This man will be to the world, dear friends, a pastor, a priest, a prophet that everyone will rally around.

I am reminded of Jesus' warning in Matthew seven verse 15. Remember there he said, "Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves."¹⁸ Old Testament prophets were easily recognized by the plain and hair, coarse garments that they wore. In fact, if somebody wanted to impersonate a prophet in those days, they would just merely put on those kinds of clothing. This is described in Zechariah 13:4 as those men who, "put on a hairy robe in order to deceive."¹⁹

And so Jesus' warning in Matthew seven is very similar because ancient shepherds wore woolen clothing that they took from their sheep. So Jesus' analogy is simply this: He is warning of false prophets that will likewise try to impersonate a true prophet. They will look like a pastor. They will talk like a pastor. They will claim to speak the Word of God like a pastor, but they will be a devil. Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 11 verse 13:

For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness.²⁰

So, dear friends, this will be *the character* of the false prophet. Let's look, secondly, at *his con.* Verse 12. "And he exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence,"²¹ that is, the antichrist will fully entrust to him his authority.

The satanic imitation here is as frightening as it is ingenious. Think about it. Even as the Holy Spirit pointed people to Christ, the false prophet, the third member of the unholy trinity, will point people to the antichrist. This is as though Satan is directing some parody of God's redemptive purposes, a satire of blasphemy to express his utter hatred and rage at the most high God.

Notice in verse 12 we read that, "He makes the earth and those who dwell in it..."²² And that, by the way, is a Hebrew figure of speech that the Lord is using here referring to all of the earth's inhabitants, including during this time the Jews who will oppose him. "He makes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast,"²³ and here is why, this last phrase, "whose fatal wound was healed."²⁴

By some satanic power the antichrist will appear to die and be raised from the dead imitating, again, Christ's death and resurrection as well as, you will recall, the two witnesses who died and were raised again. And all of this amazed the people. Even as

¹⁸ Matthew 7:15.

¹⁹ Zechariah 13:4.

²⁰ 2 Corinthians 11:13-15.

²¹ Revelation 13:12.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

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God used signs and wonders to authenticate both the message and the messenger of his truth, Satan will do the same, although his power will be limited.

This will be, dear friends, the greatest hoax in history. And all you have to do is look around at our world today and you see how gullible people are. But bear in mind, by this time the world will be extremely vulnerable because of all of the cataclysmic judgments that have fallen upon the world, the seal judgments and the trumpet judgments by this stage, by the middle of the tribulation.

Now I might add that there will be no Atheists during this time. Everybody will believe in God. The Word of God helps us understand that. We know that they have already prayed for the mountains and the rocks to fall on them in Revelation 6:16 saying, “Hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of their wrath has come; and who is able to stand?”²⁵ We know biblically that they will continue to blaspheme God. By now they have witnessed the demonic hordes attacking them, remember in the fifth and the sixth trumpet judgments. There will be no Atheists. The world will be extremely religious, but they will refuse to repent and to worship the one true God. They will be desperate. They will be frightened. They will be gullible. By now they will be judicially hardened by God, the very one whom they have rejected.

Now notice. This is a religious sham here that is accompanied by various signs and wonders of the false prophet in verse 13. We read, “And he performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down out of heaven to the earth in the presence of men.”²⁶ This will mimic the powers of the two witnesses. You will recall they had the ability to have fire proceed out of their mouth and devour their enemies (remember in chapter 11) as well as other miracles they could do, and here the false prophet will mimic these types of things. Who do not know what this will be, this fire coming down out of heaven. The best we can glean from the tense of the Greek verb, which is in the present tense, we can understand that whatever he does, he will do it over and over again.

The false prophet, keep in mind, will work in tandem with the powers of the antichrist that the Lord has given to both of them. In fact, Paul describes this in 2 Thessalonians two beginning in verse nine with reference specifically to the antichrist. He says:

The one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved. And for this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they might believe what is false, in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness.²⁷

²⁵ Revelation 6:16-17.

²⁶ Revelation 13:13.

²⁷ 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12.

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Now there are many other examples of this kind in Scripture, of evil people having certain satanic powers. Remember Pharaoh's magicians, Janus and Jambres that imitated the miracles of Moses and Aaron in Exodus seven. Remember also in Acts Simon Magus who supposedly brought statues to life through his magical arts. We read that it "astonished the people of Samaria," and even caused them to say, "This man is what is called the great power of God."²⁸ But, dear friends, the miracles of the false prophet and even the antichrist will be far more spectacular and convincing than any of these.

Between the miracle of the antichrist's resurrection and the signs and wonders of the false prophet and the deluding influence that God will send upon them that they might believe that which is false, this agent of hell will be able to form the final religious amalgam, the great whore church of Revelation 17. You will recall in Revelation 17 you see that this whore sits on the scarlet beast referring to, specifically, the world government of the antichrist. And so they will be working hand in hand. We have seen this down through history, have we not, where political powers work in tandem with some phony religious system. We see that in Russia a great deal today with the Russian political system working in tandem with the Russian Orthodox Church.

So this will be his con. Verse 14 we read that, "He deceives those who dwell on the earth because of the signs which it was given him to perform in the presence of the beast, telling [literally commanding] those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who *had the wound of the sword and has come to life."²⁹ This demand to worship an image is reminiscent of Daniel three, remember, when Satan influenced the proud king Nebuchadnezzar to make a statue of himself and to demand people to bow down and to worship him and if they didn't they would die. So it stands to reason that this image will be some kind of statue of the antichrist.

Now what happens next is unprecedented in world history. And this leads us to the final division of the text. We have learned about the *character* of the false prophet and *his con*, this great hoax with all of his counterfeit signs and wonders. But then, finally, let's look at *his control* in verse 15, "And there was given to him to give breath to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast might even speak and cause as many as do not worship the image of the beast to be killed."³⁰

This is amazing. Here we learn that God literally gives him permission to animate this image of the beast through some kind of demonic power. We read that he gives breath to the image of the beast. He does this in some mysterious way. Somehow he causes it to appear to come to life and even be able to speak.

The word "breath" here translates the Greek word *pneuma* (pnyoo'-mah) which is not the normal Greek term that is used to describe life. Normally the Greek word that would be used would be *bios* (bee'-os) or *zoe* (dzo-ay') and since this is *pneuma* (pnyoo'-mah) it would be an indication that this is not life as we would normally understand it.

²⁸ Acts 8:10.

²⁹ Revelation 13:14.

³⁰ Revelation 14:15.

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So God is not actually giving life to this statue. In other words, this statue is not going to have a soul, ok? But rather he permits the false prophet to use some undisclosed demonic power to animate the image and give the appearance of life. Now can you imagine the reaction of the world? The world, again, that by now is terrified of the wrath of the Lamb, the Lord Jesus Christ. They hate the God of the Bible. Billions have been killed. Their mother earth is now completely destroyed. I shouldn't say completely, but almost completely destroyed. It is virtually uninhabitable. They continue to blaspheme the triune God as Revelation six tells us.

But now, finally, finally, they have a champion in the antichrist. "Look what he can do? He was dead. Now he is alive." They have witnessed his death and resurrection and now to see this statue come alive. I can almost hear them say, "If he can conquer death and even cause a statue to come alive, what can he do for us?" I believe, dear friends, this will be the great lie that the world will believe.

As I thought about this I found my mind going back to John 11 and verse 25. Remember in that passage Jesus said:

I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die.³¹

Here, dear friends, we have great counterfeit of the person of the Lord Jesus Christ and his promise. Not that the antichrist is claiming to be Jesus Christ the returning Messiah, but rather he will claim to be the true God, the one who will replace this false god that is doing all of this damage, insisting that Jesus was the great hoax and that he is the great deliverer. This will be what is called the "abomination of desolation" which means the act of rendering the temple ritually defiled. This will put an end to the sacrificial system of worship that was allowed to occur in the first half of the tribulation. And this will inaugurate the final three and a half years of Gentile domination, of "the times of the Gentiles." This will be the time now of "Jacob's trouble," the worst persecution in history for the Jewish people and the final battles that will fully capture the city of Jerusalem, Zechariah 12 through 14.

I might add. Remember, Jerusalem was the preeminent geographical place during our Lord's first coming, and it will likewise be in his second coming. I read recently British Prime Minister Sir Winston Churchill understood the prize of Jerusalem in the grand scheme of redemptive history. Here is what he once stated, quote, "Jerusalem must be the only ultimate goal. When it will be achieved, it is in vain to prophecy. But that it will some day be achieved is one of the few certainties of the future," end quote.

As I think about this statue that the false prophet will appear to give life to, I find myself shuddering. Can you imagine what a hellish looking thing that will be? This blasphemous image of the beast was predicted in Daniel 9:27 as well as in Matthew 24:15. There is where Jesus said:

³¹ John 11:2-26.

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When you see the ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains.³²

Paul prophesied this as well in 2 Thessalonians two verses three and four. He described the antichrist as:

The man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God.³³

Now notice the command of the image of the antichrist will be able to give, the end of verse 15. “As many as do not worship the image of the beast to be killed.”³⁴ Understand it this way. The antichrist will be a satanically controlled political monster. He will be the quintessential narcissist and he will not tolerate any rival god or any rival worship. And so, like Nebuchadnezzar before him, he will demand that the world bow down and worship him. And if they don’t, they are to be killed. And were it not for divine intervention, all of the Jews would be killed. We know that according to Zechariah 13 two thirds of them will be, but one third will be preserved. Other Gentiles will be saved. They will be preserved as well. Remember, God will miraculously transport many of the Jews into the wilderness where he will protect them and nourish them as we studied in Revelation 12. We also know that the archangel Michael who is the great prince who stands guard over the sons of Israel will arise and he will be deployed to protect Israel during the last 1290 days, according to Daniel 12, this last half of the tribulation.

Then we learn, also, how the false prophet will impose the worship of the beast here in verse 16. We read that, “He causes all, the small and the great, and the rich and the poor, and the free men and the slaves, to be given a mark on their right hand, or on their forehead.”³⁵ “Mark” translates a Greek word meaning “to engrave” or “to tattoo” or “to brand.” It was something that was commonly done to soldiers and slaves and worshippers of various pagan cults. And here we have yet another counterfeit. You will recall that even as God dispatched an angel in chapter seven to place some kind of invisible seal on the foreheads of the 144,000 to protect them from his impending wrath, so, too, now the false prophet does just the opposite. He requires the wicked to bear the mark of the beast and in so doing it indicates their veneration of him as well as their loyalty to him.

Verse 17. “He provides that no one should 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.”³⁶ Now, God does not reveal to us the specific nature of this mark. We know that certainly today there is the

³² Matthew 24:15-16.

³³ 2 Thessalonians 2:3.

³⁴ Revelation 13:15.

³⁵ Revelation 13:16.

³⁶ Revelation 13:17.

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technology to have a variety of things that could serve as this mark. I was reading not too long ago of a new invention that a man has that is receiving a patent. It is the ability to tattoo a bar code, like we have on our products when we go to the grocery store and you scan the bar code. They can now put that anyplace on our body and this bar code then will link people into a database so that people would be able to electronically consummate any kind of a transaction. So it would do away with money. It would do away with credit cards. And, certainly, you wouldn't have to worry about identity theft because everybody would have their own unique identity. Maybe God will use this. We don't know.

But God does tell us that this mark will have some kind of numerical equivalent. In fact, the Greek grammar indicates that the number of his name and the name will be one in the same somehow. Now there have been countless hypotheses based upon many different mathematical equivalents of names down through history to try to decide what the name of the antichrist is and this mark and so forth. But all of them have proven to be nothing more than speculation. I have read probably as many as I am going to read of the various schemes of gematria which is the Hebrew word that is used to describe a system of assigning numerical value to a word or a phrase.

But all of those fanciful algorithms have led people to believe that all kinds of historical figures were the antichrist, everything from Nero to Hitler, from Napoleon to Bill Clinton. And I am sure that people are working on Barack Hussein Obama to this day. But all of that is futile. But what we do know, beloved, is that the Lord offers us a clue that will unlock the mystery. But this is for people who will be living during that time and I believe we will be in glory during this time.

Verse 18. He says, "Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding ..." ³⁷ And the language here indicates that there is some evidence of special intelligence that God will give believers of that day. They will have wisdom and understanding. "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." ³⁸ So this mysterious riddle will be deciphered by believers in that day as God gives them special insight.

We have another little clue about this in Daniel chapter 12 and verse 10 where the prophet speaks of the folks during this time. He says, "Many will be purged, purified and refined, but the wicked will act wickedly; and none of the wicked will understand." ³⁹ And then he says this. "But those who have insight will understand." ⁴⁰

John MacArthur offers some insight into this mysterious issue especially with regard to the Lord's statement here in verse 18, the number is that of a man and his number is 666. Here is what he says, quote, "Seven, the number of perfection is God's number. Since man falls short of perfection his number is six. Man was created on the sixth day (Genesis 1:26-31); slaves were freed after six years of service (Exodus 21:2); fields were

³⁷ Revelation 13:18.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Daniel 12:10.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

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shown to be sown for only six consecutive years (Leviticus 25:3). Repeating the number three times emphasizes that this is man's number just as the thrice repeated statement, 'Holy, holy, holy,' stresses God's absolute holiness," end quote.

While this is true, we still don't know with any certainty what the name of the antichrist will be, but, beloved, what we can learn from this is that this will be a terrible time for believers. Can you imagine not being able to buy or to sell without this mark? Imagine the control of the false prophet, forcing the people to worship the beast. This will be a death sentence to believers, both Jew and Gentile. Were it not for divine intervention, they would all be killed. We know that he will preserve a remnant to enter into the kingdom.

Beloved, how thankful we can be that our God reigns and that he will glorify himself as he has promised. And as we witness the coming events of Bible prophecy casting their shadows forward, we can rejoice that, indeed, the Word of God is true. Certainly we can see as we look around us that Satan has raised up an army of false teachers preaching hundreds of blasphemous religions. You can kind of pick your poison this day. Sinful, ignorant, desperate people are attracted to these things like a moth to a flame.

Oh, dear Christian, people need the Lord. We have sung that, haven't we? People need the Lord. Paul said, "And how shall they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?"⁴¹

I would leave you with this thought. Are you proclaiming the Word of God to people? Or are you just living in your little Calvary Bible Church bubble? I challenge each of you to make a list, target people, pray for them. Develop a strategy to present the gospel of Christ to them. Because, beloved, the time is short. The time is short.

Let's pray together.

Father, we are overwhelmed when we contemplate the details of your coming wrath and the deception that is already prevalent in the world. And yet, Lord, even as we think upon these things we are reminded, again, that you are a sovereign, merciful, gracious, loving, forgiving God. Lord, how we praise you for your gospel. And I pray, Lord, that you will help us to be vigilant in our efforts to reach the lost with the truth. Lord, we excitedly await the day when you will be glorified even in your wrath, your wrath against those who mock you.

Again, Lord, thank you for your love for us because had you not loved us we would have never loved you. Come quickly, Lord Jesus, we pray in Christ's name. Amen.

⁴¹ Romans 10:14.

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