

Lesson # 43 The False Prophet

Revelation 13: 11-18

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Revelation 13:11-18 (ESV)

¹¹Then I saw another beast rising out of the earth. It had two horns like a lamb and it spoke like a dragon. ¹²It exercises all the authority of the first beast in its presence, and makes the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose mortal wound was healed. ¹³ It performs great signs, even making fire come down from heaven to earth in front of people, ¹⁴and by the signs that it is allowed to work in the presence of the beast it deceives those who dwell on earth, telling them to make an image for the beast that was wounded by the sword and yet lived. ¹⁵And it was allowed to give breath to the image of the beast, so that the image of the beast might even speak and might cause those who would not worship the image of the beast to be slain. ¹⁶Also it causes all, both small and great, both rich and poor, both free and slave, to be marked on the right hand or the forehead, ¹⁷so that no one can buy or sell unless he has the mark, that is, the name of the beast or the number of its name. ¹⁸ This calls for wisdom: let the one who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man, and his number is 666.

I. The Beast from the Earth

vv. 11-13

Whereas the Beast (Antichrist) arose from the sea (Abyss), this second Beast rises from the earth. So once again, we are dealing with some measure of symbolism that must be interpreted. This is describing a man who will have the character of a beast – he has 2 horns like a lamb, and speaks like a dragon. ①

First of all, this is person, not an institution. He will control an institution, which we'll see later on is the false religious system, "Mystery Babylon", but he is a person. The language describing him is unmistakably personal, and his ultimate end in the Lake of Fire (Rev. 19:20) is a personal, not a corporate fate. Although Jesus warned about end times false prophets (MT. 24:24), this individual is the supreme false prophet – the religious henchman of the Antichrist. If my postulation is correct regarding Antichrist's pedigree as a Muslim, the, just as most obviously modeled in current day Iran, the Antichrist will be the political force while the False Prophet will act as the Ayatollah, having religious power as well as strong political influence.

Satan will set up an interesting (in a macabre sense) parody of the Holy trinity. Satan is in the role of the father, calling out his "son" the Antichrist out of the Abyss, and the False Prophet acts in the role of the unholy spirit to bring honor to Antichrist and Satan. It will be the bizarre world equivalent of the Holy Trinity. There is even a death & resurrection of the Antichrist (son figure) in Rev. 13:3-4, a membership standard (the Mark), and as the unholy spirit figure, the False Prophet performs signs & wonders (as does Antichrist). Whatever 'organized religion' will look like in the Tribulation, the False Prophet will control & direct it to compel people to worship the Beast. He is called the False

Prophet in Rev. 16:13; 19:20 and 20:10; but here, another Beast. Although his specialty is religion, and outwardly, he'll be seen as a lamb – a peaceful person - his nature is exposed here as being a beast, an animal. Satan's main weapon of choice has always been deception – see **II Co. 11:14-15**.

His “rising out of the earth” as compared to the first Beast's rising out of the sea also brings him to power with demonic authority out of the Abyss. Not only does the sea qualify as symbolic of the Abyss, so the depths of the earth (note it does not say 'land', so he is not just a surface dweller) represent Hades and the Abyss, especially in the OT, but with some references in the NT as well.ⁱ As a deceiver, he will at first win over the people with his charming ways and signs and wonders. Once established, though, no quarter will be given and worship will be mandatory – his way or no way – just as in current day Islam.

This beast has only 2 horns of a lamb, therefore he has lesser power than the first Beast, but beneath this sedate exterior lurks cunning & corruption – “he spoke like a dragon”, signifying the ability coupled with inherent evil to lure people away from Christ and into the trap so that they will unwittingly and yet willingly worship Satan.

The False Prophet administers the Antichrist's agenda, and in so doing, he is the one carrying out most of the persecution. He exercises the Antichrist's authority and ‘makes’ the people of earth worship the Antichrist & in v. 12 we are reminded of the mortal wound of the Antichrist which was healed. This is apparently a worldwide edict (to worship Antichrist), and no one will be exempt.^② It will be enforced through the use of ‘the Mark’, which we'll look at more closely in Rev. 13:16-18 – by which the entire population of earth will be controlled and corralled.

In v. 13, we are told that the False Prophet is able to perform signs & wonders, the purpose of which Satan will use to verify his power & claims of being a prophet – but see **MT. 24:23-25**. Whereas Jesus was accused of having Satan as the source of His power (cf. MT. 12:22-32), which is considered the unforgivable sin, the False Prophet will perform signs and wonders and the majority of the people will believe he is from God, with the important exception of the Elect. These signs and wonders will be much more than just magic tricks too. The text says he will be able to call down fire from heaven, something James & John had requested they be given the ability to do in LK. 9:54, but this will be to mimic Elijah's abilities (I Kings 18:32) and the Two Witnesses (Rev. 11:5).

II. A Deceiver Under Authority vv. 14 - 15

Just as Jesus had prophesied in MT. 24:24, many people will be deceived by the actions of the False Prophet. By this time, they'll be looking for someone on earth who has the power to counteract the onslaught of destructive events. The signs that are being done are “in the presence of the Beast”, meaning the first Beast, Antichrist, signal that the False Prophet has the full approval of the Antichrist to do what he does and, as a result, those who dwell on earth are

deceived. The deception is part of the scheme to compel the people to make an image of the Beast, referring to him as the one “that was wounded by the sword and yet lived”. This is of course a reference back to vv. 3-4, 12. Once again, this remarkable recovery / resurrection is the basis for the people’s flocking to worship the Antichrist and the False Prophet – they are willing as sheep to follow the first sign of human hope available to them in a long time. They had enjoyed (false) peace for 3 ½ years, and the assassination of their beloved leader had caused despair. But despair turned into hope as he was brought back to life. Coupled with that, and the signs and wonders, the people are willing to be deceived.

There is another aspect of this deception we do not want to forget as well. Back in **II Thess. 2: 9-12**, we see God’s hand in this as well, as the people are allowed to be deceived as a direct result of God’s judgment on them.

Notice too, for the 4th time in this chapter the phrase, “it was allowed”:

- V. 5 – it was allowed to exercise authority for 42 months
- V. 7 – it was allowed to make war on the saints & to conquer them
- V. 14 – it was allowed to work signs in the presence of the Beast
- V. 15 – it was allowed to give breath to the image of the beast...

Every step of the way, as Satan undergirds and plans his campaign against God in the Tribulation, he gives his power to infuse these 2 persons with evil abilities to deceive the people & to kill God’s saints. But the allowance for their success for a specified period of time comes from God Himself. It is all part of God’s judgment although it is certain that Satan sees it all as his victories. Once again, as He does throughout the Bible, God uses Satan’s evil intentions to bring about the good of God’s purposes, chief of which is the demonstration of His own glory. We see a reminder here of compatibilism, the concept that God can be sovereign yet man (or in this case, Satan) is still responsible for his actions. Good examples of this (& there are many) are found in **MT. 18:7 & 26:24**.

D.A. Carson provides an excellent definition of compatibilism:

“The Bible as a whole, and sometimes in specific texts, presupposes or teaches that both of the following propositions are true:

1. *God is absolutely sovereign, but His sovereignty never functions in such a way that human responsibility is curtailed, minimized or mitigated.*
2. *Human beings are morally responsible creatures – they significantly choose, rebel, obey believe, defy, make decisions and so forth, and they are rightly held accountable for such actions; but this characteristic never functions so as to make God absolutely contingent.”ⁱⁱ*

The people do build this “image of the Beast”, but we are not told if it is a huge statue like the gold statue of Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 3 or some sort of image on the currency of the day, a sort of electronic & holographic image. It is however, referred to throughout the remainder of Revelation – some 10 times: 13:15 (2 x); 14:9,11; 15:2; 16:2; 19:20 & 20:4. The purpose of the image is to be a focal point and people on earth are to worship it since the Antichrist cannot be among them

personally, not being omnipresent. The False Prophet somehow gives the image the ability to speak and those who will not bow and worship the image will be killed. This again is reminiscent of the religion of Islam. Images of leaders in Islamic countries (banners, posters, etc.) is a large part of the hype and adoration, and there is no question that unswerving loyalty to Islam is a requirement that, if deviated from – for example, one converting to Christianity or insulting Mohammed – is punishable by death.

III. The Mark of the Beast

vv. 16-17

Worship of the Antichrist & his image are always connected with receiving the Mark which the next verses introduce to us. In order to ensure the worship of and therefore loyalty to the Antichrist, where willing participants are not expected (once they see who he really is), an edict is made that compels people under threat of death to – note the wording of v.16 –“ Also it causes all, both small and great, both rich and poor, both free and slave, to be marked on the right hand or the forehead,” – whatever this Mark is. Those who will not take this mark or resist taking this mark will be subject to capital punishment. How will they be executed? Rev. 20:4 talks about those who had not received the mark or worshipped the Beast. They were beheaded! Now which religious/political system in modern times beheads it’s victims? That is not a tough question to answer is it?

All people will be forced, under threat of death for non-compliance, to take this mark on their right hand or forehead. In v. 17, we are told that taking this mark certifies that you worship the Antichrist because without it, you will not be allowed to live – you will no longer have access to food, clothing, shelter, utilities – anything that an economic society & specific people rely on. If you can’t buy or sell, you will not be eating and if you think you’ll live off the land like some do today, much of the land will be devastated by fire, famine, war, etc. ④

This ‘Mark’ will be the chief means of controlling who will live and who will die in an economy where there is no longer plenty as a result of the judgments of God. Naturally, the first people cut out of the society are those who do not exhibit loyalty to the state. As we already saw in 13:8-10, everyone will comply except those whose name is written down in the Book of Life of the Lamb before the foundation of the world. That covers not only those already saved, but those whom God is protecting who are at this point Elect, but unsaved. These will not take the Mark even if it means martyrdom, and for many. It will. This is not the same sort of mark discussed in Rev. 7:3 which is applied to God’s people.

Mark Hitchcock points out, “The word used for the seal of God on the foreheads of the saints in Rev. 7:3 is the Greek word *sphragizo* which is used of the invisible seal of the Holy Spirit in the NT (2 Cor. 1:22; Eph. 1:13; 4:30). The word used for mark (*charagma*), on the other hand, refers to a visible mark, imprint or etching. Therefore, while God’s mark on His saints will be invisible, the beast’s mark will be visible.”ⁱⁱⁱ

What is the Mark?

The hand and/or forehead are very visible areas during face to face commerce, and the purpose of this mark seems to be visibility – a sign of allegiance to the Antichrist. It could be a sort of tattoo or brand that is in the form of the Beast, which were early historic ideas, but as technology advances, we are fast becoming an age of dependence on electronic devices. In fact, life is dominated by these things. Bar coding and even injectable electronic chips (grain of rice size) have been devised and are being perfected on which medical, banking, criminal activity and other information can be stored. With GPS technology, our cell phones can be tracked, and even these chips can be used for the same purpose.

This ‘mark’ will apparently be used as a control mechanism, somehow limiting the ability to participate in commerce to those who have the mark. Here is my estimation of what the mark could be. I believe it will be some form of implanted microchip containing your biological, financial, legal, health info, license info, criminal records, employment info, etc. which can be read by some sort of electronic scan. A purchase will be in the form of a debit using this mark rather than a debit card, and your pay will be automatically credited to your account. It will become a virtual cashless and cardless society. The data base is already being built and I think we can all recognize that the idea is not as far-fetched as it might have been 20 years ago.

Kim Riddlebarger, an Ammillennial writer, however disagrees; he claims, *“At the time John used this image, slaves were branded or tattooed by their owners. Thus anyone who “takes the mark” is branded as a slave of the beast and consciously renounces Christ to their eternal peril. Our dispensational friends miss the point when they are preoccupied with investigating which forms of technology can be used to create body markings or a cashless society. They come closer to the truth when they warn us about government usurping its’ God-given role and seeking the adoration and worship owed to God by His people. This is a real and pressing threat to all Christians. The worship of the state or its’ leaders in all of its’ forms is a false religion. It is the very essence of the beast.”*^{iv} ⑤

Kim Riddlebarger misses the point of the context of the passage entirely. It is not just a brand of ownership being spelled out in Revelation 13. It is participation in commerce as well as showing allegiance to the beast that is being touted. It is also obvious that is more serious than ‘slave identification’ since those who refuse it are as good as dead.

We have all experienced changes in the way banking, purchases, shopping, etc. are done over the years. What has made the difference? Computers. Back in 1987, I read a Royal Bank quarterly brochure / report which outlined a plan for correcting something called ‘float’ and made some predictions about the future of debit and smart chip cards. Float was a problem at the time because so many transactions were done by cheque, and the time needed for a cheque to be sent and arrive and clear meant that the money was in limbo (or in the wrong account) so there was no interest being made by the bank that would benefit

from the amount of the cheque. For us it means very little, but when billions of dollars are being moved around, this is an expensive issue. In fact any movement of cheques or literal cash costs the bank money because someone has to handle it.

This visionary report mentioned an electronic method of transferring funds directly from account to account at the point of purchase instantly. They were describing long before they came into existence – debit cards and chip cards. Now, debit cards are even changing in our lifetime with the addition of an electronic chip rather than a magnetic strip to protect our identity and our money.

Credit cards are now huge in comparison to the 1980's (they were non-existent in the 1950's until Diner's Club decided to put out a card for businessmen to use). Many people have 10-12 cards and they basically perform a similar job as debit cards, although there is still a lag time from purchase to payment, which the bank covers with store fees, card fees and interest. Basically, a credit card is a high interest short term loan. But, our lazy society being what it is, it is too difficult and time consuming to swipe so new cards allow us to wave at the terminal or tap the card on it. The descent of our society into laziness is leading directly to a time when the Antichrist will easily convince people that the Mark is the way to go – no fuss, no muss.

What next? Bar code technology is already here and our purchases simply need to be scanned, rather than an amount punched in, also allowing the store to keep track of their inventory. Payments by cheque are quickly becoming archaic, and even bill payments can be done on the Internet, and are being encouraged to be done that way. People being encouraged to use electronic self-cashiers rather than people is the norm any more. ⑥

I hate to break the news to Kim Riddlebarger and other Amillennialists, but we are not yet in the Millennial Kingdom and we are fast becoming a cashless society!

The extensive use of debit and credit cards helps create a new type of crime – theft of your cards &/or identity electronically. One way being considered to combat this is to consider placing the electronic capability of performing transactions somewhere on your person! That technology is now here, and as early as 2002 has been tested on small groups^v. There are also already embedded chips in use for tracking pets and keeping electronic records of their medical history.

It is only a matter of time before some company offers such implants to the general population as a replacement for your credit and debit cards, and perhaps even to hold your other records. It is possible such a system may be up and running before Antichrist comes on the scene and he simply uses existing technology to further his own agenda. It will be explained that this is a new innovation, a trend that people should get in on right away – all benefit, no

downside. No one will say “this is the Mark”. If this is what is meant by the Mark, it could only occur after many years had passed after John recorded this.

If you further couple this with other identification technology being used for security purposes today – such as facial recognition scanning, full body scanners, fingerprint, handprint and iris scans – it will be very difficult to escape detection as one who refuses to take the mark.

Some people take this fear too far and refuse to use debit or credit cards, and certainly not accept a chip card. However, the technology is not the evil behind this – it is innovative. The evil aspect is the unscrupulous use of this technology by the Antichrist and False Prophet to further their own agenda.

The mark is said to represent the name or number of the name of the Beast, which leads us to verse 18 and the most famous number in history.

IV. 666

v. 18

666 is the number that immediately makes people with even the shallowest exposure to Christianity and End Times scenarios or certain genres of horror movies think instantly of Satan and the end times. It is widely used in films, books & TV series to represent Satanic groups, witches, vampires, etc.

According to Rev. 13:18, this number will in some way play a role in the plans of the Antichrist to control the world’s population, and that this number will somehow reflect his character or personage. It is connected to the ‘Mark of the beast’ in v. 17. ⑦

According to v. 18, it is something that someone with wisdom will be able to understand, however, people take this to mean that it can be understood before it comes into use, but it is virtually impossible and purely speculative to attempt to comprehend in advance what it means or how it identifies Antichrist. The crazy ideas of people over the course of history proves this.

John says that the one with wisdom can calculate the first Beast’s number which corresponds with his name, so for centuries, it has become a generational ‘eschatological’ exercise to try to show who the Antichrist is before he can actually be identified by biblical means (II Thess. 2:6 – he will be revealed “in his time’), but time after time, these ‘prophets’ are proven wrong when the person dies. Just as many in the late 1900’s believed that the European Common Market was the revived Roman Empire because it had 10 members which seemed to fit Daniel’s prophecies. Today, there are 25 members and counting.

General numerical symbolism falls far short of solving the riddle - for example, the number of man is ‘6’ (created on the 6th day), which is 1 short of perfection, symbolized by ‘7’. Thus, 666 falls short by 1, 3 times. Christ’s symbolic number would be 777, so 666 is short on every count.

However, bypassing numerology, gematria is used. This system takes every letter of the Greek alphabet and assigns it a numerical value. For example, the first 9 letters are numbers 1 through 9, then 10-20, 21-30, etc. Since Greek did not have enough letters to number very high, symbols and obsolete letters were added as supplements. There is an example in ancient literature where Jesus' name in Greek is calculated to be 888. Church father, Iranaeous cautioned that the name of the one 666 represents should not be a matter of speculation until that person is obviously present in history^{vi}. The primary reason the # 666 is given is so that people can protect themselves by identifying the Antichrist before they fall for his mark or his other deceptive means of taking them away from Christ. There is really no need for people who predate Antichrist's arrival on the scene to know who he is or how 666 defines him.

In defiance of what Iranaeous warned about, people have calculated and come up with an incredible array of names for the possible Antichrist – here a few: Nero Caesar, Caligula, certain empires, Hitler, Mussolini, Stalin, Henry Kissinger, Bill Clinton, Jimmy Carter, JFK, Mikael Gorbachev, and on and on. This sort of junk theology is what gives Premillennialism a bad name.

Sensationalistic books^{vii} have seen 666 as a computer code which supposedly is a requirement before any computer can begin to function; a credit card prefix; the control number for all bar codes, and so on. Some even point to license plates, clothing products, serial numbers – virtually anything where the number 666 shows up even as a natural outcome of sequential numbering. They often say that 999 is also included because it is simply 666 turned upside down!

We are not meant to speculate this way. Once the Antichrist is on the scene and taking power, it will be obvious for those who have been forewarned, to make the connection between who he is and 666. It may very well be that gematria is the answer, but in which language? It is presented as sort of riddle by John, but with so much riding on solving it for those who are with Antichrist in that era of history, it is likely that God will give people wisdom to discern the answer and identify him before they take the mark – if they are Christ's elect. Until that time, no name / number combination will make sense, and until he shows up, how could you prove it anyway?

Next lesson – Lesson # 44 Rev. 14: 1-5 The Lamb & the 144,000

ⁱ See my 2010 study on the Doctrine of Hell for more detail on this.

ⁱⁱ D.A. Carson; *How Long, O Lord? Reflections on Suffering and Evil*; 1990 Baker, 2nd edition 2006; pg. 179.

ⁱⁱⁱ Mark Hitchcock, "Who is the Antichrist?"; Harvest House; 2011; p. 194, footnote # 56

^{iv} Kim Riddlebarger; *The Man of Sin – Uncovering the Truth About The Antichrist* – Baker Books 2006; p. 174

^v Windsor Star article, "Enter a Man, exit a cyborg"; May 10, 2002, front page; and Windsor Star article, "Implant will track kids", Sept. 16, 2002, front page

^{vi} Robert Thomas, *Revelation 8-22*; p. 183-184

^{vii} Mary Rolfe, Salem Kirban, Hal Lindsay, etc.