

**Revelation 13: 13 and 14; “The Beast performs great Signs”; Sermon # 95 in the series
– “The Faithful and True Witness”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on
December 7th, 2008, in the Afternoon Worship Service.**

What is the value of prophecy to the Christian? Surely it is not to simply tell Him what God is going to do at the end of time. That is plain enough. God is going to judge the world in righteousness through the man whom He has appointed; our Lord Jesus Christ. Surely prophecy is not given just to satisfy men’s curiosity about what will happen politically to their nation. We already know that God is the Lord of the nations. If a nation is righteous it will be exalted. If it is increasingly sinful, then it shall wane and eventually be destroyed. “Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people.” Surely prophecy is given to show all men that our God is a sovereign God and that no purpose of His can be thwarted. He is a righteous God and no unrighteousness shall ultimately prevail. No schemes of men or devils shall prevail over His holy purposes. He not only knows the end from the beginning but He has foreordained all the events of human history that come to pass, and He is able to declare them to us.

This is why He says to us in Isaiah 41, verse 1 – “Keep silence before Me, O coastlands, and let the people renew their strength!” “Let them come near, then let them speak; let us come near together for judgment.” “Who raised up one from the east?” “Who in righteousness called him to His feet?” “Who gave the nations before him, and made him rule over kings?” “Who gave them as the dust to his sword, as driven stubble to his bow?” “Who pursued them, and passed safely by the way that he had not gone with his feet?” “Who has performed and done it, calling the generations from the beginning?” “I the Lord, am the first; and with the last I am He.” Now whether the one “raised up from the East” refers to Abraham, or Cyrus the Persian, or Christ, or the Apostle Paul, or someone else altogether; it was the Lord who raised him up. It is the Lord who called out all the generations from the beginning. And our God’s purpose is that the Lord Jesus Christ be the first, as He is the first and the last, the Alpha and the Omega.

From a purely human standpoint, prophecy ought to be a means of creating faith in people. If we show them that God, through His prophets, has told us things that are going to happen before they actually do happen, and they are written down in the Bible, and they come to pass; then they should believe it because it can surely be proved to them. But men do not believe in our Lord Jesus simply because the evidence of fulfilled prophecy is set before them. They believe when they see the evidence, and when God is working in their hearts, to draw them to Himself. Men love to be religious without knowing God. This is the ultimate deception of Antichrist, to have men worship God with a twisted view of Christ and the Bible. Past history clearly shows us that men are not only willing, but they are desirous to have some other way to know God and worship God than the way that He has set forth in His word. This is sin and rebellion working in their hearts. They will worship other gods under the name and banner of the true and living God. They will let other men tell them what the Bible is saying without looking into it for themselves. They will have such a respect and reverence for authority that they will submit to a false authority in order to think that they are right with God. They will make their own idols and have them set up in their hearts, even though God has declared Himself against them.

This is what has happened to Roman Catholicism through the teaching of the Popes. They try to worship God through Jesus Christ, but they worship Mary and the saints as well. Again in Isaiah 41, verse 5, it says, “The coastlands saw it and feared, the ends of the earth were afraid; they drew near and came.” “Everyone helped their neighbor, and said to his brother, ‘Be of good courage!’” “So the craftsman encouraged the goldsmith; He who smooths with the hammer inspired him who strikes the anvil, saying, ‘It is ready for the soldering; then he fastened it with pegs, that it might not totter.’” In other words, when those who loved idolatry saw that it was God’s will that idols be destroyed; they made them anyway. In New Testament times, when men who were leaders in

Christ's Church saw that God's purpose revealed in Christ was that He would be the only Mediator between God and men, and the one who would judge and rule over them according to His word, they gathered themselves together against him, in this particular way. They said, "Be of good courage", we will continue our idolatry. The craftsman encouraged the goldsmith to continue on with making idols in the Old Testament church, and the same has happened in the New Testament times with Antichrist who we are studying. But let us all know and understand that God will uphold His cause and His people in the true worship of Himself, even when the Beast performs his greatest lying signs and wonders. God who knows the end from the beginning has already declared the end of this whole Antichristian system. It will come to an end in coming years.

This second beast, the beast coming up out of the earth, it says here, performs great signs. It is these signs, which supposedly authenticate the false ministry of the Antichrist, and so this is what we need to look at this afternoon. There are many signs mentioned here in a general sense, but only one is really described in detail. That is the sign of Antichrist's being able to make fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men. We want to understand this sign and see that it is not the sign of one who is true and right, but it is the sign of one who has, himself, been deceived of the Devil to excommunicate and kill the true saints of God. Let us pray as we hear about this sign, that we would not be taken captive in our hearts and minds by any deceiving sign or wonder, but rather that we would be led by the truth of God's word, and be able to teach others the difference between the true and the false religion.

1st of all – Let's look at the biblical context of this sign.

"He performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men." The "he" of verses 12 and 13 shows us that this second beast, this beast who grew up subtly within the true church, is represented as an individual person. I have shown you in past sermons that this is the Papal power of the Roman Catholic church. The Pope is a person who has taken his seat in the temple of God, which is Christ's visible church. Most people looking at him, and at the Roman Catholic church, think that it is the true church. As it says in 2nd Thessalonians 2, this Man of Sin has taken his seat there as God, blasphemously asserting that He is Christ's vicar and the head of Christ's church on earth. He is distinguished from the 1st beast, the beast rising up out of the sea, which is the political side of Antichrist. But he works together with, and in conjunction with that first beast. The 10 kingdoms of the former and fallen Roman Empire are under his influence and sway, and they work together in order to deceive and to persecute the true Church of Jesus Christ; all those who do not go along with his doctrine. This first sign of Antichrist's ability which is mentioned, is a duplication of the true sign which was given to Elijah the prophet, which he gave to the children of Israel when he confronted the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel in the Old Testament.

You probably remember the story. It is found in 1st Kings Chapter 18 if you will turn there with me. Elijah lived in days of apostasy. He lived in days where true religion was scarce, and scarcely promoted. Ahab the king of Israel was a very wicked man. Elijah was told by the Lord that he should go and present himself to Ahab. He was to tell Ahab that God was going to send rain upon the earth after 3 and a half years. Elijah had said before, in chapter 17, verse 1, "As the Lord God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, except at my word." That had come to pass, and it was in the third year that Elijah was told to go and confront Ahab with this news. When they meet up with each other in verse 17 of Chapter 18, it says, "Then it happened when Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said to him, 'Is that you, O troubler of Israel?'" "And he answered, 'I have not troubled Israel, but you and your father's house have, in that you have forsaken the commandments of the Lord and have followed the Baals.'"

It is interesting, is it not, that the wicked king Ahab thinks that all the trouble he and his nation is experiencing is coming to them because of Elijah. He thinks that it is the one who is speaking God's word who is causing all the trouble. It is Elijah who spoke the word of God to him, and to the nation, and told them that rain would not come; rain being the symbol of all of God's blessings, until God told him it should come. Ahab calls Elijah the troubler of Israel when all the while, it is

because of Ahab's sin of allowing and promoting false worship that is the reason that these things have come. Let us understand that it is the same in our day. Not only are all other religions besides Christianity false religions; people who worship different gods than the true and living God; but all religions which call themselves Christian and will not adhere to the Bible's straightforward truth about salvation and the way that men should worship God, are also false. Let us not compromise this precious and all-important truth. Well, I will not take the time to go through the whole story here, but just give you an overview. Elijah had Ahab send to him, on Mount Carmel, all the prophets of Baal, four hundred and fifty of them. He also had him send to him, the four hundred prophets of the Asherah, who ate at Jezebel's table. Then he sent for all the children of Israel, and gathered the prophets together on Mount Carmel and confronted them with this question: "How long will you falter between two opinions?" "If the Lord is God, follow him." They didn't answer him a word. They weren't going to be convinced by searching preaching and questions.

So Elijah went on to give them a practical demonstration of the reality of the sovereign power of the living God. He had Baal's prophets build an altar and prepare sacrifices on it and told them to call upon the name of their gods. And if their gods answered with fire then their gods should be worshiped. But if he called upon the name of the Lord and God answered him by fire, then God would be the God that they should serve. All the people, it says in verse 24, answered and said, 'It is well spoken'. The prophets of Baal cried aloud and leaped about on the altar and cut themselves with knives and lances until the blood gushed out on them. "But there was no voice; no one answered, no one paid attention," it says in verse 29. So Elijah rebuilt the altar, cut the bull in pieces, and then actually had water poured on the burnt sacrifice and the wood of the altar. They did this three times. Then it says in verse 36, "And it came to pass, at the time of the evening sacrifice, that Elijah the prophet came near and said, 'Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that You are God in Israel and I am Your servant, and that I have done all these things at Your word.'" Verse 38 says, "Then the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt sacrifice and the wood and the stones and the dust, and it licked up the water that was in the trench." "Now when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces; and they said, 'The Lord He is God!'" "The Lord He is God!" "And Elijah said to them, 'Seize the prophets of Baal!'" "Do not let one of them escape!" "So they seized them; and Elijah brought them down to the Brook Kishon and executed them there." That is the biblical context. Now how can we apply it to what we read in Revelation 13?

We can say, in the 2nd place, that - This sign in Revelation 13 is a counterfeit of the true sign that God gave to Elijah.

The sign that was given by God to Elijah to show the children of Israel, was one of the mightiest signs ever performed by any of God's prophets. It showed that the false gods were false and the true God was living and true. Everything was plain and clear. But what was a mighty and a true sign given by God through Elijah, in order that the children of Israel might know the Lord and have their hearts turned back to God again, was taken by the Devil in New Testament times and given to the Pope to turn men's hearts away from the truth of the gospel and the truth of the Bible. It was given by Satan in order that the Popes would have the power to excommunicate men from the church and burn them at the stake. What the Devil has done through the Antichristian Papal system has been to take Elijah's true authority which he received from God, and to use that prophetic authority in a false way in relation to Christ's statements given to Peter concerning the keys of the kingdom. He would make it seem to be true that it was the right of the Popes, by their own supposedly infallible word, to define true Christianity. It would be their supposed right, by their own supposedly infallible judgment, that true Christians be seen as heretics and placed under the Papal anathemas.

The true doctrines of the Bible having been changed over the course of hundreds of years, changed and twisted to mean something else than they plainly say, it became easy and apparently right to the majority of people in the church that what their Popes and cardinals and bishops and

priests said about those who would not submit to this false authority, this false worship and practice, was supposed true. It became easy to believe a lie. The Popes knew that the Bible was the true word of God, but they imposed upon it with their own ideas. The words of the church fathers and their traditions became more important than keeping the pure Word of God pure. They did this over a period of time, hundreds of years; placing the impositions of their own false reasonings and doctrines that they would make up, upon the word of God. The doctrine of Christ's headship over His church was taken away when the Popes spoke and men believed their false interpretations of the Bible. When Luther and others later questioned these false doctrines, then they called down their anathemas upon them. This was their "fire from heaven" which they called down in sight of men. They had taken away the doctrine of salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, when the sacraments were made the means of salvation, when the worship of Mary and the saints was set up, when idols were brought into the Christian sanctuaries of worship. In this time period that we are studying, how often did a Pope called down the "fire from heaven in the presence of men" issuing bulls of excommunication and death to those who tried to say that the Popes were not following Bible truth, in the use of their authority, and in the practice of worship which they set up? How often did the Pope take the authority and the place of God in Church and State in ordering the execution of literally hundreds of thousands and even millions of people before the Reformation, and even during and after it as well?

I have been speaking to you about Pope's making fire come down from heaven in spiritual sense and not a literal one. Whether it is true that there is to be a further development of this false power that will manifest itself in a Pope's being given power by Satan to literally call down fire from heaven, I cannot say. I know that it is possible. Elijah called down fire from heaven by the power and will of God. With Antichrist, if it were to happen, it would be the power of the Devil. The reason that I know that it is possible is because of an incident that we read about in the book of Job, Chapter 1, if you will turn over there with me. You will recall that here in Chapter 1 Satan and God are having a discussion about the reality of Job's righteousness. In verse 8 it says, "Then the Lord said to Satan, have you considered My servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil?" "So Satan answered the Lord and said, 'Does Job fear God for nothing?' "Have you not made a hedge around him, around his household, and around all that he has on every side?" "You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land." "But now stretch out Your hand and touch all that he has, and he will surely curse You to Your face!" "And the Lord said to Satan, 'Behold all that he has is in Your power; only do not lay a hand on his person.'" "So Satan went out from the presence of the Lord."

Satan has the permission from God. Now how does he use it? Verse 13: "Now there was a day when his sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house; and a messenger came to Job and said, "The oxen were plowing and the donkeys feeding beside them when the Sabeans raided them and took them away – indeed they have killed the servants with the edge of the sword; and I alone have escaped to tell you!" "While he was still speaking, another also came and said, "The fire of God fell from heaven and burned up the sheep and the servants, and consumed them; and I alone have escaped to tell you!" Notice the wording of the language here: "the fire of God from heaven". Satan is orchestrating this, but God is credited with it. This is the reason that this sign, the sign of fire from heaven falling in the presence of men, this power being given to a man, is so significant to our study. Satan can, at times, when given permission by God, use the natural elements of the wind and fire to deceive men into thinking that they are acts of God Himself.

That is what was happening, and still is happening in regard to the false religion of Papal Roman Catholicism. It is still being seen as the true Christianity. And the Papal infallibility in matters of doctrine and practice is still asserting itself into the minds, hearts, and consciences of unsuspecting people who want to know what a true Christian is. In closing let us apply this to ourselves in this way. In Matthew 12: 38 it says that, "some of the scribes and Pharisees answered,

saying, 'Teacher, we want to see a sign from You.' 'But He answered and said to them, 'An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.' 'For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.' This is the sign that we should believe; the sign of Jesus' death and resurrection on behalf of sinners. In our next study we will look more at how Satan deceives those who dwell on the earth by his false signs given to this beast coming up out of the earth.