

The Beast out of the Earth—the False Prophet (Revelation 13:11-18)

A number of commentators have pointed out the comparison between the Holy Trinity and an unholy trinity that will rise up in the future. The Holy Trinity—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit—is the only appropriate object of worship. However, Satan desires to rob God of worship. The future unholy trinity will consist of three beasts—the beast from the Abyss (Revelation 11:7), the beast from the sea (Revelation 13:1), and the beast from the earth (Revelation 13:11). We can identify these three beasts as Satan, the Antichrist, and the False Prophet (compare Revelation 16:13; 20:10). Just as the Holy Spirit directs attention to Jesus Christ (John 16:12-14), so the False Prophet will direct attention to the Antichrist.

Revelation 13:11-18 describes the beast from the earth. Revelation 19:20 identifies him as the False Prophet. Jesus warned that many false messiahs and false prophets would dot the pages of human history (Matthew 24:23-25). In the days leading up to Christ's return the ultimate Antichrist and False Prophet will take center stage. Together, under Satan's lead, they will dominate the political scene, enforce idolatrous worship, and persecute the true followers of Jesus Christ. Only the return of Jesus Christ will make it possible to overcome their devious power. While the Antichrist will be primarily a political and military dictator, the False Prophet will lead the religious charge in those dire days. From the prediction of the activities of this "beast" we're reminded that worship rightly belongs to the Lamb who is Lord. While we're prone to worship that which is less, we must reserve worship for God alone.

The False Prophet's role will be to elevate the Antichrist (the worship of the Beast)—we tend to worship that which amazes us (13:11-13).

The third beast, the beast from the earth, will mimic the role of the Holy Spirit of God but instead of pointing people to Jesus Christ he will point the spotlight of worship on the Antichrist.

The False Prophet will appear gentle but speak blasphemously (13:11).

John saw "another beast," another similar to the beast that came out of the sea. The sea represents chaos, danger, and disorder. This next beast came out of the "earth." Some see in this a reference to the "land" of Israel, but such an interpretation is too precise for the context. The earth, in continuity with the chaos of the sea, more likely refers to the physical, fleshly, unheavenly origin of this particular world leader. Both beasts will capitalize on the disastrous condition of the world in that day using physical, forceful, and even supernatural persuasion. The beast coming up out of the earth will appear gentler than the Antichrist. He will be more like a lamb, although a lamb bearing two horns. Horns refer to power. The Antichrist will have ten horns (Revelation 13:1), while the False Prophet will have but two horns. Apparently the False Prophet's power will be much less than that of the Antichrist. However, the False Prophet will speak "like a dragon." Satan is described as a dragon (Revelation 12:9), and his blasphemous words will characterize both the Antichrist (Revelation 13:5-6) and the False Prophet.

The False Prophet will incite the whole world to worship the Antichrist (13:12).

The False Prophet will be extremely active in the last days. Eight times in this passage the word for “make” or “do” is ascribed to this beast. All that the False Prophet “does” takes place on behalf of and under the authority of the Antichrist, the first beast. Primarily, the False Prophet incites everyone who lives on the earth to worship the Antichrist. Political loyalty won’t be enough. Religious worship will become a necessity. Some of the motivation for worshipping the first beast, the Antichrist, will lie in the fact that this beast had been healed of a deadly blow to the head. Revelation 13:3 describes the death of one of the heads of the seven-headed beast from the sea. Since the seven heads refer to seven past empires the recovery of this death blow seems to refer to the restoration of an ancient empire, likely the Roman Empire. The fact that the Antichrist will revive much of that which characterized ancient Rome in its oppressive heyday will cause people to wonder at and worship him.

The False Prophet will display supernatural power (13:13).

In addition to highlighting the recovery of the first beast, the False Prophet will also perform great signs. Included in these miraculous powers will be the ability to call fire down from heaven onto the earth in the sight of the world’s inhabitants. This power will mimic that of God’s two faithful witnesses (Revelation 11:5), thereby distracting people from God’s warnings and justifying, at least in their minds, the validity of worshipping the Antichrist. The False Prophet, therefore, will have as his primary role the elevating of the Antichrist so that people will worship him instead of God. People will be amazed at the Antichrist’s ability to revive a dead empire and the False Prophet’s ability to work miracles. They’ll all too readily, out of amazement at these things, direct their worship to the Antichrist. It’s true that we tend to worship that which amazes us. Much more amazing than anything that the Antichrist and the False Prophet will be able to do is the power of the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ, who rightly deserves our worship.

**The False Prophet’s focus will be to idolize the Antichrist
(the image of the Beast)—we tend to worship that which frightens us (13:14-15).**

In order to enhance his plan to incite worship of the Antichrist, the False Prophet will order the creation of an idolatrous image and bring physical force to bear on enforcing worship of this image.

The False Prophet will deceive the world into making an idolatrous image of the Antichrist (13:14).

The beast out of the earth, the False Prophet, will deceive earth’s inhabitants in that future period leading up to the return of Jesus Christ. His use of miraculous signs will convince many that his deceptive message is true. The False Prophet will apparently be given the power to perform these miracles by God’s permissive will. He’ll perform these miracles in the presence of the first beast, the beast out of the sea—the Antichrist. Everything the False Prophet will do will point people toward the Antichrist. This False Prophet will demand that the people living on earth construct an image of the Antichrist. Here again emphasis will be placed on the

Antichrist's miraculous revival of a previously dead empire. Since the Antichrist was responsible for bringing that Rome-like empire back to life he will become the object of worship. Idolatrous worship always dishonors God. The image of the Antichrist, mentioned frequently in subsequent verses (Revelation 13:15; 14:9, 11; 15:2; 16:2; 19:20; 20:4) will become an impediment to worshipping the true God.

The False Prophet will supernaturally empower the idolatrous image to speak and to order the execution of all who resist (13:15).

The False Prophet will not only order the creation of an image of the Antichrist. He'll also animate that image. The False Prophet "will be given," probably by the permissive will of God, the ability to give "spirit" or "breath" to the image of the Antichrist. In this way the image will actually be able to speak. Since God alone can create life it seems doubtful that the image will become alive. The word "breath" is the same word translated "spirit" and more likely implies demonic empowerment. In 1 Corinthians 10:19-20 Paul equates idol worship with demonic activity. The future False Prophet will bring demonic influence to bear in regard to the image of the Antichrist. Demons will speak through the image, making the image appear to be alive. One of the messages these demons will declare is a command to execute anyone who refuses to worship the image of the Antichrist. Those who resist the Antichrist will become the targets of imperial censure. Specifically, those who believe in the true and living God and refuse to worship the idolatrous image of the Antichrist will be put to death (compare Daniel 3:1-11). Many will worship the Antichrist out of fear of death. It's true that fear often prompts us to worship. God deserves our reverent fear and He alone deserves our heartfelt worship. To fear and worship lesser things is to underestimate the power, majesty, and awesome nature of God.

The False Prophet's scheme will be to mark all who align with the Antichrist (the mark of the Beast)—we tend to worship that which satisfies us (13:16-18).

As an additional controlling measure the False Prophet will institute the application of a mark on those who give their allegiance and worship to the Antichrist.

The False Prophet will force everyone to receive an identifying mark on the right hand or the forehead (13:16).

The False Prophet will make everyone, people from every societal class—small and great, rich and poor, free and slaves—receive a mark on their right hand or their forehead. The 144,000 special witnesses described in Revelation 7:3 will receive God's seal on their foreheads, possibly a visible indicator of their ownership by God. The followers of the Antichrist will receive a "mark," a visible symbol of their allegiance to that future world dictator. What that mark will be is impossible to know, although suggestions of implanted electronic devices probably overreach the meaning of the word.

The False Prophet will control commerce through the mandatory identifying mark of the Antichrist (13:17).

The mark of the beast, the visible indicator of loyalty to the Antichrist will become a condition for commerce. Without the mark, people will not be able to buy or sell goods. Receiving the mark of the beast will make it possible for people to transact business and purchase food and the necessities of life. Satisfying personal physical needs will be impossible without it. John further describes this mark as consisting of the name of the Antichrist, indicating that the mark carries a personal identification of this beast out of the sea. This name will be expressed in numbers rather than letters—the number of his name.

The mark of the Antichrist—the number of the beast out of the sea—will be 666 (13:18).

Revelation 13:18 has fascinated Bible scholars since the earliest times. John states that wisdom is required for discerning the number of the Antichrist. It requires rational understanding, as opposed to irrational guesswork. John states that the number of the beast is the number of a man, an actual, future individual. John then states that the number of the Antichrist is six hundred sixty-six. There have been any number of attempts at linking this number with political leaders past and present. It seems that by replacing the letters of the Antichrist's name with numbers will in some way make his identity clear, but that identification will only come when the Antichrist is actually on the scene. To assign a name to these numbers before that time doesn't reflect wisdom or rational understanding. However, in that future day it will become apparent that the Antichrist, whose name will in some way match up with the number 666, is indeed the archenemy of God and the counterfeit replacement of Jesus Christ. Because this mark will be necessary for commerce, satisfying basic human needs will hinge on reception of the mark of the beast. People will worship the Antichrist out of awe over his power, fear over his threats, and the necessity of satisfying their basic needs. We tend to worship that which satisfies our needs. In reality, only God through the redemptive work of Jesus Christ can truly satisfy our deepest need. Only God deserves our worship. Only the Lamb who is Lord is worthy of our devotion. While we're prone to worship that which is less, we must reserve worship for God alone.