

THE BEAST FROM THE EARTH

"Then I saw another beast coming up out of the earth, and he had two horns like a lamb and spoke like a dragon. And he exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence, and causes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed. He performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men. And he deceives those who dwell on the earth by those signs which he was granted to do in the sight of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who was wounded by the sword and lived. He was granted power to give breath to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak and cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed. He causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads, and that no one may buy or sell except one who has the mark or 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 it is the number of a man: His number is 666." (Revelation 13:11-18, NKJV)

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

In a rage, the devil is depicted as having unleashed an attack against the people of God , “the woman” – a flood designed to “cause her to be carried away” (Rev 12:15). His attack is relentless, and it is calculating and shrewd. Under the strict control of the King of kings, he continues his assault until this very day.

When the church is weak, and loses its love for the truth, Satan is allowed to work more aggressively. He is effective in his objectives when truth is thrust into the background, and tradition is embraced as though it were from God Himself. Isaiah portrayed such a condition as truth falling in the street and failing (Isa 59:15). During times like this, Isaiah affirmed, “he that departeth from evil maketh himself a prey.” Furthermore, he continued, “the LORD saw it, and it displeased him that there was no judgment.” It ought to be apparent that we are living in times so characterized, and they should be displeasing to us also.

As has always been the case , there are innocent people that suffer in these attacks – individuals that have kept the faith, and have not compromised their love of the truth” the “remnant.” Like Daniel was carried away in the Babylonian captivity, so these faithful ones are caught in the maelstrom of the wicked one. Yet, they do not lose their faith, and will be rewarded abundantly for keeping their grip on eternal life.

ANOTHER ADVERSARY

In the text of this series of devotions, the devil raises up another adversary: “another

beast.” Having failed to stamp out the church by means of earthly government (the first beast that rose out of the sea – Rev 13:1-4) and its legalized bloodshed of the saints, the adversary now uses a different tactic. The objective is the same, and the spirit of iniquity will still prevail. This is “another beast,” although it appears docile and harmless.

Remember, this is Satan’s besiegement of the church. Heaven has cried out “Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time” (12:12). The cry is to be taken seriously! While “He that is in us is greater than he that is in the world” (1 John 4:4), His greatness is made effective to us only through our faith.

A SUMMONS FROM JESUS

Jesus summons the church into an acute awareness of their situation. They are to arm themselves for both defense and offense. Their adversary is seething with anger, and has a ceaseless hatred for them. Satan is creative in his aggression against believers. For this reason, they cannot be casual in their spiritual lives. They are not in a static situation, but one that is packed with intense activity. As the Spirit testifies, “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand” (Eph 6:12-13). Every believer must arm himself against an aggressive opponent!

We now confront a second “beast” that again confirms the essentiality of sobriety and vigilance. Whereas the first beast was obvious, and the confrontation more open, this attack is subtle. This foe does not rise from the agitation of society (the sea, Rev 13:1), but out of social calmness and serenity (the earth, Rev 13:11).

We are seeing a conflict of kingdoms. The “kingdoms of the world” are in direct contradiction to “the kingdom of our Lord and His Christ.” His is an “everlasting kingdom,” while the kingdoms of this world are temporal, destined to be swallowed up by His unending Kingdom (Psa 145:13; Dan 4:3; 7:27; 2 Pet 1:11). Both beasts function in the earth – the temporal domain. Both are animated by the devil himself, and both are aligned against the saints. They are raised up by Satan to draw men downward, to perdition. It is, after all, a beastly tendency to have our minds riveted to a passing world. Yet, that is the whole focus of Satan’s efforts. We are to prepare to resist his efforts.

Chapter 2

THE SOURCE AND NATURE OF THE SECOND BEAST

“Then I saw ANOTHER BEAST coming up out of the earth, and he had two horns like a lamb and spoke like a dragon” (Rev 13:11). While the first beast openly opposed the people of God, the second will seek to deceive them. Satan’s first attempt to remove “the woman” from the earth was to swallow her up with violence. It did appear as though he was successful, for “it was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them” (Rev 13:7). His attack did not, however, remove the saints, the faith, or the Scriptures from the face of the earth. The saints were driven underground, so to speak. They were, in the words of the Spirit, given wings to fly to a secret place, where a location of nourishment was prepared for them (Rev 12:14). Now, the devil seeks to lure them from their habitation by means of deception.

FROM THE EARTH

This foe does not come from “sea,” as the first beast (Rev 13:1) – a turbulent society – but from one that has been settled under the orderliness of government. This foe is characterized by earthly wisdom, as well as a certain worldly attractiveness. Earth is its habitat, with all of its wisdom and lure. It rises from the cursed realm, not the one that has been blessed.

SATAN EMPLOYS EARTHLY POWERS

We learn from this that Satan employs earthly powers and capabilities in his insurrection against Christ, and His opposition of the people of God. The closer a person is to “this present evil world,” the more apt he is to be used by Satan. That is where Satan obtains his motley forces – the earth. “This world” is a seed bed for the growth of distraction (Matt 13:22). It is the realm to which Jesus does NOT belong, and from which His Kingdom is separate (John 8:23; 18:36). Satan is its “prince” (John 16:11), and its “fashion,” or present form, is “passing away” (12 Cor 7:31). Whatever, therefore, has its genesis in that realm is not good. It is something Satan employs against the saints of the Most High God.

HORNS LIKE A LAMB

In the Revelation, until this time, there has only been one Personality associated with a lamb – the Son of the Living God (5:6,8,12,13; 6:1,16; 7:9,10,14,17; 12:11; 13:8). He will be the dominant One throughout the remainder of this book – “THE Lamb” (14:1,4,10; 15:3; 17:14; 19:7,9; 21:14,22,23; 22:1,3). But here is a single reference to another entity that bears some resemblance to a lamb.

This beast does not look like a lamb, but only has a single trait that is likened to that of this gentle creature. This is the only reference in all of Scripture to “horns like a lamb.” Abraham found a ram with horns (Gen 22:13). The Psalmist spoke of “the horns” of the unicorn, or wild oxen (Psa 22:21), as well as those of an ox and bullock (Psa 69:31). But none of those references are parallel to the one that is now before us.

This is a most vivid depiction of the nature of Satan’s attack of the people of God. It is in the realm of delusion, deception, misrepresentation, and falsification.

Chapter 3

PROPHETS MENTIONED HORNS

“And I beheld another beast coming up out of the earth; and he had two horns like a lamb, and he spake as a dragon.” (Revelation 13:11).

Daniel saw a ram with “two horns.” The horns did not originate simultaneously, and were not of the same size. The one which came last grew to be the highest (Dan 8:3). He was later told, “The ram which you saw, having the two horns; they are the kings of Media and Persia” (Dan 8:20, NKJV). Zechariah saw four horns, depicting kingdoms that had scattered the children of Israel (Zech 1:18-21). In the visions of Daniel and Zechariah, horns depicted adversarial kings and kingdoms. But that is not the case before us. Rams are aggressive, but lambs are not.

SATAN’S SIMULATION OF JESUS

Here is the devil’s attempt to emulate the Lord Jesus. You may recall the conquering

Lamb had “seven horns,” depicting perfect and complete power (Rev 5:6). What we behold in “two horns like a lamb” is partial and delegated power. They are horns “like a lamb,” but are not the horns OF a lamb. This is a depiction of a peaceful appearance: –i.e. non-threatening. This beast does not have apparent traits like a leopard, lion, or bear. Rather, it comes veiled as a gentle and amenable lamb.

A RELIGIOUS APPEARANCE

This is a religious appearance. The war now moves to a more dangerous arena, where iniquity is not quite as evident. If Satan is going to lure the people of God into the cursed realm, he must do his best to replicate the Son of God. Indeed, this what he does, raising up an adversary that appears related to Christ. It is orderly, not seemingly hostile, and attractive to those dwelling upon the earth.

SPOKE LIKE A DRAGON

We are not allowed to linger on this vision long without being alerted to the nature of this second “beast.” It had horns like a lamb, but not the mouth of a lamb. When he spoke, his intent became more obvious. He “spoke like a dragon.” His appearance appeared to be of a godly order, but what he said was of an ungodly order.

The appearance of this beast bears some resemblance to the appearance of the “old serpent” to Eve. It was not the appearance of the serpent that derailed Eve, but his words. The serpent, we are apprized, was not more powerful than any beast of the field., but “more subtle” (Gen 3:1).

Now, after several millennia, “the enemy” again resorts to craftiness. He raises an opponent whose words are subverting, perverse, and evil. They will lure men toward the bottomless pit in the name of religion.

FALSE TEACHERS TO COME

Peter , Jude, and Paul warned of this devilish tactic. “Even as there shall be false teachers among YOU, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies” (2 Pet 2:1). “For there are certain men CREPT IN unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ” (Jude 4). “For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in AMONG YOU, not sparing the flock” (Acts 20:29).

THE UNDOING OF MANY

Many who could not be intimidated by bloody persecution, were successfully deceived by specious reasoning. That is the most dangerous of all attacks. Carnal men imagine that bodily harm is the worst of all aggression. But that is not so. The invasion of the realm of thought has proved to be a greater weapon against the saints. Those who have the horns of a lamb, but the mouth of a dragon, are more to be feared than those who are swift like a leopard, ruthless as a bear, and dominating as a lion. Remember, it was a lie that brought our race down at the first.

Chapter 4

LIKE THE FIRST BEAST, AND ALIGNED WITH SATAN

“And he exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence . . .” (Verse 12).

If the people of God are to be overcomers, they must expect to face an opponent like this. God does not promise the faithful will be spared from confronting such a subtle and dangerous foe. Mark it well, if Satan’s objective is to destroy “the woman” – the people

of God – why would anyone imagine we are reading of a period of time when there were no people of God, no church, no one aligned with the conquering lamb? The very notion is too foolish to embrace.

THE CHURCH IS NOT GONE

Some theology affirms that with the commencement of the fourth chapter of the Revelation, the church is gone, having been secretly raptured. If that is, in fact, the case, against whom is this beast aligned? The children of the wicked one? Did not Jesus Himself say, “And if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself; how shall then his kingdom stand?” (Matthew 12:26).

And what is there about the ungodly that would require such subtlety on Satan’s part? Why would he come disguised as a lamb if there were no one following the lamb? Why is such an elaborate strategy required if the church had already been snatched from the earth – removed from the God-glorifying arena of warfare? Those who embrace such theologies need to listen to the message of this book, and cease to listen to the prattling of those with no understanding!

SATAN IN HIS MOST SUBTLE ASSAULT

Here is Satan in his most deceptive approach. While the foe looks different, it is not. “He exercises ALL the authority of the first beast.” Satan’s original intent has not been abandoned. He has only changed his appearance! It is one thing to face an angry foe, it is quite another to face one that is shrewd, calculating, and scheming. This is the one aspect of Satan’s opposition that concerned Paul the most. Thus he wrote to the Corinthians, “But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ” (2 Cor 11:3, NKJV).

ORGANIZED FORCES

Working through organized forces, Satan will now seek to corrupt and defile the truth. He will leave men thinking they have embraced the truth, yet actually having embraced a lie – that is deception. The words of the second beast will have the character of the dragon, but they will appear to be of Christ. The devil will embark upon an initiative of gigantic proportions. The political endeavors he fostered were unspeakably large and influential. Now he will initiate a religious offensive that will bear the same traits. It will come in the name of Christ (horns of a lamb), but will have the character of Satan (mouth like a dragon).

DELUSION IS POWERFUL

Do not imagine that delusion is somehow less powerful, less dangerous, or less to be feared! This second beast “exercised ALL the power of the first beast.” He only appeared less powerful, but it was not any less effective! A person with a trained and disciplined mind might think himself adequate for any challenge to the mind, but such a posture is an imagination of the worst order. If pure and undefiled Eve, possessed of undefiled wisdom and without contamination, could be deceived by Satan, what will be the lot of those who have “sinned and come short of the glory of God?” Men do well not to bow at the shrine of worldly wisdom, human logic, or other forms of philosophy.

SOME DIFFERENCES IN THE BEATS

Before going further, I want to point out some differences between the two beasts. These differences will emphasize the nature of Satan’s shrewd hostility against the people of

God.

1. The first makes war (13:4-7). The second deceives with miracles (13:14).
2. The first succeeds by force (13:7-10). The second makes gains by persuasion (13:14).
3. The first rules with fear (13:4). The second rules with craft and chicaneries (13:13-14).
4. The first teaches to worship the dragon (13:4). The second teaches to worship the first beast (15:15).
5. The first slays openly (13:10). The second puts men under social ban (13:16-17).
6. The first has power from the dragon (13:2). The second has power from the first beast (13:12-15).
7. The first blasphemes openly (13:1,6). The second deceives (13:15).

BOTH FORMS EMPLOYED SIMULTANEOUSLY

Today, both forms of oppression are being experienced – political and religious; oppression and deception. Many grieve over the bloody and heartless persecution of fellow believers throughout the world – and grieve we must. We are to remember those suffering in this manner – our brethren. “Remember the prisoners as if chained with them; those who are mistreated; since you yourselves are in the body also” (Heb 13:3). Also, now, in our time, our own government has launched an initiative against the body of Christ. He has forbidden public prayer in the name of Jesus, called for a cessation of condemning certain sins, removed religion from the schools, forbidden the posting of public religious messages and symbols, promoted the rights of sodomites, sanctioned sodomite marriages, etc., etc.

However, there are precious few who lament the other type of tyranny leveled against the saints – that of deception– i.e. false religion in the name of Jesus. Throughout history, this has always been Satan’s most successful ploy. It has also been the subject of the most stern Apostolic warnings. The second beast does not appear as dangerous, but it has dragged more souls into hell than the first one! Satan’s assaults against the church increase in intensity, as they are allowed by God to be initiated.

POINTS OF SIMILARITY

Seeing the similarities between the two beasts will assist us in seeing the danger of the one we are now considering.

1. Both are opponents of God, the truth, and the saints.
2. Both are haughty, heaping attention unto themselves.
3. Both bring suffering to those who will not give heed to them .
4. Both try the patience and faith of the saints.
5. Both have exceedingly broad power.
6. Both are phenomenally successful from earth’s point of view.
7. Both are aligned with Satan.
8. There is perfect unity between them.

If ever there was a time for the saints to be sober and vigilant, it is today. It is a time when both beasts are trampling upon the truth and the people of God. While there were historical periods when only one beast ruled at a time, now both are active and powerful. If believers are going to overcome the devil, they must be armed to stand against

persecution AND delusion. Their hearts must be so knit with the Lord they can withstand threats of death and perils of being ostracized.

WE ARE TO BE SERIOUS

Satan is serious in his aggression. We are to be serious in our determination to lay hold on eternal life. This is not the time for casual religion! Let every child of God “Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil” (Eph 6:11). It will be adequate to withstand the assaults of Satan from the first and second beasts.

Chapter 5

CAUSES WORSHIP OF THE FIRST BEAST

“ . . . and causes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed” (Verse 13b).

Remember, the first beast is a representation of earthly government – of the confederation of men. Such unification is not for God’s glory, but is always focused upon men making a name for themselves. Coalitions like this started at Babel. It displeased God then, and similar partnerships still displease Him (Gen 11:1-8). At that time, the people feared being scattered, and so came together to make for themselves “a name.” They imagined that protection would be guaranteed by such an alliance. God was displeased with the whole affair because they did not put their trust in Him. They proceeded just as though there was no God at all.

THE NATURE OF THE FIRST BEAST

The first beast is Satan’s capitalization on this kind of confederation for the purpose of opposing the church. Let no man take it upon himself to “despise government” (2 Pet 2:10), as though every man was an island unto himself. Believers are to “honor the king” (1 Pet 2:17). However, their faith is to be in God not the king!

Right here we strike at the heart of the matter. The first beast is earthly government, promoting itself as the object of trust. Thus Satan brings individuals to place confidence in men rather than in God; to trust in horses rather than the Lord (Psa 20:7; Isa 31:1). That is what makes it so beastly!

WORSHIP OF THE FIRST BEAST PROMOTED

The second beast promotes the worship of the first beast. This is not a superficial promotion. It is written that he “causes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast.” The consolidation of human influences is thus viewed by men as superior to the God of heaven. This has particular regard to earthly government. I remember well an experience I had in the late seventies, when I was on a business trip in Boston. I took occasion to go to the national cemetery where great national figures had been buried. As I examined the various tombstones in the cemetery, I found no references to God, Christ, heaven, or anything spiritual. Every tombstone had to do with national pride. I thought of this text when I viewed those stones.

Under the jurisdiction of the second beast, men come to highly regard human organization – particularly when it is religious. Therefore, the church itself is seen as taking the place of God. Roman Catholicism was the first to do this on a large scale, exalting the religious institution after the same manner as worldly government. Her daughters have done the same thing. Under such an arrangement, from a practical point

of view, the Father is no longer seen as Sovereign and active. The Son is not perceived as ruling and reigning. The Holy Spirit is not considered indispensable to the execution of the will of God. The holy angels are not thought to be integral to the whole matter of our salvation. In fact, truth itself is put into a secondary position. It is quite true that the theologies of men acquiesce with all of these realities theoretically, including them in their creedal statements. However, on a practical basis, they proceed just as though there was no reigning heavenly Monarch over the church.

WHEN THE INSTITUTION IS DOMINANT

Under such an arrangement, the institution is everything! The first beast is “worshiped” when men give their minds and lives to the institutionalized church. It is organized after the manner of worldly government, which expressly contradicts the revelation of Christ Himself. Jesus told His disciples, “And He said unto them, The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. BUT YE SHALL NOT BE SO: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve” (Luke 22:25-26).

Those in religious high places put themselves into the place of God, requiring of men what God has not required of them. I will develop this subject more fully in this series. Suffice it to say, this represents a most serious Satanic initiative. While men have learned to live with it, there must arise some who will not concede to this beastly attack. For those with sensitive hearts, the source of the most consistent opposition is corrupt religion – the institutionalized church, and those who are slaves to it.

Chapter 6

SUPERNATURAL POWERS

“ He performs GREAT SIGNS, so that he even makes fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men” (Rev 13:13).

Here is a vivid depiction of delusion or deception. Those with a penchant for the supernatural will surely fall prey to Satan’s devices. It is one thing to long for the Lord to work in the behalf of His people, like Gideon did (Judges 6:13). It is quite another to want to merely see something supernatural. The occult, mystic, and soothsayer can produce things beyond the realm of nature as well. Our hearts had best be ravished with truth, not external phenomena!

SATAN HAS DONE THIS BEFORE

The “signs” performed by this beast are not mediocre, if there be such a thing as a mediocre sign. They are “great signs.” Let it be clear, Satan has always employed this method when given leave by God to do so. The magicians of Egypt turned their rods into serpents, turned water into blood, and brought frogs upon the land of Egypt (Ex 7:10-12,22; 8:7). Moses spoke of false prophets that cause a sign or wonder to come to pass, then call men to follow a false god (Deut 13:1-2). Jesus spoke of the coming of false christs and false prophets that would “show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect” (Matt 24:24). King Saul, after having defected from God, confronted the witch of Endor, who brought up Samuel from the unseen world (much to her own consternation, 1 Sam 28:7-21). After the enthronement of Jesus, a sorcerer named Simon “bewitched the people of Samaria,” using his sorceries (Acts 8:9-11). Paul wrote of a time of apostasy attended by “signs and lying wonders” (2 Thess 2:9-12). The Holy Spirit did not editorialize away the fact that these were supernatural – and men

certainly should not attempt to do so.

NO MORE MIRACLES?

There are some purported scholars who deny supernatural phenomenon has occurred at the instigation of Satan. They affirm such things are mere apparitions. But they do greatly err, and disarm the people of God with their scholastic nonsense. Satan himself is transcendent to nature, and employs tactics with which the natural man cannot contend. Jesus spoke of those who would, in the day of judgment, profess they had “cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders” in His name (Matt 7:22). Our Lord did not charge them with lying, but affirmed He did not know them—i.e., they had not worked in alliance with Him.

Some men, sifting truth through their pseudo-scholarship, choose to denigrate the very notion of miracles. Our text, will affirm they were the very means by which Satan deceived those dwelling upon the earth.

HE MAKES FIRE TO COME DOWN

Here is the beast’s attempt to replicate the real power of God. You may recall that destructive power came from God’s two witnesses. What is said of that fire differs, however, from what this beast does. “And if anyone wants to harm them, fire proceeds from their mouth and devours their enemies. And if anyone wants to harm them, he must be killed in this manner” (Rev 11:5). While the two witnesses brought fire from their mouths, the beast calls it down from heaven. It might be thought that this miracle was like that of Elijah, who also called fire down from heaven (2 Kgs 1:12-14). However, there is a difference. The fire that proceeded from the mouth of the two witnesses, and the fire called down by Elijah, destroyed their enemies. The second beast, however, causes fire to come down from heaven, but with no destructive power upon its enemies, who are the saints.

IN THE LOWER CLIMES

What this beast does is appropriately described as “on the earth in the sight of men.” The arena in which this arch-foe operates in the cursed realm. By way of comparison, what the Lord is doing is a matter of intrigue to holy angels (Eph 3:10-11), departed saints (Rev 6:9-11), and the four living creatures (Rev 5:6-14). But the second beast, only impresses those who choose to dwell below – upon the earth. It should be noted, our only safety is in the heavenly places, where those who are in Christ Jesus have been seated. Satan’s power, though formidable upon earth, cannot invade that realm.

Chapter 7

DECEPTION AND SUBTLETY

“And he deceives those who dwell on the earth by those signs which he was granted to do in the sight of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who was wounded by the sword and lived” (Rev 13:14).

The passage parallels a revelation given in Second Thessalonians. There, delusion is said to come from God because men refused to receive the love of the truth. “And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming. The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this reason God will send them strong

delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness” (2 Thess 2:8-12).

The “lawless one” is associated with this “second beast.” Working in alliance with Satan, he comes with all power, signs, and lying wonders, with all unrighteous deception among perishing ones. That parallels the second beast deceiving those dwelling upon the earth with signs. The fact that God sends the strong delusion is another way of saying the enemy had been “granted” authority to work these deceptive signs. The Lord truly being “the Governor among the nations” (Psa 22:28), it could not be otherwise.

DWELLING UPON THE EARTH

The ones deceived are those dwelling upon the earth. Those are precisely the ones who worshiped the first beast, giving him the honor due the Lord alone (13:8). This is a description of those whose affection is placed upon earthly things. It does not speak of the physical, but the spiritual condition. Herein is the reason for the admonition, “Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth” (Col 3:2). For believers, their vulnerable part is their “members which are upon the earth” (Col 3:5) – their natural, or Adamic, part. While they are on the earth, they are “strangers and pilgrims” in it (Heb 11:13). Our text speaks of those who “dwell on the earth” – who are at home here, and have placed their affection here. This is the spiritual portrait of their condition.

THE CONTRADICTION OF A CARNAL CHURCH

A church whose mind is pinned to the earth will be overcome by Satan! There is not the slightest chance of survival while occupied with, and dominated by, this present evil world. While this is obvious from Scripture, it is virtually unknown in the nominal church. Congregations, familiar to many of us, are filled with people who, in the language of our text, “dwell upon the earth.” Their thoughts are not godly, heaven-centered, or dominated by a love of the truth. They fall into the category of “those who dwell upon the earth.”

To be “carnal and walk as men” (1 Cor 3:3-4) is never a commendable situation, and always one fraught with jeopardy. Those who would be, or want to be, a friend of the world are THE enemies of God (James 4:4). The “carnal” mind is the epitome of enmity, or hostility, toward God. Those dominated by such a mind are, in the words of our text, “dwellers in the earth.”

And what will be the portion of such individuals? “God will send them strong delusion!” They will be taken in by the deceptions of the second beast! They will not be able to survive the Satanic assault, for the Lord will not allow them to do so. If men will not trust in the Living God, they will fall prey to the deceptions of the devil. For such, there is no way to avoid this happening.

THE SPIRITUAL WILL BE VICTORIOUS

Those who are granted to “sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Eph 2:6) will not be deceived by this religious beast. From their lofty position, and because they have received the love of the truth (2 Thess 2:10-11), they are made superior to the beastly tactics of the evil one. Thus is the Scripture fulfilled, “He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world” (1 John 4:4).

I know of few spiritual perspectives so universally rejected as this one. Most of the Christianity with which we are confronted is nothing more than the prating of the second beast. The church institutionalized is, in fact, the second beast. It has trusted in

organization for its power and effectiveness, and walks aloof from God.

Chapter 8

INSTITUTIONALISM

Perhaps an explanation of how I am using “institutionalized” is in order. An “institution,” as I am using the term, is a confederation of men without the animating Spirit of God. It is a religious organization that has, at best, only the shell, or form, of the truth. It denies the power of the truth, choosing rather to trust in human wisdom.

PERILOUS TIMES

This is what the Spirit referred to when He spoke of perilous times. “But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power.” The reaction of the saints to such powerless religion is mandated from heaven. “And from such people turn away!” (2 Tim 3:1-5). That word is to be taken seriously!

Let me be clear about this. The peril of which Paul wrote is not political peril, or the prophecy of the rise of a political despot or kingdom. He is speaking of a religious phenomenon – a “Christian” religious phenomenon, or perceived occurrence, that has “a form [or appearance] of godliness,” but rejects its power. That equals powerless religion! The Amplified Bible reads, “For [although] they hold a form of piety (true religion), they deny and reject and are strangers to the power of it.” Weymouth’s New Testament reads, “and will keep up a make-believe of piety and yet live in defiance of its power.” This is the parading of an impotent form of godliness that cannot alter the character of the people because God is not at work in it.

THE WEAKNESS OF INSTITUTIONALISM

An institutionalized church has a lot of trouble with sin – sin in all forms. That is because humanly-devised plans and disciplines have no Divine power. At the very best, they can only get at the shell of the truth, but never at its power. The very existence of powerless religion is evidence of the working of Satan. This is the second beast, which is the subject of this series of devotions. It comes with horns like a meek and lowly lamb, but a mouth that belches out Satanic delusions. A religious organization of this order is a professed “church” that has to hire worldly-wise men to attempt to subdue the outbreak of sin. They often choose to call them “counselors.” They also borrow from the world’s cesspools of knowledge such as psychiatry and motivation, treating them with the same respect they profess to give to the Scriptures. They do this because what they represent as being from God is really powerless to do what they themselves sense must be done. Thus they attempt to teach people how to manage sin, rather than declaring the Divine provision for mortifying “the deeds of the body,” and “your members that are upon the earth” (Rom 8:13; Col 3:5). The thought of crucifying the flesh (Gal 5:24) is strange to them, because, quite frankly, they are not “alive unto God” (Rom 6:11).

SOME EXAMPLES

Throughout church history, there have been signs and lying wonders wrought before dwellers on the earth. Time would fail us to mention but a sampling of them. Romish traditions are recorded in the Breviar. Of this book, Grollier’s Encyclopedia says, In

Roman Catholic worship, the breviary – from the Latin breviarium (summary, compendium) – is a book or books containing the Divine Office, or Liturgy of the Hours, a collection of prayers, psalms, and biblical readings recited at different hours of the day. It dates from the Middle Ages, when it formed the basis of the Book of Hours. The breviary has been revised several times in recent years.

The following accounts are recorded in this official volume.

“St. Francis turned enough salt water into fresh water to save the lives of 500 travelers who were perishing of thirst. The surplus was sent over the world and performed miraculous cures.”

“St. Raymond laid his cloak upon the sea and sailed upon it, as a boat, 150 miles in six hours.”

“The dying Juliana could not swallow when the priest came to offer her the consecrated wafer. He laid it on her stomach, and it immediately disappeared from view.”

(Taken from , A Vision of the Ages, p150, B.W. Johnson)

A brief exposure to the televised religious of our time will confirm that Catholicism is not the only organization that keeps their professed chronicles of miracles.

Let none suppose that this constitutes a denial of the miraculous order. The signs and lying wonders wrought by the second beast are not for the glory of God, but for the honor of the beast. They lure men from the truth, and obscure the Gospel to their hearts. In such signs, the institution is the point, and not the souls of men.

Chapter 9

THE AGE OF DELUSION

The reign of the second beast is the age of spiritual delusion – a time when a form of godliness is embraced, while denying the power thereof. The tactics employed in such a time are declared by the Spirit.

SMOOTH WORDS AND FLATTERING SPEECH

“For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple” (Rom 16:18, NKJV). Satan attempts to penetrate the minds of men by appealing to the flesh. He does not promote edification or the clarifying of the truth, but the pacification of the carnal nature. The second beast formalizes this approach.

PEDDLING THE WORD

“For we are not, as so many, peddling the word of God; but as of sincerity, but as from God, we speak in the sight of God in Christ” (2 Cor 2:17, NKJV). In this case, the Word of God is used to bolster human objectives. It is not declared to implement Divine purposes, but to promote an earthly agenda. Such approaches do not have eternity in focus. The second beast institutionalizes this approach.

DECEITFUL WORKERS

“For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works” (2 Cor 11:13-15, NKJV). The devil, working through men, and particularly institutions, replicates apostles and ministers of righteousness. He comes wearing the mask of Christianity. However, he is

the one behind the efforts so described. The second beast will organize this type of effort.

TRICKERY OF MEN

“That we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting” (Eph 4:14, NKJV). In this case, human wisdom is vaunted above the wisdom of God. The human mind is exalted to a place of prominence, assigning to it Divine qualities. Men are not thus “persuaded” by spiritual reasoning (Acts 26:28; 2 Cor 5:11). Rather, deceptive tactics are employed that convince men they are receiving more than is actually delivered. The second beast systematizes this approach, making it an official organ of religion.

NOT HOLDING THE HEAD

“Let no one cheat you of your reward, taking delight in false humility and worship of angels, intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, and not holding fast to the Head, from whom all the body, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments” (Col 2:18-19, NKJV). While real ministers of God speak what they “know” (John 4:22; 2 Tim 1:12), Satan’s messengers do not so speak. Coming in the name of Christ, they speak of things they do not understand. They cannot handle eternal things, yet they speak of them. The second beast institutionalizes this approach, making it common in religious circles.

FABLES AND ENDLESS GENEALOGIES

“As I urged you when I went into Macedonia; remain in Ephesus that you may charge some that they teach no other doctrine, nor give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which cause disputes rather than godly edification which is in faith” (1 Tim 1:3-4, NKJV). One of the greatest enemies of the people of God is institutionalized folklore. Scripture calls it the “tradition of men” (Mark 7:8; Col 2:8). Such leads men to trust in a heritage rather than the Lord. It leads them to have confidence in a position rather than in the Lord. The second beast so structures this approach that it will have strong appeal to those living at a distance from God.

IDLE TALKERS AND DECEIVERS

“For there are many insubordinate, both idle talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole households, teaching things which they ought not, for the sake of dishonest gain” (Tit 1:10-11, NKJV). An idle, or vain, talker, is someone who brings no real benefit to the saints. Their speech is like the wind, giving no advantage to the individual fighting the good fight of faith. The second beast formalizes such speaking, bringing acclaim to those foolish enough to accept his postulates.

TRYING TO DECEIVE

“These things I have written to you concerning those who try to deceive you” (1 John 2:26, NKJV). Real men and women of God make every attempt to edify, strengthen, and equip the people of God. The second beast, however, has its own agenda, and deceives men into adopting that program. It functions without Jesus, the Spirit, or the truth of God. It requires no Intercessor, no reward in heaven, and no vivifying hope.

Chapter 10

MAKE AN IMAGE

“ . . . telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who was wounded by the sword and lived.”

The second beast speaks persuasively to those who “dwell on the earth,” telling them to “make an image to the beast” which rose out of the sea (Rev 13:1). It is the same beast that had already received a mortal wound, but was still alive. Earlier, we are told, “the deadly wound was healed” (13:3). Although the first beast suffered a devastating defeat, yet the world is persuaded something good remains in it. Daniel spoke of this defeat in his prophesy of four global kingdoms: Babylon, Medio-Persian, Grecian, and Roman. All of them were dashed to the ground and thoroughly demolished by the Kingdom of God (Dan 2:35).

I have said the first beast is political power – the organization of men and the institution of a humanly devised object of trust. Such government found its apex in Rome, but was dashed to the ground after more than a millennium of global reign. Now, under the auspices of Satan, the principle of earthly government, already proved to be inferior, is again aggressively and effectively promoted.

The “image of the beast” is prominent in the remainder of this book. It is linked with “the beast,” being a projection of its purpose. This “image” is mentioned four times in verses 13 and 14. The image is “made,” given “life” and “speaks,” causes the death of those who refuse to worship it, and is worshiped by those dwelling upon the earth.

Other references made to the “image” of the beast are found in 14:9,11; 15:2; 16:2; 19:20; 20:4. They include his “mark,” “worship,” and those gaining the victory over it. We do well to get a grasp of its significance. It represents our adversary as a very crafty one.

This is a prophesy of a dramatic shift in the approach to, for want of a better term, “Christianity.” Under the auspices of Satan himself, the professing church would be patterned after the principles of worldly government. It would function under human authority and wisdom, maintaining a hierarchical form of government and focusing its attention on itself rather than the Lord Jesus Christ. Further, it would persecute and misalign the people of God, just as the governments and kings of the earth do.

This corrupt form commenced with the rise of Roman Catholicism, but has now proliferated into every major denomination. Its concept of government and authority contradicts the teaching of Jesus, who revealed to His disciples the uniqueness of His kingdom. “But Jesus called them unto him, and said, Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. BUT IT SHALL NOT BE SO AMONG YOU: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Matt 20:26-28).

The depiction of this second beast in the Revelation perfectly parallels the apostolic warning of a “falling away” (2 Thess 2:3), the rise of corrupt leadership from among the eldership (Acts 20:28-29), perilous times (2 Tim 3:1-5), and a time when men would not endure sound doctrine (2 Tim 4:3). In plain speech, the same thing would happen in the Gentile church that took place when Israel turned its back upon God. For those who can see it, we are living in the reign of this second beast. It is a time when almost every conscientious effort to serve the Lord is met with indifference, and even, opposition by

the professed church.

Chapter 11

POWER IS GIVEN TO DESTROY

“He was GRANTED POWER to give breath to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak and cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed” (Rev 13:15, NKJV).

When we read of such judgments, we are bound to exclaim with the Apostle, “Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! For who has known the mind of the LORD? Or who has become His counselor? Or who has first given to Him And it shall be repaid to him? For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen.” (Rom 11:33-36, NKJV). We are beholding the inscrutable workings of the Lord. This is how He is “working salvation in the midst of the earth” (Psa 74:12). It is involved in the “whole earth” being “full of His glory” (Isa 6:3).

BREATH TO THE IMAGE

Not only is this enemy granted to deceive those dwelling upon the earth through miracles, he is also granted to empower the image of the beast. A very fundamental perspective is unveiled in this text. First, the image has no life of itself. It is but a shell, or form, with no real attractiveness or ability. It is the creation of men, and as such must be made to appear alive and powerful.

This is language that speaks of deceit, duplicity, and trickery. Stripped of its imagery, power was granted to the second beast to make political power appear preferable, mighty, and to be obeyed. The organization of mortals and the institution of human laws are made to appear more productive than they really are. Remember, this is an “image of the beast” – a Satanic means of ascribing preeminence to human confederations.

THE EMBODIMENT OF PRIDE

Here is human pride institutionalized. Scripture frequently associates pride with mighty men, or the earth’s concept of power. A single example will suffice to confirm this point. “Talk no more so exceeding proudly; let not arrogancy come out of your mouth: for the LORD is a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed. The bows of the mighty men are broken, and they that stumbled are girded with strength” (1 Sam 2:3-4). Ultimately, this is a trait of the devil himself, who is the power behind both the first and second beasts. Solemnly, the Lord warned Israel to avoid this attitude, which has characterized all earthly governments. “Beware that thou forget not the LORD thy God . . . Lest when thou hast eaten and art full, and hast built goodly houses, and dwelt therein . . . Then thine heart be lifted up, and thou forget the LORD thy God . . . And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth . . . ” (Deut 8:11-20).

This is a human trait, fostered by Satan, that constrains groups of men to forget they are but men. They know nothing of the perception of the Psalmist, “Put them in fear, O LORD: that the nations may know themselves to be but men. Selah” (Psa 9:20).

Arrogantly, such confederations blot God from their memory. Of them it is written, “Their inward thought is, that their houses shall continue for ever, and their dwelling places to all generations; they call their lands after their own names” (Psa 49:11). They draw attention to themselves, “proclaiming their own goodness” (Prov 20:6). To the

dismay of many, the government of the United States is now thinking in this manner – just like all other kingdoms have done.

DESTINED TO FAILURE

The “image of the beast” is the aggressive promotion of this view of greatness. In it, Divine qualities such as provision, protection, and enablement, are ascribed to human organization. The institution, whether political or religious, is imagined to be everything. It alone can qualify the individual for acceptance. Men will debate, write, and engage in all manner of aggression, in an effort to protect and justify the institution, all the while neglecting the glory of the Lord.

This spirit was first promoted at Babel – the first known attempt of institutionalism (Gen 11:1-10). God frustrated the effort then, and will ultimately bring down all similar attempts.

It makes little difference to the deceived that the Almighty brought down the most majestic and impressive forms of such power. Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medio-Persia, Greece and Rome, all fell – even though they were the epitome of organization and convention. In them was fulfilled the word of the Lord, “Though they join forces, the wicked will not go unpunished” (Prov 11:21, NKJV).

GRANTED POWER TO GIVE LIFE TO THE IMAGE

Even though history confirms the futility of organization that obviates God, the notion of its superiority and preference is revived. It is contrary to reason and revelation, yet is made attractive to men. This is a vivid portrayal of “strong delusion.” IT IS SENT BY GOD (2 Thess 2:10-12), but implemented by the devil through those who are alienated from the life of God.

Notice, while the first beast is said to have recovered from its deadly wound (13:12), it is not the one that empowers its image. It is the second beast who is granted authority to enliven the corrupt notion that human alliance is somehow superior. It is most unfortunate that many efforts to obtain unity are really an effort to unite institutions rather than individuals.

Those who know the Lord are persuaded of the foolishness of such an imagination. Adam fell. Babel fell. Egypt, Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome fell. For this reason, Satan does not use the first beast to give life to its image – the thought that it is superior. To put it another way, he does not raise up another impressive political power. The old serpent, when given authority to move, does not produce another world empire. Instead, he produces a religious empire.

Chapter 12

A RELIGIOUS POWER

“He was granted power to give breath to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak and cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed.” (Rev 13:15)

This time, the shape of political power will be replicated in a religious institution. This will sanctify the thought in the mind of the lifeless masses – those who dwell upon the earth. It will have a religious appearance (the horns of a lamb), but the character of the devil (the mouth of a dragon).

This “image” will have all of the marks of human ambition and pride, yet come in the

name of the Lord. Satan made an attempt to draw the very disciples of Christ into the vortex of this delusion. Remember when they disputed among themselves “who should be the greatest” (Mk 9:33-34)? That is the frame of spirit that is formalized in the image of the beast. It is a religious system in which men seek honor from one another, instead of seeking it from God alone (John 5:44).

GOVERNMENT PLUS RELIGION, WITH GOVERNMENT BEING DOMINANT

Giving life to the image of the beast is nothing less than an attempted coalition of earthly government with religion. In this alliance, however, human government is the dominating influence, not religion. This represents a new and formidable initiative by Satan against those who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus.

THE CHURCH ORGANIZED LIKE THE WORLD

This is the church organized after the manner of the world. God is not at the heart of things, but men are the heartbeat of the organization. The organization itself is the point, and not the purpose of God. Historically, State religions, which are the most apparent form of this attack, came into prominence. In them, the shell of the truth was maintained to some degree, but the power was in the organization.

The mother of such coalitions is the Roman Catholic Church, which first brought governmental pomp and splendor into the religious arena. But it certainly did not end there. There is the German Lutheran, Dutch Reformed, English Anglican, Greek Orthodox, etc. This is not intended to denigrate any individual associated with these organizations. In such alliances, however, the political framework has always overridden the spiritual substance. Those who have resisted or opposed the authority of the organization have consistently been viewed as its enemies, and threats to its existence.

We will find that “the image of the beast” is not confined to large State-churches. It can be found down to the congregational level, where a worldly perspective of authority is instituted and honored. You may recall that such a spirit was found of old time in Diotrophes, who “loved to have the preeminence,” and refused to recognize the Apostles (3 John 9). This spirit is still thriving. Many reading this article have confronted this spirit.

Chapter 13

NON-WORSHIPERS KILLED

“And he had power to give life unto the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak, and cause that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed.” (Rev 13:15)

The second beast is also granted power to cause “as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed.” Under the reign of the second beast, the acid test of acceptance will be allegiance to the worldly concept of power. Those who refuse to bow will be “killed.” This is to be taken both literally and spiritually. Some of the most dreadful of all persecutions have been instituted by, what we call, State-churches. A most notable example was “Bloody Mary,” who ruled England as Queen Mary I from 1553. A devout Roman Catholic, she “earned the epithet “Bloody Mary” for the executions of Protestants that occurred during her reign” (Grollier’s Encyclopedia). The sin of those she slaughtered was their failure to recognize the power of the Catholic church. History says of the Mennonites, “Because Mennonites refused to assume state offices, to serve as police or soldiers, or to take oaths of loyalty, they were considered subversive and as such

severely persecuted” (Grollier’s).

Several inquisitions were formed against Christians who refused to bow to earthly religious power. Officially defined, “The Inquisition was a medieval church court instituted to seek out and prosecute heretics.” There are countless historic and encyclopedic references to confirm the existence of this opposition, should you choose to research it.

THEY WOULD NOT WORSHIP THE IMAGE OF THE BEAST

And what was the transgression of these multitudes that were slain by the State in the name of devotion to true religion? They “would not worship the image of the beast!” They refused to recognize the supremacy of earth-centered power! Oh, the tragedy of such a blotch on human history! But when religious men lose their love for the truth, and submit to join hands with the wicked, the pure in heart will be oppressed! It is no wonder Jehu said to king Jehosaphat, “Shouldest thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the LORD?” (2 Chron 18:1; 19:2; 20:35).

Whatever may be said for the union of church and state, such alliances have left a bloody trail in history. It should be apparent to every discerning soul that human pride and organization will not bow the knee to Jesus or submit to operate under His Headship! Conversely, the real saints refuse to bow to it. There is an unavoidable clash between the powers of this world and the saints of the Most High God.

Chapter 14

THE MARK OF THE BEAST, #1

“He causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads . . .” (Rev 13:16-17). “And the first went, and poured out his bowl into the earth; and it became a noisome and grievous sore upon the men that had THE MARK OF THE BEAST, and that worshiped his image” (Rev 16:2)

We now come to an extremely controversial section of the Revelation of Jesus Christ. It is imperative that we remove our hearts from idle curiosity, and refuse to be dominated by human wisdom. Our text is exposing us to the tactical move of the devil. It is his effort to destroy the saints. If we forget that, we will fall into the sea of confusion.

NOT OMNISCIENT

At first our text states the second beast caused all who would not worship the image of the first beast to be killed. The individuals who refused to acknowledge the authority of religious demagogues were thus slain. But the matter does not end there. The second beast is not omniscient. He does not know all of the people of God, any more than Jezebel knew all of the prophets of God (1 Kgs 19:18). Therefore, the second beast institutes a procedure that will restrict, both buying and selling, receiving and giving. Only those who submit to his power will be permitted to make the stated exchange.

SPIRITUAL PERSPECTIVE REQUIRED

Some choose to believe this passage has reference to restrictions in social commerce. This view of the text, however, does not blend well with the message Christ gives. This is not to mean that such a ban could not occur, or that the procurement and distribution of commodities will not be restricted by some despot. But that is not the intent of these words.

This is a system that attempts to combine earth with heaven. In such a combination, earth

always dominates. Flesh plus Spirit always equals “flesh.” This world plus heaven always equals this “world.” When an attempt is made to join the things of God with the transitory things of this world, the things of God are always lost.

The objective of the second beast is to promote the worship of the first. In other words, to cause men to subject themselves to the authority of men rather than that of God. He does this under the guise of a religious appearance, as a representative of Christ.

INDISCRIMINATE IN APPLICATION

“He causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and slave . . .” Because of the limited knowledge of this beast, he imposes a restriction on all men. The purpose of the attempt is to get at the people of God. It is the same tactic Herod used in his diabolical effort to get rid of the Christ-child. He had ALL the infants under two years of age killed, hoping to kill Jesus in the process (Matt 2:16). This is a tactic of the evil one.

There is an interesting thing to see in this approach. Small, poor, and slaves are considered as much of a threat as great, rich, and free. Outside of Christ, such distinctions are not necessary. Faith, however, brings with it Divine influence and power. It makes one a threat to the world system, particularly when found in a religious setting. Further, you may expect those who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus (Rev 19:10) to be found in all of these categories. The saints are not limited to a particular social grouping, and this is confusing to the devil.

THE PLACE OF THE MARK

“. . . to receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads. . .” An identifying mark is placed upon men – a mark that will qualify them for the sanction of the second beast. Remember, he is promoting the worship of the first beast, who is animated by the devil himself. The ultimate purpose of this “mark” is to bring honor to the power God has rejected and cursed.

The mark can be received one of two places – the beast appears to be liberal in his requirements of men. It can be in the “right hand or on their foreheads.” We must not allow ourselves to think of a physical mark, or an imbedded computer chip of some sort. Again, I am not saying such a thing is not possible, but that it is not what Jesus is showing to John.

THE MARK IN THE RIGHT HAND

A mark in the “right hand” signifies a devotion to working for the beast, or acting in the behalf of religious institutionalism. This can be done without actually subscribing to the way the beast thinks. It is a form of compromise where the conscience is violated, and the knowledge of what is right is suppressed. It involves knowing what is wrong, yet doing it in order to lessen the suffering incurred by publically living for the Lord.

There are examples in Scripture of the principle here declared. During Christ’s earthly ministry, there were a number of “chief rulers” that believed on Him. Notwithstanding, “because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue, for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God” (John 12:42-43). They, so to speak, received the mark in their hand. They continued to be identified with the synagogue, knowing that confessing Christ would cause them to be expelled. To avoid expulsion, they simply did not acknowledge Jesus publically—i.e. acknowledge Him as one in whom they believed.

Another example of this type of conduct is found in the parents of a blind man Jesus

healed by putting clay on his eyes. When Christ's enemies interrogated them concerning the healing of their son, they said they did not know what means healed his blindness, or who it was that did it. The Spirit informs us this was not the truth. "These words spake his parents, because they feared the Jews: for the Jews had agreed already, that if any man did confess that he was Christ, he should be put out of the synagogue. Therefore said his parents, He is of age; ask him" (John 9:22-23). Again, here is an example of receiving the mark in the hand. The knew the truth, yet chose to remain in good standing with those who did not believe in Jesus.

When the Word of God speaks about doing, it often refers to the hand. God spoke to Israel of what they put their "HANDS to do" (Deut 12:18). Solomon spoke of man's productivity as "Whatsoever thy HAND findeth to do" (Eccl 9:10). In our text, having the mark upon the hand involves working for the institutions of men.

Chapter 15

THE MARK OF THE BEAST, #2

He causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads, and that no one may buy or sell except one who has the mark or the name of the beast, or the number of his name." (Rev 13:17)

SATAN SETTLES FOR SILENT COMMITMENT

Satan, though he does not prefer it, will settle for the individual remaining where he knows Jesus is not present. As long as the person will work for him, the devil does not mind personal disagreement with him. The second beast also has this mind-set, being empowered by our adversary the devil. If a person will agree to be identified with the organization, he will be accepted. That soul may actually disagree with what is being done, and have some settled convictions about it. Yet, if they will just receive the mark on the right hand, agreeing to be a representative of the institution, they will be accepted.

THE MARK ON THE FOREHEAD

This is actually the beast's preference, for it represents the most thorough committal. A mark "on their foreheads" denotes thinking like the beast. In this case, the person accepts the thoughts of the beast. The entire life is reshaped around these thoughts, accepting them to be truth. Those who think like the beast have his mark upon their forehead. They do not have "the mind of Christ" (1 Cor 2:16) or "the mind of the Lord" (Lev 24:12). The beast persuades them he is right, and that the world's concept of power and effectiveness is right.

CLASSIC EXAMPLE

The classic example of receiving a mark in the forehead occurs early in Scripture. Satan confronted Eve with a perspective in sharp conflict with the Divine mind. Do you remember his words? "Ye shall not surely die: for God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil" (Gen 3:4-5). It is not possible for a greater variance to exist than is found between Satan's words and those of the Lord (Gen 2:17). Eve, however, changed her mind about the tree after hearing words from the mouth of the devil. "And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat" (Gen 3:6). She had received the mark, so to speak, in her forehead.

In Scripture, the “forehead” also speaks of determination or resolve. Speaking of a resolute confrontation of God’s enemies, the Lord told Ezekiel, “Behold, I have made thy face strong against their faces, and thy forehead strong against their foreheads. As an adamant harder than flint have I made thy forehead” (Ezek 3:8-9). His devotion to the Lord, and determination to serve Him, would outweigh the resolve of his enemies.

Chapter 16

AN ATTEMPT TO EMULATE THE NAME, #3

“He causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads, and that no one may buy or sell except one who has the mark or 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 it is the number of a man: His number is 666.” (Rev 13:16-18)

This is an effort of the beast to emulate the Lord, who also places a mark, or seal, upon His people (2 Cor 1:22). The beast’s mark is called “the mark of his name” (Rev 14:11). That is his character reflected in the minds of men. What a dreadful consideration!

Think of the glorious mark of the Lord upon His people. There are those who have “the seal of God in their foreheads” (Rev 9:4). Some are described as having “His (the Lamb) Father’s name written in their foreheads” (Rev 14:1). It is said of the redeemed, “And they shall see his face; and His name shall be in their foreheads” (Rev 22:4). Jesus promised the overcomers, “I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name” (Rev 3:12). That speaks of a thorough conformity to the image of the Son – a Divine determination (Rom 8:29; 1 John 3:1-2).

SPIRITUAL PRETENSION

Here, then, the second beast covers his diabolical effort with a shroud of religiosity. He will call his work the work of the Lord, and speak of commitment to his cause as commitment to the Lord Himself. He will ascribe Divine qualities to created personalities and a human agenda. Whether it is a title like “Lord God the Pope,” or “The True New testament Church,” he seeks to bring a sanctifying religious flavor to what he is doing.

I cannot begin to tell you of the multitudes that have fallen prey to this tactic. They refer to religious activities as the work of the Lord, in which not a spark of Divine involvement can be found. Their works bolster the flesh and foster carnality. In them the natural man flourishes, and the spiritual man starves. Christ is emulated, but not possessed. Such people are part of a system that has horns like a lamb, but has the mouth of a dragon.

THE INHIBITION

“ . . . and that no one may buy or sell except one who has the mark or the name of the beast, or the number of his name.”

And now we get to the heart of the matter. The devil desires for exchange to take place among men and women, but not righteous exchange. He resists his kingdom of darkness being penetrated with the “light of life.” For this reason, working through the second beast, Satan sets strategies in motion that suppress the spread of the truth. In this text we behold a scheme that has proved remarkably effective.

This is the beast’s artifice. Unless the individual is in some way formally associated with the institution, he cannot “buy or sell.” The beast will not sanction the formal exchange of

ideas from those unwilling to wear its mark. The beast will make it convenient for the person, offering credentials and other religious paraphernalia that will bring official acceptance. But one must either serve the institution or think like it.

MARTIN LUTHER

Martin Luther, for example, can study as much as he wants, as long as he remains in the monastery and thinks in a traditional fashion. But as soon as that monk changes his mind and ceases to serve the purposes of the organization, he will not longer be allowed to speak. When he sheds the mark of the beast in his forehead, and shakes it from his hand, he is excluded from buying and selling. That is the tactic of the beast, and an effective one at that.

OUR TIME

We are living in time when the beast has become very subtle in his aggression against the saints. It will allow a lot of religious education, social involvement, and innovation – but only as it profits the institution. Many of us who have refused to wear the mark have suffered ostracization.

Understand, no person can dictate to another the proper course of action to take.

However, you had better refuse “the mark” in both your hand and your forehead.

Whatever you do with your hand is to be unto the Lord. Your mind is to be transformed as you come to “know Him” more fully. The seal you have must be that of God and not that of men. As it is written, “Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity” (2 Tim 2:19).

It is never right to align yourself with a form of godliness that denies the power thereof. Nor, indeed, are you given the liberty to concede to the beast what it wants. In standing against the devil, you must also stand against the second beast. It is religion organized after the manner of the world. Beware of it!

Historically, this type of religion was introduced by the Roman church. It brought a government into the spiritual arena that was driven by men, not God. It institutionalized truth by means of human authority, and gave the glory belonging to God to an organization. But the effort did not end with Rome.

Chapter 17

THE SABBATARIAN APPROACH, #4

As you might expect, there are a number of differing views about “the mark of the beast.” Of particular interest is the position of those who bind Sabbath day observance on the Christian community. The most prominent group advocating this position is the Seventh Day Adventists – although this view is not limited to them. They feel that observing Sunday as the Lord’s day is “the mark of the beast.” Their reasoning is as follows.

Referring to Daniel 7:25, Sabbatarian theology states that the beast will “change the times and the law.” That change, they insist, involves the fourth commandment which reads, “Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy” (Ex 20:9). That Sabbath (which means rest) is affirmed in Exodus 20:9, to be the “seventh day.”

The Council of Trent, ordered by Pope Pius V, is cited as the time when the Sabbath law was changed by the Catholics to Sunday. This council was held in Northern Italy between 1545 and 1563. The conclusion of the Sabbatarian is that observing Sunday is “the mark

of the beast.”

It is inconceivable, and an insult to the intelligence of the saints of God, to affirm the necessity of observing the seventh day as a rest unto the Lord in Christ Jesus, when no such teaching was given by the Lord Jesus, the Apostles, or any inspired writer. There is a total absence of teaching concerning the Sabbath day from Matthew thru Revelation. There is not a syllable of doctrine on that subject that is uttered in the New Covenant writings – except that those in Jesus are not to allow any person to judge them in respect to Sabbaths (Col 2:16), and that “There remaineth therefore a sabbath rest for the people of God” (Heb 4:9) – a rest that is identified with believing (Heb 4:3).

This view, however, does not fulfill the text before us. The “mark” of reference was used to suppress the spread of the truth. While more could be said on this subject, it is not profitable to do so at this point. I have only shared it to show the extent to which some will go to justify their view. Such a procedure is more related to the activity of the second beast than to that of the Son of God. In the next section, more will be said on the many attempts to interpret “the mark of the beast.”

Documentation of the Sabbatarian position follows.

1. "Sunday-keeping must be the mark of the beast." ... "The reception of his mark must be something that involves the greatest offense that can be committed against God." (The Marvel of Nations, Elder U. Smith pages 170, 183)
2. "Here we find the mark of the beast. The very act of changing the Sabbath into Sunday, on the part of the Catholic church, without any authority from the Bible." (Ellen G. White, The Mark of the Beast, page 23)
3. "The Sunday Sabbath is purely a child of the Papacy. It is the mark of the beast." (Advent Review, Vol. I, No. 2, August, 1850.)
4. "The change of the Sabbath is the sign or mark of the authority of the Romish church." ... 5.
5. "The keeping of the counterfeit Sabbath is the reception of the mark." (Ellen G. White, Great Controversy, Vol. 4, page 281.
6. "The mark of the beast is Sunday-keeping. A law will enforce this upon Seventh-day Adventists. They won't obey. Then they will be outlawed, persecuted, and condemned to death! Of all the wild Advent speculations in the prophecies, this deserves to stand among the wildest." (Seventh-day Adventism Renounced" by D.M. Canright, 1914)
7. "Sunday-keeping is an institution of the first beast, and ALL who submit to obey this institution emphatically worship the first beast and receive his mark, 'the mark of the beast.' Those who worship the beast and his image by observing the first day are certainly idolaters, as were the worshippers of the golden calf." (Advent Review Extra, pages 10 and 11, August, 1850)
8. "The Seventh day, Saturday, must be kept; that keeping Sunday is the mark of the beast; that all should pay tithes; that Mrs. White is inspired as were the writers of the Bible; that the Bible must be interpreted to harmonize with her writings" (Seventh-day Adventism Renounced" by D.M. Canright, 1914)

CONCLUDING THOUGHT

I cannot leave this section without once again observing the dominance of this condition in the Western church. God has been supplanted by the organization, which is nothing

more than a formalized valley of dry bones. Commitment to an institution may suffice for “the beast,” but it is not acceptable to the Lord Jesus. Whether it is a nation, a State-church, or some other form of human organization, our association with it must be subordinate to our commitment to the King of kings and Lord of lords. It should be evident that no other posture is acceptable. The Lord Jesus will not take second place. He must have the preeminence, because it has been given to Him by God the Father.

Chapter 18

DIVINE INSIGHT IS GIVEN, #5

“Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man: His number is 666” (Rev 13:18).

We must never forget we are considering a “beast” – a power employed by Satan to oppose the saints and suppress the truth. We cannot, therefore, settle for some novel view of this text. It is imperative that we have an accurate perception of our enemy, and not a mythical and powerless one.

THE INTENT OF THE BEAST

In order to better understand this segment of the vision, a brief review of the beast is in order. We have been exposed to his “image,” “mark,” and now “name.”

GOD ALMIGHTY

This type of language is best understood within the context of redemption. For example, we also read of the “image” of GOD (Col 1:15; 3:10; Rom 8:29; Heb 1:3; 2 Cor 3:18; 4:4), the “mark” or “seal” of God (Ezek 9:4,6; Rev 7:3; Eph 1:13; 4:30; 2 Cor 1:22), and the “name” of GOD (Rev 3:12; 14:1; 19:12; 22:4). Each of these representations have to do with men becoming like God. In particular, this takes place through the Lord Jesus Christ. We are recreated in His likeness (“image”) – Colossians 3:10. We are also identified as uniquely His identification (“mark” – Rev 20:4). We also partake of His nature or character (“name” – Rev 14:1; 22:4).

In this passage devil is using the “beast” to make men like himself – to transmit to them his character or nature. The “beast” is to Satan what Jesus is to God – the means of making individuals like himself. If we lose sight of this malicious intent, the passage before us will become obscure, and we will gravitate to a carnal view of it.

What we have here is picturesque language denoting the propagation of the beast’s nature among men – the transmittal of his character to Adam’s sons. The devil knows that will disqualify any mortal from eternal life and Divine approval.

A NUMBER

Here is the language of limitation. Anything or anyone that can be numbered is marked by limitation. Allow me to elaborate.

GOD HAS NO NUMBER

Nowhere in all of Scripture is there a numeric representation of the Living God. Not seven, thousand, million, billion, trillion – there is no number that can be given to God. He is transcendent to quantification. There is no number assigned to Jesus Christ. He has a name, but not a number. He is called “First and Last,” but never a number. Men refer to Jesus as the Second Member of the Godhead – but that is theological language, not a Scriptural expression. The Holy Spirit is never represented by a number. Some has

referred to Him as the Third Member of the Godhead. Again, that is not a representation found in God's Word. However precise it may appear to those who traffic in scholastics, it is, at best, a flawed and deficient description.

There is no limitation in God. He is infinite, without boundaries of any sort. He cannot be contained in a certain place, nor can He be fully comprehended.

LIMITATION

Numbers are used to denote limitations. The redeemed, for example, are so vast they are said to be "a great multitude, which no man could number" (Rev 7:9). **THE BEAST, HOWEVER, HAS A NUMBER!** The angels of God are said to be "an innumerable company" (Heb 12:22). **THE BEAST, HOWEVER, HAS A NUMBER!** Even the stars of the sky and the sand of the sea shore are said to be "innumerable" (Heb 11:12). **THE BEAST, HOWEVER, HAS A NUMBER!**

The fact that the beast has a "number" first signifies he is limited! He is not invincible or all-powerful, even though he presents himself to be so. His power is limited. His influence is limited. His time is limited! Hallelujah for a foe that is limited, and for a God that is NOT limited! When Scriptures speak of something being "numbered," it means limitations have been established. The demise, for example, of Belshazzar's kingdom, was expressed in miraculous handwriting upon the wall. It said, "God hath NUMBERED thy kingdom, and finished it" (Dan 5:26).

I want to press this point, for it is pivotal to an understanding of this text. Something or someone with a number is limited. Divine control is over anything with a number, and its duration has been established. The brevity of life is depicted in the phrase, "teach us to NUMBER our days" (Psa 90:12).

As we view this arch-foe of the people of God, then, we must gather courage. He is limited!

A SMALL NUMBER

The multitude of angels are said to be "ten thousand times ten thousand" (Dan 7:10). Revelation describes them as "ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands" (Rev 5:11). **BUT THE NUMBER OF THE BEAST IS 666!**

The vision given to John portrays the days of the church's trial as 1,260 (11:3; 12:6;). **BUT THE NUMBER OF THE BEAST IS 666!** Each tribe of Israel has 12,000 sealed with the seal of God: 144,000 in total (7:4-8). **BUT THE NUMBER OF THE BEAST IS 666!**

We must know that Satan has but a "short time" (Rev 12:12). Consequently, everything aligned with him has a relatively short duration. In the end, glory will outweigh trial. Blessings will be more numerous than hardship.

Chapter 19

WHAT DOES THE NUMBER SIGNIFY? #6

Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man: His number is 666." (Rev 13:18)

As you might imagine, attempts to identify the beast with a specific person have been countless. Each attempt assigns a numeric value to letters, then adds them up to 666. Mind you, the text does NOT say that is the secret to identifying the beast! In fact, using this method, men can be quite creative. One has said, "There are three rules by the help of

which I believe an ingenious man could find the required sum of any given name. First, if the proper name by itself will not yield it, add a title. Secondly, if the sum cannot be found in the Greek, try Hebrew, or even Latin. Third, do not be too particular about the spelling.” (A Plummer)

Following the above procedures, there have been a wide range of people said to be “the beast.” Included in the number are Caligula, Trajan, Julian the Apostate, Genseric the Vandal, the Pope, various specific Popes (Benedict IX and Paul V), Mohamet, Martin Luther, John Calvin, Beza, and Napoleon Bonaparte. In each of these cases, the interpretation was driven by the times and circumstances, not by wisdom.

Martin Luther was of the opinion it was a year, A.D. 666, “when the pope became uncontrollable.” Faber said it stood for “Apostate.” W. Jones calculated that it stood for “Christians, strangers to the cross.” Scot said it means “marked out for destruction.” Wordsworth said it was “the number of the world.”

A traditional view that has gained wide acceptance among conservative believers sees “666” as signifying a kingdom rather than an individual. This view affirms it to symbolize the Latin Kingdom (Rome). The method employed to calculate the name, uses Greek letters, and is as follows.

The name “Lateinos” identifies the reputed founder of the Latin race. The following reasoning is then offered. Rome is the ancient capital of the Latin race. The Roman Catholic Church is officially called the Latin church, and wrote all of its sacred books in Latin, thereby distinguishing it from the Greek Church. For centuries, the worship of the Roman church was conducted universally in Latin. The conclusion: “The papacy, beyond possibility of doubt, is the beast” (Vision of the Ages, B.W. Johnson). Ashley S. Johnson says, “Six hundred and sixty-six is the number of a man, and that man is the pope of Rome beyond a doubt” (The Voice of Seven Thunders).

Early in church history, Irenaeus suggested the number stood for Euanthas (E=5; U=400; A=1; N=50; TH(theta)=9; A=1; S=200). More recently, William Barclay used some creativity to say the beast was Nero (N=50; E=6; R=500; O=60; N=50). He said the Hebrews letters also added up to 666. Here is his conclusion. “There is little doubt that the number of the beast stands for Nero; and that John is forecasting the coming of Antichrist in the form of Nero, the incarnation of all evil, returning to the world” (The Revelation of John).

SOMETHING IN COMMON

In my understanding, there is something all of these views have in common. They all tend to diffuse the power of the text, making it merely academic. They also employ an approach upon which it will be exceedingly difficult to unite. The procedure itself gives man too much power, and God too little. It tends to exalt human understanding rather than Divine wisdom.

I do not question that there are elements of truth in all of them. Further, it is possible that “the beast” was present in all of them. When, however, a view of Scripture makes it irrelevant for a given generation, it is not likely that it is right. This is particularly true of the book of Revelation. It is not limited to a certain period of time, or a specific locality. With great consistency, everyone with a capacity to “hear” is told to give heed to its message.

A CLOSER LOOK AT THE NUMBER, #7

“His number is 666.” (Rev 13:18)

The requirement to comprehend the significance of this number is “wisdom”—“Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast.” The expression “Here is wisdom” does not introduce the answer, but what is required to obtain the answer. Other versions clarify this by translating the verse, “This calls for wisdom” (RSV, NIV). This is “the spirit of wisdom and understanding” that is referred to in Ephesians 1:17. It is wisdom that comes from God, not from a logistic procedure. If identifying the number simply involved adding up numerical equivalents of Greek or Hebrew letters, Divine wisdom would not be required. An elementary school student with access to the numeric value of letters and the ability to add could accomplish such a task – and even then, that would not qualify as “wisdom.” The spirit is not calling for a scholar, but for a person who has “the wisdom that is from above” (James 13:17).

WHY IS WISDOM REQUIRED?

Wisdom is required to identify the beast. The reason for the requirement is obvious. This is the embodiment of Satan’s effort to deceive, mislead, and beguile. There is only one way to survive an assault of deception: have wisdom! Divine wisdom is the only effective antidote for delusion!

We are not reading of a demand for literary or scholastic expertise! I do not know that such an approach is ever made by God to understanding His Word. Whatever value is assigned to learning and research disciplines, you will have to read the books of men to get them. This simply is not the approach of the Spirit to true understanding. This does not require a denigration of learning disciplines, it does forbid the exaltation of them.

The identity of the beast is necessary to the survival of the elect. If men are not able to identify their foe, they are not apt to overcome him. It is no novel requirement to understand “the number of the beast.” It is necessary to avoid being overcome by it. It is indispensable if men are to escape being deceived, thereby falling into the snare of the devil.

IT IS THE NUMBER OF A MAN

Many have understood this to mean a specific man—a certain person.

If this is the case, we have in this text a departure from the nature of Scriptural warnings. First, we are categorically told we are not wrestling “against flesh and blood” (Eph 6:12). Second, Jesus solemnly told us “judge NOT according to appearance” (John 7:24).

Do not suppose this means there has never been unusually wicked men who have pioneered opposition to the saints. That is not the case, and this word is not intended to say such despots will not rise again.

ANTICHRIST

John told us “even now are there many antichrists.” In the same breath he reminded believers they had heard “the Antichrist is coming” (1 John 2:18, NKJV). If we suppose “the Antichrist” is a mortal, then we have one major Antichrist preceded by many smaller ones. But if it is a spiritual power, we have quite another situation. John referred to “the SPIRIT of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world” (1 John 4:3, NKJV). John spoke of a larger foe than a man. It was something that animated men, drawing them into aggressive opposition against the Lord and His people.

It parallels the beast which we are now considering.

The phrase “It is the number of a man” can be seen in different ways. It can be seen as a way of saying, This is a particular individual—i.e. the number of A man. It can also be understood as meaning, This is a human manner—man’s number. The NIV translates the verse in this way: “for it is man's number.” The RSV says, “for it is a human number.”

The expression (ἀριθμὸς γὰρ ἀνθρώπου) is literally translated “the number for man.”

I am going to say this phrase means man-centered. It is something that comes in the name of Christ, but finds its locus in man, his wisdom, and his ways. The number “666,” in this case, stands for the ultimate in human ingenuity and glory – yet something coming far short of the glory of God. It is shy of perfection, never entering into the rest of God – like the sixth day of creation. Man was dominate on that day, but God was accentuated on the seventh!

IDENTIFIED

“666” is like the signature of flesh. It has no God in it, no Divine power, no eternal purpose. As I see this text, this is nothing less than the church wedded to the world, and having the world as its wedded name. It is the church organized and functioning according to human wisdom. This sort of approach was pioneered by Rome, but has penetrated into virtually every aspect of Christianity. For the most part, this is what we confront when we look at the contemporary church – the second beast. The court of Caiaphas the high priest is but a footman compared to this horseman!

Later, this same entity will be identified as “Babylon the Great,” a “WOMAN” on a scarlet beast, and a “harlot” that sits upon many waters (17:3,5,7; 17:1,15,16; 18:2; 19:2). But it is all speaking of the same thing – the corruption of the church, or the humanizing of it, if you will. Satan is shown here as assaulting the people of God with Christian institutionalism! While it appears harmless, it is not! This is the religion of man, through man, and to man. It is not God-centered, but man-centered. Its power is not from God, but from man. Its wisdom is not from above, but from beneath. Because of this, the second beast promotes a religion that is essentially of this world, and Satan is “the God of this world.” You cannot borrow from what he promotes, and construct a valid form of religion.

Chapter 21

CONCLUSION

To me, and with regards to what is against us, there are few texts of Scripture as sobering as this one. We have covered a text that reveals how Satan is waging war against the church, which is the body of Christ. At the first, working through governmental powers, he sought to stamp out the people of God with bloody persecution and harsh threats. He did not understand that the people of God – the real people of God – “love not their lives unto the death,” or “did not love and cling to life even when faced with death” (AMPLIFIED–Rev 12:11). He does not realize that those who are in Christ willingly yield to the word of their Master, “If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:26). He still is convinced, as he did in the days of Job, that “Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life” (Job 2:4). But he is wrong, and when he has raised persecution against the church he has only brought down those who were pretenders.

From the higher vantage point, this second beast is how God has chosen to send “strong delusion” to those who have not received the love of the truth, yet want to be religious. It is precisely as the Lord said, “And then shall that Wicked [one] be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming: Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness” (2 Thess 2:9-13). The “wicked one” works in conjunction with the second beast, producing a delusion that is a fabrication of the Gospel, including “another Jesus,” “another spirit,” and “another gospel” (2 Cor 11:4; Gal 1:6). This is why the delusion is called “strong delusion.”? It is a beast with horns of a lamb, coming in the name of Christ and pretending to have embraced the Gospel.

What I have offered to you in this series of devotions is to be weighed as any other mortal observation. Our view of this passage is not the basis of our fellowship. It is, however, to be a key ingredient in fighting the good fight of faith. It should teach you to take quite seriously any corruption of the truth. Lifeless religion is lethal, and is to be so considered. Wherever it is found you are being faced with spiritual pretension, for Jesus neither authors nor sustains spiritual lifelessness. Where there is an absence of life – reciprocity to God – Jesus is absent, the Spirit is absent, and the truth has not been embraced. This is why the very concept of religious reformation is erroneous. The mode of the Kingdom of God is transformation, not reformation.

When human wisdom supplants the wisdom that comes from above, we are being assaulted by the wicked one. Those who assign an inordinate value to human understanding are a threat to your faith. Beware of them, even if they smile when they talk to you.

I admonish you to seek spiritual understanding of the good fight of faith. At all cost, appropriate the spiritual weaponry that has been provided for you in Christ Jesus. With haste and resolution, put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil! Be as relentless and determined to lay hold on eternal life as Satan is to thwart you in the effort.