

Newsletter June 2018

In our May 2018 Newsletter, we had moved on into Revelation chapter 12. That chapter opened with a portrayal of Israel giving birth to a child, the Messiah, but the major player introduced in that chapter was Satan, who is portrayed as a great red dragon. Although Satan was obliquely mentioned in Chapters 2 and 3 in connection with the seven churches (cf. Re. 2:9,13,24; 3:9), this was the first time in the Revelation that we actually saw him in his active role as the resolute adversary of God and the source and promoter of all that is evil. That narrative continues on here in Chapter 13 as Satan confronts Jesus Christ with the Antichrist of the last days.

Again we return to the beginning of Daniel's Seventieth week as the Antichrist first emerges on the scene in direct opposition to Jesus Christ as He breaks open the first seal of the Scroll in Heaven, which contains his rightful title to the entire earth and all its people (cf. Re.6:1,2). Satan is a created invisible spirit-being and must work on earth through mortal men as he gains control over them. His goal from the beginning of his rebellion has been to rule mankind in God's place and to steal his own position of honor and worship from them. In an ultimate effort to carry out his villainous goal, Satan will bring forth a political ruler as a substitute Christ in full opposition to Him (i.e. an anti-Christ). Three and one-half years later, he also will bring forth a religious leader as the political Antichrist's advocate, thus attempting through him to emulate the Holy Spirit. The political ruler will carry the name, "Antichrist" and the religious leader will carry the name "False Prophet," but they are both essentially one in Satan who will fully motivate and control them. Therefore, it is Satan who will vicariously receive the worship of mankind in response to their evil unholy activities.

With this brief introduction, we shall now begin our study of the text in Revelation Chapter 13 – just as Satan calls and brings forth the political Antichrist to attain his position of global prominence:

“And I stood upon the sand of the sea, and saw a beast rise up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and upon his horns ten crowns, and upon his heads the name of blasphemy” (Re.13:1).

The word “and” that begins this verse indicates that it is a continuation of the last verse of Chapter 12. Therefore, “I” here refers to the voice of the Dragon from verse 12:17: “And I (Satan) stood upon the sand of the sea...” The sand represents all of humanity and, in particular, the great Gentile world. The sea represents the ebb and flow of world history that has led up to this very moment. We read here that a “beast” rose up out of the sea – apparently at Satan's command. The Greek word for “beast” is *therion* that means a “wild beast,” and representing some form of living creature. Symbolically in Scripture, a beast represents a world power with a sovereign as its head. The seven heads of this beast refers to the image in king Nebuchadnezzar's dream, which Daniel interpreted as representing seven godless empires each headed up by a powerful ruler (cf. Da. 2:31-45). These great empires are Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, Rome, and lastly the future empire of the Antichrist. This last beast, the Antichrist, has risen through the political ranks of the Gentile world to become a global dictator. The Antichrist will combine within himself the power of all the previous world rulers. He will be the last world ruler before Christ returns, whereupon he must go into perdition – the lake of fire (cf. Re.19:20).

The political Antichrist will suddenly appear on a very troubled world scene as a potential deliverer. He is but a charismatic man who will claim to have achieved a form of superior knowledge and abilities – perhaps through mystical means. Both the earth's religious and secular communities will be drawn to him because of his highly progressive solutions to various world problems and for what they envision as his supreme ability to establish global peace. A difficult political compromise must necessarily take place to unite the world under a global government with the Antichrist as its dictatorial head. Some believe this global government to be the United Nations, although it will most likely need to be a far more robust successor that is willing and able to enforce its edicts on the world population with powerful military assets confiscated from ten powerful nations. It would be bad enough if this dictator was but one person acting alone, but we see as we continue on in verse 1 that the Antichrist carries with him the heads of ten nations (i.e, ten crowns) who support him and surrender their military power (ten horns) to him. These will be ten godless nations that already have a blasphemous attitude toward God and his true Christ.

“And the beast which I saw was like unto a leopard, and his feet were as the feet of a bear, and his mouth as the mouth of a lion: and the dragon gave him his power, and his seat, and great authority” (Re.13:2).

The Antichrist will exhibit the stealth and swiftness of a leopard as he seductively draws men to himself, the raw brutality of a bear when he is angered, and the ferocity of a lion when his authority is questioned; his raw power, exalted position, and great authority will come directly from Satan who indwells him (cf. Da. 7:3-7).

“And I saw one of his heads as it were wounded to death; and his deadly wound was healed: and all the world wondered after the beast” (Re.13:3).

Some interpret this verse as referring to the resurrection of the old Roman Empire, but the use of the personal pronoun “his” in this verse and similar personal pronouns found in verses 12 and 14 (below) as well as in Re.17:8 indicates that this verse refers to a man who is one of the heads that we saw in verse 1. This verse reads that “one of his heads” is wounded leading to the question of which of the seven heads is healed of a deadly wound. Some envision the Antichrist as a resurrection of one of the earlier six heads of empire such as Nebuchadnezzar, but most of these insist that this will be the evil and insane Emperor Nero. This is highly unlikely inasmuch as Nero took his own life, and we read in the very next verse of this chapter and later in Re.13:14 that an attempt had been made to make war against him and to assassinate him. The only reasonable conclusion to reach here is that the Antichrist himself will be wounded by attackers during the great world war fought against him, which follows the breaking open of the second seal of the heavenly scroll by Jesus Christ (cf. Re.6:4). It will be spread abroad that Antichrist is dead. However, John’s words, “as it were wounded to death” indicates great uncertainty that his death is factual. Satan does not have the power to raise the dead, but he does have the power to display all forms of lying wonders sufficiently to have cleverly faked his death. Regardless of any lack of certainty regarding his death, the whole world will marvel that he is still alive.

“And they worshipped the dragon which gave power unto the beast: and they worshipped the beast, saying, Who is like unto the beast? who is able to make war with him” (Re.13:4)?

When it is reported that the Antichrist has been miraculously healed of his fatal injury and is alive and well, it becomes obvious that any future attempt to remove him from power would be futile and extremely dangerous. It will also be publicized abroad that his recovery from death constitutes his resurrection from the dead. Thus, Antichrist will mimic the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ, whom he attempts to fully emulate and supplant. Just as Jesus’ resurrection was undeniable proof of his deity, the Antichrist will cite this incident to assert that he is the equal of God. Having built the third Temple in Jerusalem, under the Antichrist’s protection, as a provision of a pact that they have made with him, the nation of Israel will expect their Messiah to soon come to them. So powerful will the messiah-delusion be that Israel will be deceived into accepting the Antichrist as their long-awaited Messiah. Not only will the people of earth admire and fear him, they will be deluded into worshiping him. In worshiping Antichrist, they are actually worshiping Satan, the evil dragon, who empowers him.

“And there was given unto him a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies; and power was given unto him to continue forty and two months and he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme his name, and his tabernacle, and them that dwell in heaven” (Re.13:5,6).

Men today ignorantly blaspheme God in their speech without thinking, and without reason, but the Antichrist will blaspheme with the purposeful intent of displacing Christ with himself. God allows Satan to give the Antichrist a great mouth to brag of great things about his person and his accomplishments, while simultaneously speaking vile blasphemies against God with total impunity. He blasphemes God and his very Name. In blaspheming God’s holy Name, he seeks to defile all that God is – the great eternal “I AM” beside whom there is no other (cf. Ex.3:14). He blasphemes all who reverence his name, and he also blasphemes God’s tabernacle. The word tabernacle (Greek = *skēnē*) found here does not refer to the third Temple of the Jews in Jerusalem (cf. Re.11:1,2), but to the eternal dwelling place or habitation of God, which includes his majestic throne (cf. Re.4:2) and all the vast domain of Heaven. Moreover, the Antichrist will blaspheme all those who exist in Heaven; this includes the angelic hosts that remained loyal to their creator. They are a target of his blasphemy because led by the archangel Michael they had fought against him in the great war in Heaven and had utterly humiliated and defeated him (cf. Re. 12:7,8). Nevertheless, we note that his blasphemous reign will only continue for 3 ½ years more, which refers to the second half of Daniel’s seventieth week.

“And it was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them: and power was given him over all kindreds, and tongues, and nations” (Re.13:7).

Inasmuch as Satan had lost the great spiritual war in Heaven and for this cause he had been expelled to the earth, he will concentrate his efforts in making war on earth against God’s people in an attempt to corrupt and

destroy them through the activities of his powerful Antichrist. For a short time, he appears to have greater success on earth than in Heaven. Not only will the Antichrist blaspheme God he will be given overwhelming power to suppress any worship of the true God, and to completely overcome any resistance to his evil rule throughout the world.

“And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (Re.13:8).

For the first three and one-half years of the seven-year period of Daniel (cf. Re.13:5), the Antichrist will receive the accolades and worship of the entire world, with the exception of those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life. This latter group most certainly refers to elect believers within his Church, which as we have determined will yet remain on earth during this first three-and-one-half year period. However, it does not exclude many Gentiles and others living during this time who also faithfully worship the one true God.

“If any man have an ear, let him hear. He that leadeth into captivity shall go into captivity: he that killeth with the sword must be killed with the sword. Here is the patience and the faith of the saints” (Re. 13:9,10).

This verse is both a call for patience and a call for faith. Those who honor God must patiently endure the wrath of the Antichrist rather than rise up in rebellion, for if they attempt to do so they will be taken captive and will be “killed with the sword” (cf. Da. 7:25). The saints must patiently wait as many of their numbers are martyred before this violent chaos comes to an abrupt end (cf. Mt:24:22) with a great cataclysmic upheaval in the heavens (cf. Mt.24:29). Then, the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, as Jesus calls down for his Church to arise and join Him in the air (cf. Mt.24:30; 1Th. 4:15-18). Ultimately, Antichrist himself will go into captivity and must suffer eternal death in the lake of fire (cf. Re.19:20).

“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” (Re.13:11).

With the Church gone into Heaven and thus beyond his reach, Satan must now do something to divert the intrinsic religious desire of the remainder of mankind away from Jesus Christ and toward the Antichrist. To accomplish this, Satan will raise up a religious leader (a false prophet) at this mid-point of Daniel’s seventieth week to drum up religious fervor in the remaining populace for him. Unlike the Antichrist who rose out of the sea, this religious ruler (the second wild beast) will rise up out of the land. Unlike the first creature that led a consortium, this second beast appears to act as a single person. We see that he has very little military might or political authority of his own, having but “two horns like a lamb,” but his words exert great influence upon the remaining earth dwellers inasmuch as “he spake as a dragon.” The false prophet will emulate the Holy Spirit who indwells and reveals the wonders of Christ to the elect. Through the efforts of this false prophet, a global religious system will rapidly be established to bolster the world’s collapsing political government into a false theocracy of evil. The apostate temporal church remaining on earth, after the rapture of the true Church has taken place, will align itself with this movement, seeing it as a furthering of its own goals of peaceful coexistence and universal brotherhood. All religious differences will be sacrificed to comply with the insistent demands of the false prophet.

“And he exerciseth all the power of the first beast before him, and causeth the earth and them which dwell therein to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed” (Re.13:12).

The false prophet exercises the same power as the first beast, as he exhorts the entire world to worship the political Antichrist who supports him. He especially points out the purported power of the Antichrist to raise men from the dead, inasmuch as he has fully demonstrated this power through his own supposed resurrection.

“And he doeth great wonders, so that he maketh fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men, and deceiveth them that dwell on the earth by the means of those miracles which he had power to do in the sight of the beast; saying to them that dwell on the earth, that they should make an image to the beast, which had the wound by a sword, and did live” (Re.13:13,14).

The false prophet will perform many miracles and will even demonstrate his Elijah-like power to call fire down from heaven (cf. 2Ki.1:12). In doing this he opposes the two witnesses who have been given similar powers (cf. Re 11:3-5). Through this means, he will seduce reprobate mankind into worshiping the political Antichrist saying “that they should make an image to the beast, which had the wound by a sword and did live.”

“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” (Re.13:15).

This image is the “abomination of desolation (cf. Da.9:27),” which will be set up in the third temple at the mid-point of Daniel’s seventieth week. It is at this time that Israel will finally have their eyes opened to the evil intent and true nature of the Antichrist, thus initiating a mass exodus of Jews from Jerusalem into a place of safety that God has prepared for them (cf. Mt.24:15-20; Re.12:6,14). Only the sealed remnant of 144,000 will remain behind as we shall see in Revelation 14:1. In Old Testament times, images were carved out of wood, overlaid with gold, were carried about and propped up, but they could not hear, speak, or execute any action (cf. Je.10:3–5). Unlike those earlier idols, this highly advanced image of the Antichrist will appear to be alive through an artificial intelligence, which is programmed into it, and it will both speak and have the ability to root out those who do not worship the Antichrist to have them killed.

“And he causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads: And that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name” (Re.13:16,17).

Moreover, this image will require every living man, woman, and child from every station and walk of life to receive a mark that they must either receive in their right hand, or have placed in their forehead. This mark will contain the name of the beast and the number associated with him (i.e. 666; cf. Re.13:18 below). We already have microchips that could be permanently implanted to accomplish this. The important thing for us to understand here is that the Antichrist will have assigned a unique identification to every person who gives allegiance to him. Without this mark a person cannot carry on any business or commerce anywhere in the world; they cannot work to secure food, clothing, or shelter. More significantly, this mark identifies those who have it as a member of the kingdom of the Antichrist who totally owns them. To accept the mark of the Antichrist will be paramount to denying Jesus Christ and the rejection of his coming Kingdom. Therefore, it will be an indelible mark identifying the reprobate for eternal judgment, and once received it cannot be removed.

“Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number is Six hundred threescore and six” (Re.13:18).

In the past, this verse has been responsible for many determined attempts to root out the man who is or will become the Antichrist. In the present world we find the number “666” appearing at random all around us every day. Some have attempted to assign Hebrew, Greek, or Latin letters to these three numbers – the number of his name. The preterist has worked this out such that it must refer to the emperor Nero. Others say it refers to the Emperor Domitian and some even say Hitler. Some merely see the number 6 as a number designating a man, who is imperfect, in the same sense that the number 7 is symbolic of deity and absolute perfection. Following that reasoning, 666 could indicate the unholy trinity consisting of Satan, the Antichrist, and the False Prophet much in the same way that 777 can be seen to represent the triune Godhead.

However, this verse could only be intended to provide some insight as to the background and character of the Antichrist – not his actual identity. Conceding that possibility, there are two places other than here in Revelation where six hundred threescore and six appears in Scripture. These are found in 1Ki. 10:14 and 2Chr. 9:13. In both instances, it describes the tribute received by Solomon in a year’s time. Accordingly, the man of which “666” is the number could be Solomon-like. Further supporting this view, this verse begins with, “Here is wisdom” – another attribute properly attributed to Solomon. The Antichrist could be a man who appears to have the wisdom of Solomon and could also be a man of great financial wealth, as was Solomon. Following that assumption to an extreme, it is not unreasonable to assume that the Antichrist could come from, or perhaps only need appear to come from, the ranks of national Israel.

Even so, none of this speculation leads us anywhere that can be considered absolutely conclusive. Inasmuch as John apparently intended that the number 666 would readily identify the Antichrist to saints in the future, if not in his immediate day, the true identification of the Antichrist may only become possible when this man of sin actually appears on the scene. If so, only to that future generation will the number 666 have any valid meaning – thus making all current efforts to discover the identity of this man in this day and age impossible and therefore quite futile. © Arthur J. Smith June 2018