

Understanding Revelation Part 19

How to Survive the Antichrist

Revelation 12:17 - 13:1-10

I don't know about you, but I will be really glad when the election is over.

I'm really tired of the signs, the mailbox filled with postcards every day and the never ending stream of television and radio ads.

But I'm also very grateful for the privilege that we have in this country to participate in the selection of our governmental leaders.

The political process in this country over the last several years certainly demonstrates how man is constantly looking for leaders who will bring peace and order in the midst of conflict and chaos. And it also demonstrates the fickleness of the electorate when they don't get what they are expecting.

It's hard to believe that 6 years ago, Barak Obama and the Democrats were swept into office by promising hope and change. And now, many of those same people are removed from power because in the eyes of the voters they hadn't produced that which they had promised.

But those setbacks won't keep man from continuing to search for that one leader who can solve our problems and provide us with a sense of security and order.

The passage confirms that one day we are going to get what we long for, a leader who will bring worldwide peace and prosperity – at least for a time.

But then that same leader will be revealed for who he really is – a puppet of Satan who will demand to be worshipped and who will pour out his wrath on those who refuse to do so.

Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints.

In chapter 12, we were given a look, through the eyes of John at a great cosmic battle which is going on behind the scenes.

We see Satan and his demons will be permanently cast out of heaven to the earth.

Knowing that His time is short, and having been thwarted in his attempts to prevent the coming of the Messiah, Jesus, he will turn his attention first to Israel and then to the church.

In chapter 13, we get to see the means by which he is going to operate.

Satan forms an unholy trinity with two horrific beasts for the purpose of waging war against the followers of Jesus.

Today we'll focus on the first beast and then next week, we'll examine the second in more detail.

Chapters 7 and 8 of Daniel provide us with some relevant background regarding this first beast.

In both those chapters, we learn about the nature of the Antichrist and the descriptions that we find there are completely consistent with how he is described here in Revelation 13.

Let's see what we can learn about the nature of the Antichrist and then focus on how that should impact the way that we live our lives right now.

THE FIRST BEAST – THE ANTICHRIST

The first thing that we see about the beast is that he comes out of the sea. Throughout Scripture the sea is often a picture of mankind, particularly the Gentile nations

Sea = source of chaos and evil

We certainly see that in Daniel 7, where the four beasts that come from the sea represent the Gentile nations who will rule over Israel.

In the ancient world, the people also associated the sea with chaos and evil.

And it shouldn't be a surprise that the Antichrist is going to be able to rise to power in the midst of a time of chaos.

We have several examples throughout history that serve as pictures of this.

Probably the most well known to us is the rise of Hitler in Germany.

In the midst of the chaos following World War I, the people who were facing hunger and hopelessness were searching for a leader who could bring some order to that chaos.

And Hitler fit that desire perfectly.

He didn't need to take power by force because the people willingly yielded it to him.

It's easy to imagine how in the midst of the chaos that is certain to result from the events portrayed by the seals and the trumpets that the world will willingly give power to someone who comes on the scene and can bring order out of that chaos.

Similarities to the dragon of chapter 12

Like the dragon in chapter 12, this beast also has seven heads and ten horns.

However, there are also some significant differences.

The beast has diadems on its horns, while the dragon had diadems on his heads, for instance.

This clearly shows that the dragon and the beast are not the same creature, but that they are certainly related.

- Attributes

- o Represents both a kingdom and its leader

In chapter 17, we are given some further insight into what the horns and the heads of the beast symbolize. We'll look at these in much more detail when we get to that chapter, but for now, let's just focus on how they help us understand what we read here in chapter 13.

(Revelation 17:9-12) (ESV)

We are told that both the ten horns and the seven heads represent kings.

So it is clear that the beast, at least in one sense, must represent a confederation of political leaders.

But it is also clear from the context that the beast also represents the person who heads up that alliance.

We have something similar to that today right here in our country.

President Barak Obama is a person who holds the office of President.

But at the same time he also represents our entire federal government, which we even call the "Obama administration".

This concept that the beast represents both a person and an alliance of leaders is significant to the understanding of the rest of this passage.

- o Composite of all four beasts from Daniel 7

This beast contains elements from all four of the beasts in Daniel 7.

In particular we find here the leopard which represented Greece, the bear which represented the Medio-Persian Empire and the lion which represented Babylon.

And it seems likely that the seven heads may be the sum of those three heads plus the four heads of the fourth ferocious beast which represented the Roman Empire.

Each of those four kingdoms were powerful and ruthless,

But the kingdom of the beast will be unlike anything the world has ever seen

Combining the worst attributes of all these previous world powers.

- o Recovers from a "mortal wound"

This is probably the most difficult part of this passage to deal with.

There are two possibilities here and we just don't have enough in the text to choose between them.

The first possibility is that this is referring to a human leader.

After all, the blow is to one of the heads, and, as we have seen, the heads represent kings. If this is the case, then it appears that somehow Satan is going to counterfeit the resurrection of Jesus.

In fact the language used here is exactly the same as that used in Revelation 5:6 where Jesus is described as the Lamb who had been slain.

The one thing that we do know is that if this is the case, it will not be a genuine resurrection since Satan is incapable of giving life.

The second possibility is that the mortal wound refers to the kingdom itself.

That seems to be hinted at later in verse 14 where it is the beast, and not just one of the heads, that is wounded by the sword and yet lives.

If that is the case, then this would be consistent with what we saw in Daniel 7, where the fourth beast represented both the historical Roman Empire and as well as a future alliance that would have the same nature.

If you do a study of Daniel 7, you would referred to that as a "revived Roman Empire."

- Authority

- o Empowered by Satan

It is not surprising to us at all that the beast is empowered by Satan as we see in verse 2.

After all, this beast is the means by which the dragon, Satan, carries out his war against Israel and the church that we saw last week in chapter 12.

What is surprising, however, is that beast is also...

- o Given authority by God

In verses 5-8, we have ample evidence that the beast is given authority by God to carry out his activities.

He is given a mouth to utter blasphemies.

He is given authority over "every tribe and people and language and nation".

He is allowed to exercise that authority for 42 months.

And he is allowed to make war on the saints and conquer them.

Since the Scripture is clear that Satan does not have the ability to grant any of those things, there

would have been little doubt for John's readers that God is the one who is giving this authority.

- Activity

- o Blasphemes God and His followers

John's audience would certainly have been familiar with how the Roman government of their time usurped God and blasphemed Him when the emperors were acclaimed as deity and took on titles that proclaimed them to be God.

But the Antichrist is going to take this even further and openly blaspheme God with his words and his actions.

With his mouth, he will speak words of blasphemy both against God and His name and against those who worship and follow Him.

And he will also blaspheme God when he...

- o Demands worship

The Antichrist will demand the worship of everyone on earth.

And as a result of the actions of the false prophet, which we'll look at next week, every person on earth, with the exception of the true Christ followers, will willingly give their worship to him.

- o Wages war on believers

God will allow the Antichrist to wage war on believers, but only up to a point.

Both the time period and the nature of that war are limited by God.

Jesus also refers to the limits placed on the Antichrist as he wages war against the believers:

(Matthew 24:22) – *And if those days had not been cut short, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short.*

And at least from a human perspective, the Antichrist will be successful and will conquer the saints.

But as we've already seen and will see again, that apparent victory is short-lived because the death of the Christ followers is merely the door by which they enter into an eternity spent face to face with Jesus.

WHY THIS MATTERS TO US TODAY

It would be very easy for us to sit back and look at all of this and just conclude that this is all really good information, but since the Antichrist is not yet in power, this really doesn't matter to us today.

But just as it did matter to John's audience nearly 2,000 years ago, this passage does have implications for how we live our lives today.

Because even though the Antichrist may not be in power yet...

- The spirit of the antichrist is already in operation

(1 John 4:2-3) – *By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already.*

Although "the Antichrist" (with a capital "A") may not be on the scene yet, throughout history there have always been those who embody the spirit of antichrist (with a small "a").

That's why John wrote that the spirit of the antichrist is already in the world.

Sometimes we see that embodied quite clearly, like in the case of Adolf Hitler.

But most of the time it operates much more stealthily, behind the scenes.

But it is no less dangerous then.

So even though most of us here this morning may not still be here on this earth when the Antichrist comes to power, we still have to deal with the spirit of antichrist every day of our lives. And fortunately for us, this passage gives us some really practical guidance on how to do that.

HOW AM I TO RESPOND TO THE SPIRIT OF ANTICHRIST?

1. Carefully consider my worship

It's pretty unlikely that any of us in this room are going to go home and bow down to an image of Barack Obama.

But if we're not careful, we can still blaspheme God by allowing other people and things in our lives to usurp the place of God.

In a sense, the first of the Ten Commandments really embodies the other nine:

Exodus 20:3 – You shall have no other gods before me.

Even good things in our lives can become gods if we're not careful.

So how do I know if I'm allowing something else in my life to become a God?

I know it's a bit clichéd, but perhaps the best test is to look at our calendars and our checkbooks.

Because where we spend our time and our money are probably pretty good indicators of the things

in our lives that have the potential to become gods.

Let me just give you a couple of examples.

There is nothing inherently evil in spending time on the internet, but if you have time to be constantly updating and reading your Facebook page and you don't have face time with God in His word and in prayer, then perhaps you are in danger of having Facebook become your God.

There is nothing inherently wrong with spending money on things that you enjoy – maybe some new clothes or a vacation for example.

But if you're spending your money on those things while at the same time withholding your tithes and offerings from God, then perhaps you are in danger of having those other things become your God.

2. Wage war with the right weapons:

We need to keep in mind that even though the beast will physically attack the followers of Jesus, we are actually in the midst of a spiritual battle.

So we must make sure that we use the right weapons – not weapons of the flesh, but rather weapons of the spirit as Paul reminds us:

(2 Corinthians 10:3-4) - *For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds.*

Verses 9 and 10 provide us with some very practical advice on what weapons we are to employ in this battle:

• NOT fight

We are to avoid the human temptation to take matters into our own hands and try to oppose this satanic system by force.

There is certainly nothing wrong with participating in our political system here in this country. In fact, I think we could make a pretty good Biblical case that we are to be good citizens, which includes exercising our right to vote for candidates that we believe will be supportive of the cause of Jesus.

But what we do need to guard against is the temptation to try and fight what is ultimately a spiritual battle with the tools of the world.

Jesus commanded us to make disciples and change the world by changing the hearts of man, not by trying to change things through our political system.

• NOT fear

There is some really scary stuff in here.

But John did not write this so that his readers, including all of us, would live in fear as a result of what we see going on around us right now or what we know will occur in the future.

When Jesus sent His apostles out into the world to share the gospel, He knew that they were going to face hostility.

So He encouraged them with the same words that He would repeat just before His crucifixion when giving details of His return:

(Matthew 10:22) – *...But the one who endures to the end will be saved...*

He went on to explain how they were to endure to the end:

(Matthew 10:28) - *And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.*

Jesus warned the twelve that they were going to face tribulation in their lives of service to Him.

In fact, history records that all of them, with the exception of John, faced horrible deaths as a result of their faith in Jesus.

But they were not to live in fear of what they would experience physically because what really mattered, their souls, were secure as a result of their faith.

Especially in this section of Revelation that we are in right now, the picture isn't real encouraging. But if we'll just persevere until the end of the book, we see that God is going to take care of Satan and his demons once and for all.

And the eternal state of blessedness for those who endure to the end through their faith in Jesus is also assured.

So no matter how bad things may get, we have no need to fear.

• Faith

We are not to fight or to fear, but rather to live by faith.

Ultimately that is the only way to win the spiritual battle that we are engaged in.

But if I just say to you, "You need to live by faith", that's a nice cliché, but how do we do that in real life?

Obviously there are many ways to do that, but let me close by just sharing two ways that we can live by faith in our daily walk with Jesus:

o **Conform my thoughts to God's Word**

Just a few moments ago, we read from 2 Corinthians 10 where Paul exhorted us to fight our spiritual battle with the right spiritual weapons.

In the verses which follow, he gives us some practical instruction about how to do that:

(2 Corinthians 10:5-6) – *We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ, being ready to punish every disobedience, when your obedience is complete.*

Living by faith starts with our thought life.

We are to take every thought captive and make sure that it leads us to be obedient to Jesus.

That means that I must constantly be filling my mind with the words of Jesus.

That is the only way that I'll be equipped to obey Him.

So obviously that means I have to spend time not just reading the Bible, but also asking God to show me how He wants me to apply His Word in my life.

It also means that I must also guard my mind against any thoughts that would be contrary to the Word of God and which would hinder my ability to obey Jesus.

In our culture, we are constantly bombarded from every angle with words, images, sights and sounds that are contrary to the word of God.

So there are two things that we must do to guard against allowing those thoughts to remain in our minds.

First, to the extent it is possible, we need to guard against putting ourselves in places where we know we will be exposed to those thoughts.

We can control what music is on our iPods or what books we read or what TV shows and movies we watch.

But for those times where we don't have control of what we are exposed to we need to be constantly evaluating all of those things and comparing them to God's Word.

Then we can accept and embrace those things which are consistent with God's Word and reject those which are not.

o **Continue to do good**

In the midst of chaos and evil, it's real easy to just give up and withdraw from life at times.

But an important part of living by faith is continuing to do good in our lives, even when we might not be able to see any results from that good.

Peter certainly confirms that living by faith in the face of suffering requires us to do good in our lives:

(1 Peter 4:19) - Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.

Doing good even in difficult times is also part of the process of endurance that John writes about in verse 10. Not surprisingly, Paul confirms this same principle:

Galatians 6:9-10 – And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.

Paul makes it clear that we are to persevere in doing good, because eventually we will reap the rewards for that – maybe not in this lifetime, but certainly in the one to come.

Continuing to do good in the lives of others, particularly our brothers and sisters in Christ, is the outward evidence that we are indeed living by faith.

In the midst of the chaos of this world, many will turn to the Antichrist as the solution to their problems.

But ultimately he will turn against all who follow him because all he really cares about is saving \ himself.

But for those of us who choose instead to live by faith in Jesus, we might experience some temporary tribulation.

But we can be confident that Jesus will never turn His back on us, because He already demonstrated through His death and resurrection that He is more concerned with saving us than with saving Himself.