

**“Taking on the Enemy”**  
**(Courage and Discernment - weapons of spiritual warfare)**  
**February 15, 1998**  
**Revelation 13**  
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To what lies are you so susceptible that believing them you could be convinced to stop following Jesus?

What would it take to draw you away from trusting God?

What ideas, values or goals could be more influential in your thinking than God's kingdom?

If someone wanted to turn you away from being a Christ-following Christian, to just being an “in name only” Christian, what would best accomplish that goal?

Would the threat of physical death turn you away from following Jesus?  
In other words, would you be a Christian if it was illegal?  
Would you be willing to die rather than renounce your faith in Jesus?

Would fear of poverty , financial insecurity, lead you away from trusting and following God?  
In other words, would you be willing to give up your job, your income, if the alternative meant disobeying God?

Would fear of being alone lead you to sacrifice your principles and date and marry someone who doesn't love Jesus?

Contrary to God's word, have you come to believe that a person's life does consist of the abundance of his possessions and, like the rich young man in Jesus' parable, if you can't have both God and money, your life indicates you will choose money?

What fears or lies keep you from being a Christ-follower or could cause you to stop following him?

This is not just hypothetical - many people even in churches are unwilling to be Bible-obeying Christ-following Christians because they perceive the price is too high.

Something or someone has deceived them -  
something has caused them to fear the wrong things.

In chapter 12 of the book of Revelation we were introduced to a vision of the Apostle John's in which a dragon is seen as making war against the people of God.  
John says that dragon is symbolic of none other than Satan himself.

Throughout the Bible there are clear references to a great struggle that has been going on for generations -

Satan's struggle to take as many people to hell with him as he possibly can.

The Bible leaves no doubt that Satan is a person - a created being - that in anger against God has spent his known existence fighting against the purposes of God.

There is an enemy of your soul and it is Satan.

There is an evil power behind all other evil that is Satan's influence.

Chapter 12 of Revelation has made it clear we have an enemy.

**Chapter 13 will speak of two powerful ways Satan works to destroy people AND it will address the issue of how God's people resist him.**

John describes these two ways in fantastic symbolism.

He has a vision in which he sees **two beasts** joining forces with the dragon/Satan to accomplish Satan's ends.

The first beast has political, governmental, military power.

13:1-2 "And the dragon stood on the shore of the sea. And I saw a beast coming out of the sea. He had ten horns and seven heads, with ten crowns on his horns, and on each head a blasphemous name. The beast I saw resembled a leopard, but had feet like those of a bear and a mouth like that of a lion."

Hundreds of years earlier Daniel, in the 7<sup>th</sup> chapter of his book, had prophesied precisely concerning the coming world powers:

In a dream wherein he saw four beasts, he described the Babylonian, the Persian, the Greek and the Roman world powers that would come in succession.

One of those beasts, in Daniel's vision, was leopard-like, one lion-like, one bear-like and so on.

When John, in his vision, sees the beast of Rev 13 it combines the worst of all the beasts of Daniel.

If the power and evil intent of those previous world governments had been great - this last government's power for evil would be worse.

John described this latter-day beast as having horns, heads and crowns.

In the Bible, "Horn's, heads and crowns" have always symbolized power and authority.

And from whom does this beast derive his power?

Revelation 12:2b “The dragon gave the beast his power and his throne and great authority.”

This last great government gets its authority from Satan himself - this government is under Satan’s direct control.

We know that the book of Revelation is prophetic - looking forward to a time in the future.

When will this “beast”, this last great evil government be in existence.

Throughout our study of Revelation we have seen that John doesn’t describe everything in strict chronological order - we have to pay close attention as to when he is talking about the future and when he is describing the present or when he is talking about the past.

I have several times shown you this simple chronology.

It starts with the **OT** time (from creation to the time of Jesus).

The **Cross** stands for the time of the life of Christ on earth.

The word “**Now**” indicates all the time from the Apostles, the people of John’s day right up to the present time.

I believe that coming right out of this present age will come a time Jesus called the great **tribulation** - the period of time discussed in some detail in this book.

Following what we think is a relatively short period of intense tribulation Jesus will come as he describes so many times in the Bible.

That is the **SC**, the second coming of Jesus.

He will usher in a (**M**) thousand year reign here on earth following which will be the creation of the new earth which will exist for (**E**)ternity.

In chapter 11 John described the Tribulation time and he jumped ahead to describe in part the second coming of Jesus.

In chapter 12 John went back in time and described the animosity Satan has always had for the people of God and for Jesus. He was talking about the period of time leading up to the birth of Christ and this age in which we live where Satan’s goal is still to destroy God’s people.

When we come to chapter 13 and read it carefully we get the impression John is describing the period of time called the tribulation.

He has jumped ahead now to describe what it will be like during that period of intense turmoil on the earth.

But because of other texts in the Bible we know that what will be intensely true during the tribulation is already true in part.

The attack on God’s people may be more intense then but his attack is real now.

So we are discussing the tactics Satan is using now and in the future.

### What is this government and who is the beast that leads it?

In times past some have thought the Roman Catholic Church and the Pope were this government and beast.

For a while the Roman Catholic Church thought that Martin Luther and the reformation church were the beast of Rev 13.

Others in more recent times have picked the Trilateral Commission or the United Nations - but they are probably all wrong.

The governing power spoken of here in Rev 13 is an awesome power - apparently known to everyone.

Rev 13:3b "The whole world was astonished and followed the beast."

I believe given the scheme of things in Revelation, it is a world power that is yet to rear its ugly head.

But is this beast symbolizing an actual person or is it a movement.

Some refer to this beast as the "antichrist".

While that term is not used in Revelation it is used by John in his other letters to the churches.

And this beast certainly fits the descriptions Daniel and Paul give of a coming person and that Jesus predicts would come at the end of the age.

The word "anti" in "antichrist" means both "opposed to" and "instead of".

When we look at this beast we see that he certainly does both:

His task, as we will see in a moment is to oppose Christ and Christ's people and he certainly presents himself as God - "instead of" the real God.

Notice that he takes names for himself that belong to God alone

13:1 "on each head a blasphemous name"

Not only does he take God's names but he mimics the death/resurrection of Jesus - "Rev 13:3 "One of the heads of the beast seemed to have had a fatal wound, but the fatal wound had been healed."

And thirdly he takes the worship that belongs to God alone.

In Rev 13:4b "They also worshiped the beast and asked "Who is like the beast?" "Who can make war against him?"

Those phrases taken from the OT are elsewhere directed to God. "Who is like our God" and "Who can overcome God? - no one!

It seems consistent then, with other Scriptures, to refer to this beast as the antichrist.

**I don't think we can be dogmatic that this beast represents a single person but I do think a single person best fits the imagery presented here.**

And so the "beast" is a coming powerful leader of an evil government who will convince

the people of the world that he alone can lead them to the kind of power, security and affluence they so much desire.

But most importantly, he will be so powerful that no one will dare resist him.

**I want you to see what his purposes are:**

Revelation 13:7-8 “He was given power to make war against the saints and to conquer them. And he was given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation. All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast - all whose names have not been written in the book of life belonging to the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world.”

He wants to rule over the world in God’s place and he wants to destroy those who belong to God.

In our lives of relative peace and affluence it is rather difficult for us to imagine a time as is described in this text.

But John’s readers had no difficulty at all.

They could readily see the Roman government and the current Caesar as the embodiment of the beast.

People at many times in history and in our own day in other countries likewise can easily imagine such a coming day because they live, right now, in a situation very much like it.

And what is the tactic that this first beast - this antichrist - uses to control the world and to attempt to destroy God’s people?

**Fear!**

It’s the use of raw power to intimidate God’s people and all others.

It’s like the religious leaders and Roman authorities in Peter’s and Paul’s day telling them to stop preaching the gospel or lose their freedom and their lives.

It’s like Chinese Christian leaders today rotting in their prison cells because they must obey God rather than the government.

It’s like people in Pakistan, Iran, Indonesia, fearful of following Christ because it could mean their livelihood and/or their lives.

But this intimidation by Satan is **not reserved** to open threats of physical violence.

How often today does Satan use the fear of financial insecurity as reason for people to reject Jesus or to stop following him?

How many of us are more enamored of this present kingdom than of the Kingdom of God - so that our largest investments are in the here and now because we are afraid of being without?

How often today does Satan use fear of sickness and especially fear of death to keep people from trusting Jesus.

We get so consumed with hanging on to this life that in the midst of sickness or facing death when Satan insinuates that God doesn't love us or God's isn't in control - we buy it.

How often does Satan use our fear of being alone to intimidate us into all kinds of compromises with God's will.

Afraid that God's will and way for relationships won't "work" - so in fear they use whatever means are available just to have someone - even if it means someone after someone after someone.

If the antichrist will use the raw power of fear in those last days, the spirit of antichrist uses it **even today**.

I want you to note that the actions of the beast, the antichrist, were not reserved for the time of the great tribulation alone.

While it is true that assault on God's people and the intimidation of all people will be greater during that time John said, I John 4:3 "This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world."

Satan's tactics are the same today.

And how are God's people to respond to Satan's intimidation?

13:9-10 "He who has an ear, let him hear. If anyone is to go into captivity, into captivity he will go. If anyone is to be killed with the sword, with the sword he will be killed. This calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of the saints."

John says there are **two ways you overcome Satan's use of fear:**

Endurance and faith.

**Endurance** is doing what is right even when it is costly.

**Faith** is believing God even when all you have to go on is his word.

Satan comes when we are sick and says God isn't doing what he's supposed to do - and we say you're wrong Satan, I will not fear sickness or death.

Satan says your life will be ruined if you don't make so much money or take a certain job and you say "no it won't - I will not fear poverty."

Satan says if you don't abandon your principles about dating and marriage, you'll never have a happy life and you say I will not fear being alone.

I will not compromise what is right according to God's word just because Satan attempts to frighten me with dire consequences.

He may wreck his havoc on me as he did on Job but I will not yield.

Instead I will trust God - I will continue to believe Him - that obedience to his Word and to his will, will be worth it.

As I said last week - Satan is **most overcome** in our lives not by an inability to kill us - because kill he might - **Satan is overcome when he cannot take our souls to hell with him.**

Satan is overcome when we refuse to succumb to his intimidation and we remain faithful no matter what the circumstances.

Now the **second beast** presents **Satan's second method** for destroying people: If the first beast was fear, the second one is **deception**.

As in the case of the first beast so in this case - although it is possible that this beast represents a religious movement - the language seems to indicate that this is an actual person who leads a religious movement.

Later he is called the "**false prophet**".

It is possible that if the first beast is the "dictator" of that coming world power then this second beast is the "**Minister of propaganda**".

This second beast comes with **two horns like a lamb** but with the authoritative voice of the dragon.

Jesus said, "Mt 7:15 "Beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves."

This person is seductive, deceptive.

The first beast ruled through governmental might.

This second beast rules through religion.

But the second beast exists to serve the purposes of the first beast who exists to serve the purposes of the dragon or Satan himself.

Notice this beast, this person performs great miracles.

And "Because of the signs he was given power to do on behalf of the first beast, he deceived the inhabitants of the earth."

Paul had warned of that day: "The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, and

in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie..." (2Thess 2:9-11)

The second beast orders them to set up an image of the first beast to worship and they do it.

So convinced are they that this new religion is the right one that they willingly respond.

And so deceptive is the second beast that he gets the image to appear to be alive and even to speak.

It doesn't matter if there is an actual statue or not - this is a vision.

What matters, with or without a statue, is that there is a philosophy/religion that people accept as the truth in contrast to what God has said.

So seductive, so deceptive is the second beast that people all over the world willingly respond.

And when this philosophy/religion is fused with the government, it makes sense to people to adopt the financial practices of this new world power.

Now will there be an actual mark on the hands or foreheads of people?

While that is of course possible, the language of this passage leads us to believe the idea of the mark is simply a way of saying that the people pledge their allegiance to this way of government, religion and even doing business.

When in Chapter 7 it said that God's people, even during this age, are "sealed" or marked with God's mark - few of us started checking our bodies to see if we could find some physical marking.

Oh, it is rather fun to speculate like a bunch of sci-fi buffs but when referring to this passage, it is just a little too fantastic when writers and speakers talk about physical marks on the forehead, or computer chips implanted in people's hands, or uniform product codes on everyone as being what John is talking about.

It is much more in keeping with good interpretation of literature to see that John is merely representing in visual form what has taken place in people's thinking. – Everyone accepts the lies of the second beast and conforms to the new rules of the world.

Everyone that is except those who refuse to be deceived by the lies - those who are followers of Jesus Christ.

How do Christ-followers respond to the deceit of this beast:

Revelation 13:18 "This calls for wisdom. If anyone has insight let him calculate the number of the beast, for it is man's number. His number is 666."

Just as fear had to be rejected with endurance and faith so deceit must be rejected with discernment and truth.

It calls for wisdom and insight John says.

Before describing what that means today let me attempt to deal with this most intriguing idea of the "666".

It is hard to imagine all the interpretations these numbers have conjured up.

Many believe, following some ancient methods of deciphering encrypted codes, that when the letters of names are given numerical value it is possible to find the name that adds up to 666 - and when you do you will know who the antichrist is.

The problem with that is that all kinds of names have added up to 6665 depending on the method you used.

In times past as I said before certain Popes have been called antichrists because someone got their names to add up.

Others said it was Martin Luther.

Soon after John's day some said it was Caesar Nero.

But in more recent times some have said it was Hitler, Stalin, Mao, Henry Kissinger, Saddam Hussein and on the list goes.

Within 100 years of John writing this book, Christian leaders did not know who he meant if he meant someone in particular.

I concur with those who don't see the number as indicating a certain individual but as **describing the whole governmental/religious system** as being nothing but man's concoction.

Throughout Scripture God's number of perfection is 7.

777 is perfection multiplied.

666 is man's number - **im**perfection multiplied.

The point is that God's people must be able to discern man's "truth" - which are actually lies - from God's truth.

**Let me now show you some of the discernment that is necessary.**

I want you to remember with me the time in Jesus' life when he was in the wilderness fasting when Satan came to him to tempt him.

The account is found in Matthew 4.

Three times Satan comes to him, three times using deceit to seduce Jesus to do Satan's will instead of God's will.

The first time he invites Jesus to use spiritual power to meet his own immediate needs rather than using spiritual power to do God's will.

He suggests to Jesus to turn the rocks into bread since Jesus is so hungry.

Jesus resists him recognizing that what Satan wants him to do is be more concerned with the material and the immediate than with the spiritual and the eternal.

Jesus replied, "Man shall not live by bread alone but on EVERY word that comes from the mouth of God."

Satan wanted to seduce Jesus to see earth as bigger than heaven.

To see time as more important than eternity.

To think that Jesus immediate needs were more worthy of consideration than God's longer-range plans.

How many of us are seduced this way?

Made to believe that the immediate issues of job, money, importance, safety, security, happiness, relief from any pain (emotional or physical) are the most important issues we have to deal with and God's agenda will have to wait.

We buy the lie and Jacob we sell our spiritual inheritance for a bowl of porridge.

How about when Satan next came to Jesus and said to demonstrate his power and divinity by throwing himself from the temple wall and commanding angels to come and catch him.

How spectacular that would have been.

Imagine how impressive.

Imagine a short-cut to getting people to realize who he was.

But Jesus was unwilling to take a short-cut to being the God/man he came to earth to be.

There was no short-cut for Jesus to experience full humanity.

And there is no short-cut for us to experience full spiritual maturity.

Satan comes along as intimates that spiritual disciplines aren't worth it - that faithfulness won't get you anywhere, that endurance will end in disappointment - and we buy the lie and again go for the immediate.

Complete honesty, faithfulness to our spouses, integrity in our dealings with others, forgiveness and patience seem like such slow ways to get what we want - surely there's a short-cut.

No there isn't except a short-cut to a dead end.

I know this raises political issues but I couldn't help but think of his when I saw excerpts of Governor Romer's press conference regarding his long-time relationship with a woman other than his wife.

With here standing sadly by his side he tried to convince us there is a different ethic that is just as healthy and honest as fidelity.

I know he calls himself a Christian but he accepted a lie.

He couldn't wait for God's timing using God's methods - he took action of his own.

And a third time Satan came to Jesus and this time he promised Jesus the world if Jesus would give allegiance to Satan.

Satan offered Jesus a less expensive throne - one that didn't include the price of the cross.

But Jesus said "Away from me Satan. For it is written, Worship the Lord your God and serve him only."

Satan can offer much - but it cannot last.

Do you notice how Jesus resisted the deceit of the devil?

Every time he responds with the word of God.

As the deceit gets more subtle, the knowledge of God's word must be sharper.

Believer you can't withstand the lies of Satan if you don't know what God says.

So John says to his readers be discerning - be wise.

Satan comes now and he will come in the tribulation with raw fear **and** with insidious deception.

God's people will stand against him with endurance, faith, wisdom and insight.

How are you doing?

Are you steeped in the truths of Gods' word.

Have you grasped an eternal perspective that allows you to see through the immediate into the future?

Have you come to the place where you will say, "I trust God no matter what?"

Look at Ephesians 6:10-18 for a fitting close to this message.

MENTION "VISITOR RECEPTION" at end of service.