

lesson nine

FEBRUARY 23—MARCH 1

Satan and His Two **Allies**

“And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ” (Revelation 12:17, NKJV).



Even though Satan and his allies are strong and powerful, Jesus is stronger. While Satan is preparing to battle against God, we know the outcome will result in a barren wasteland where even sheep will find little to eat.

Rev. 13:8

Introduction *God Wins*

Living in the world today, it's easy to get overwhelmed by the sin and evil that meets us at every turn. It's easy to think that there is no possible way truth could overcome the sheer weight of error that is propagated throughout our world on a daily basis. And when we turn to Scripture, this seems to be affirmed.

Satan will never subdue those who are redeemed by the blood of Christ.

In Revelation 13, we find a beast rising up out of the sea (verse 1), empowered by the dragon, Satan (verse 4; cf. Rev. 12:9), to blaspheme God and everything He stands for (Rev. 13:5). To make matters worse, this beast is even given power to persecute God's faithful people (verse 7). This beast, the very instrument of Satan on earth, is not only approved of by the inhabitants of the world; it is worshiped—by all the world (verses 3, 4). What hope do God's people have of remaining faithful through such catastrophe? Has evil triumphed beyond the point of no return? Is God unable to stem the tide of humanity's rebellion?

We discover the beautiful answer in verse 8, where Scripture tells us that all humanity will worship the beast—all, we find, except those whose names are "written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." What a beautiful promise: Satan will never subdue those who are redeemed by the blood of Christ.

Yes, Satan is certainly active in our world today. Yes, the forces of error and evil may appear overwhelming at times. Yes, it may often seem as though truth cannot triumph. But the beautiful and reassuring truth we find in Scripture is that those who trust in God have no reason to despair, for God will preserve them.

In fact, when we turn back a chapter to Revelation 12, we discover that God has already won the victory over Satan (verses 7, 8). The very being who wreaks so much havoc in our world today, who leads us to believe that evil will surely triumph—he's a defeated foe! In fact, it is precisely because he is defeated, because he knows that his clock is ticking, that he is so intent on deceiving and destroying humanity (verse 12). He's trying to take us down with him.

The battle may appear overwhelming at times, but from Scripture, we know who will win. God has already gained the victory. The only choice we have to make is whether to remain faithful to the Victor or to give up in despair and join the losing side. As we explore the unfolding story of this great battle between Christ and Satan, let us choose to remain faithful to the One who sacrificed all to lead us to victory.

Overview (Rev. 12:17)

Revelation 12 describes the conflict between the dragon (Satan) and the followers of Jesus from the time of Christ until the end of the 1,260 years. In the final verse of this chapter, we find the dragon “enraged” (NKJV) with the woman and preparing to strike back against the followers of Jesus. Revelation 13 broadly outlines the sweep of this final attack.

Revelation 13 also marks a significant change in Satan’s strategy. Up to this point, Satan’s primary tactic has been coercion. “One might observe that the word ‘deceive’ does not occur at all in the historical section of Revelation (Revelation 4–11). But it is used regularly in the eschatological section (12–20) to describe Satan’s end-time activities in preparing for the final crisis.”¹ What Satan could not win through brute force he now seeks to win through duplicity. He does so by enlisting the service of two great beast powers; together, they form a powerful three-part alliance—a sort of false trinity—to try to stamp out the people of God once and for all. We will now look at each of these three powers individually.

Both of these beasts are powerful figures, but they are simply used by the dragon as tools in his deception.

The Dragon (Rev. 12:3, 4, 7–9; 13:2, 4)

The dragon is explicitly identified as Satan, and he originated in heaven (Rev. 12:7–9). However, we see elsewhere in Revelation 12 that the dragon also works through human powers; for example, he tried to destroy the baby Jesus (verse 4) using the pagan Roman Empire (cf. Matt. 2:13, 16). What does the dragon want? Worship is one of the key themes in Revelation, and we see in Revelation 13:4 that the dragon’s plan includes getting the world to worship him.

However, to get this worship Satan must employ trickery. Few would worship Satan knowingly or voluntarily. Thus, Satan gives his power, throne, and authority to an agent, the sea beast, who receives worship on Satan’s behalf (Rev. 13:2, 4). In order to ensure that the world worships this sea beast (and therefore himself), Satan also uses a second power, the land beast (verses 11, 12). Both of these beasts are powerful figures, but they are simply used by the dragon as tools in his deception. Although the dragon disappears into the shadows and is rarely seen out in the open, in Revelation 13 he is still the mastermind working behind the scenes through these two powers.

The Sea Beast (Rev. 13:1–10)

The second power of Satan’s false trinity is the sea beast. The sea beast

receives its power, throne, and authority from the dragon; and it even resembles the dragon (Rev. 12:3; 13:1). Just as children's applause for a puppet performance is really applause for the puppet master, so the worship of the sea beast is really worship of the dragon.

The actions of the sea beast include blasphemy against God and persecution of the saints, which matches Daniel 7:24, 25. This beast is the same power Paul described in 2 Thessalonians 2:3, 4. One of the key distinguishing characteristics of the sea beast is that it persecutes for forty-two months—the same time period as the 1,260 days that the woman was persecuted in Revelation 12:6. This sea beast power, acting as an agent of the dragon, is the apostate Roman church. For 1,260 years, from the papacy's establishment as the supreme ecclesiastical power in A.D. 538 to the abduction of the pope in A.D. 1798, papal Rome reigned. Revelation 13:3 notes that the sea beast received a deadly wound; but how would this wound be healed, and what would happen next? The answer is closely connected to the next power, revealed in the rest of Revelation 13.

The Land Beast (Rev. 13:11–17)

The third member of the counterfeit trinity is the land beast. This beast differs from the first in several ways. First, it arises from the land rather than the sea, indicating that it would originate in a very different area from papal Rome. Second, it arises around the time that the first beast receives its deadly wound in 1798. While the first beast had a long history, this second beast is new. Finally, while the first beast was terrifying in appearance, this second beast appears lamblike and harmless. The only nation fitting such a description is the United States, which was founded on the premise of providing religious freedom. But while appearing lamblike, this beast speaks like a dragon—in other words, it ultimately becomes a mouthpiece for the dragon and a tool in his scheme.

The land beast also has the same authority as the sea beast: authority from the dragon. Ultimately, the second beast is the powerhouse causing the world to worship the first beast and, by extension, the dragon. The land beast is also instrumental in causing the world to make an image to the first beast and causing all to receive the mark of the beast; the former is the restoration of the medieval church's religious system, while the latter is its counterfeit Sabbath.

Practical Application

Satan's hatred of Jesus in Revelation 12 motivates him to attack His followers using deception and counterfeit Christianity. Satan's powers of deception are quite formidable—nearly all the world will fall for his cunning plan. However, Jesus has revealed the devil's plan centuries beforehand, thereby demonstrating that His power is greater than even the greatest schemes of Satan. Praise God; Satan cannot take Jesus by surprise! The great lesson we must take from Revelation 13 is that we must choose Christ today and depend upon His wisdom and His power to stand amid this final deception.

1. Ranko Stefanovic, *Plain Revelation* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2013), p. 149.

Testimony

A Pestilence

Rev. 13:1–4

“In chapter 13 . . . is described another beast, ‘like unto a leopard,’ to which the dragon gave ‘his power, and his seat, and great authority.’ This symbol, as most Protestants have believed, represents the papacy, which succeeded to the power and seat and authority once held by the ancient Roman Empire. . . .

“‘Power was given unto him to continue forty and two months.’ And, says the prophet, ‘I saw one of his heads as it were wounded to death.’ And again: ‘He that leadeth into captivity shall go into captivity: he that killeth with the sword must be killed with the sword.’ The forty and two months are the same as the ‘time and times and the dividing of time,’ three years and a half, or 1260 days, of Daniel 7—the time during which the papal power was to oppress God’s people. This period, as stated in preceding chapters, began with the supremacy of the papacy, A.D. 538, and terminated in 1798. At that time the pope was made captive by the French army, the papal power received its deadly wound, and the prediction was fulfilled, ‘He that leadeth into captivity shall go into captivity.’”¹

It is important, especially in the little things of life, that we make sure to stick to the Word of God.

The first few verses in Revelation 13 pack in a lot. For those living in the late 1700s and early 1800s, the French had just captured the pope. It seemed impossible that Rome would recover. Yet, little by little, so slowly that it was almost imperceptible, relations were repaired.

Today, how often do we make little choices or compromises that seem not to matter much, but before we know it we are neck deep in a bad habit or an ill-advised friendship? It is important, especially in the little things of life, that we make sure to stick to the Word of God and what He has told us. It is important to prepare ourselves for what is to come but also to keep the devil and sin from sneaking into our lives and changing us from the image of Christ to the image of Satan.

REACT

Think of a time when you gave in just a little bit to sin. Did it feel good? Did it make you think that it was not so bad and you would sin again just in this one area if the opportunity came again? Because of that slipup, did you rationalize in your mind that it was OK to sin just a little bit in another area?

1. Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 439.

Daniel 7

Evidence *Doppelgängers: The Satanic Counterfeit*

As we learned in the Logos section, the thirteenth chapter of the Revelation of Jesus is quite an essential part of the book. It reveals the satanic triad. This section shows that Satan, the old serpent, and dragon, is looking to imitate the heavenly Trio's work. It focuses first on revealing the character and work of the sea beast. Some identifying factors for this beast are the 1,260 days, the mortal wound, and the claim for worship. It is clearly trying to be a doppelgänger of Christ—a duplicate of sorts.

The second beast is also trying to duplicate the work of another member of the Trinity—the Holy Spirit.

It is important to note the similarity between this beast and the horn from Daniel 7. They are identical in timeframe, purpose, and boastfulness. When you analyze the characteristics of this beast, you can identify it as the apostate church from A.D. 538 to A.D. 1798. It tries to duplicate Christ as the source of authority and power (monitoring of the Scriptures), convinces others that it is the only way to heaven (indulgences), persecutes the saints, and speaks of itself boastfully. Thus, one can see through history the fulfillment of this vision.

The second accomplice is described in Revelation 13:11–18. This second beast is representing another power. As with the first beast, the second beast is also trying to duplicate the work of another member of the Trinity—the Holy Spirit. Primarily, it points to the first beast (the Christ counterfeit) and exalts it. Moreover, it has power and makes sure to demonstrate it in an attempt to copycat the miracles performed by one of the Persons of the Godhead. Also, it marks those who worship the beast, in a similar manner that the Holy Spirit seals those who keep the commandments of God and have the faith of Jesus.

The earth beast can be identified as another entity in history, the United States of America (USA)—a country that looks like a lamb but speaks like a dragon. With the proclamation of so-called religious liberty, the collaboration with ecumenical movements, and plurality, the USA is a fit candidate to play an important role at the end of the great controversy. Its function and influence will bring attention to the sea beast and its purposes in the future.

All in all, Revelation 13 is about how the doppelgängers are trying to emulate Christ and the Holy Spirit. We ought to be acquainted and full of knowledge about the Godhead in order to recognize these sophisms from the enemy and his associates.

REACT

How can we teach the ministry of the Holy Spirit in a more concrete way?

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How-to *Loving the Truth*

2 Thess. 2:9–11;
Rev. 13:11–14

In the thirteenth chapter of Revelation, John sees two very different beasts: one that comes up out of the sea, and another that arises out of the earth. The second beast is presented as a deceptive and controlling power whose influence results in many people giving homage to the first beast. At the end of the chapter, John notices that anyone who is deceived by the second beast receives a mark, either in their right hand or in their forehead.

How can an individual avoid being taken in by lies?

While probably no one wants to receive the mark of the beast, most people are unaware of how to protect themselves from deception. After all, if a person is deceived, is it really his or her fault? How can an individual avoid being taken in by lies? Here are a few practical ideas:

Cultivate a love for truth. Second Thessalonians 2:9–11 describes the reason why so many people will be deceived by the beasts of Revelation 13. Paul states clearly that God allows people to be deceived if they refuse to love the truth when it is shown to them. If we don't love the truth, the only other option is to love a lie.

Respond to the convicting power of truth. Have you ever felt as though you needed to do something, but for one reason or another, you never acted on that conviction? First Corinthians 6:9, 10 points out that a key area of deception is believing that we can continue to live a life of sin and still experience salvation. Truth will sanctify us if we are willing to respond to its conviction (John 17:17).

Exercise belief and faith in Jesus. Jesus said that He is “the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). Failure to love and respond to truth is failure to love and respond to Jesus. He alone is able to transform our lives and cover us with His righteousness. When we love and believe in Jesus, He assures us that we will experience eternal life (John 11:26).

Experience assurance of salvation every day. Paul states that the Holy Spirit is able to assure us that we are children of God (Rom. 8:16). If we continue to love and respond to the truth that is Jesus, we continue to hold on to our position as heirs of the kingdom of heaven. Jesus encourages us to abide and remain in Him so that we bear fruit that testifies of a Christian life (John 15:4). Salvation is an experience that will keep us from deception only as long as we remain in the experience.

REACT

Why, do you think, is deception such a central aspect of the mark of the beast in Revelation 13?

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Rev. 13:1–18

Opinion

Lessons From the Beast

In studying Bible prophecy, it's easy to get bogged down by dates, times, and figures and thus lose sight of the message of the prophecy. Revelation 13 actually describes two beasts with multiple characteristics. What does God want us to learn from the descriptions of these beasts?

One of the lessons God teaches through this prophecy is the fact there is a right and a wrong way to worship. While we know that the first beast represents the papacy, this question of worship goes far beyond which church holds our membership records. This prophecy teaches us that no matter how sincere we may be, there are certain forms of worship God cannot accept. This principle is also brought out in the experiences of Cain and Abel (Gen. 4:1–7), the prophets of Baal and Elijah on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18:20–39), and even in such straightforward proverbs as “There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death” (Prov. 14:12; 16:25, NKJV). Revelation 13 revolves around questions of worship and is a call to examine whether our worship is right.

If we aren't completely committed to God, we really aren't committed at all.

The collision of true and false worship in the passages above also clarifies that in the end there will be only two sides—either we worship God or we worship the beast. There will be no middle ground. But this is true even now. Matthew 6:24 reminds us that “no one can serve two masters” (NKJV). God wants wholehearted surrender. If we aren't completely committed to God, we really aren't committed at all. On the other hand, Revelation 13:16 tells us that the beast accepts partial commitment. The symbolism of the forehead and hand represents our thoughts and actions. The beast is fine with either one—you don't really have to be convinced his way is right, as long as you live like it.

The warnings of Revelation 13 are followed by a complementary message in the next chapter. Revelation 14 repeats many of the cautions of Revelation 13 and expands on the consequences of our decision. However, it also reminds us that it is possible to live a truly committed and faithful life. May God help us to be counted among the faithful.

REACT

Revelation 13 reveals that there can be different motivators in worship. What is the basis of true worship, and how can we be sure that our attitude toward spiritual things is not based on tradition, pride, fear, or force?

Exploration

Action = Truth

Revelation 13

CONCLUDE

John the revelator identifies the sea beast (Rev. 13:1) as a power that “opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme His name, His tabernacle, and those who dwell in heaven” (verse 6, NKJV). The land beast is also described as a false teacher (verse 14). What is specified even more than these beasts’ blasphemies are their violent and forceful actions against the world and the people of God (verses 7, 10, 13, 14, 16, 17). For John, a lack of correct Christian doctrine is important, but even more emphasized and repeated in Revelation 13 is the fact that these beasts act contrary to the character of God, which gives human beings freedom, even if that freedom is against Him. As Christians, it is important that we not only speak the truth but act the truth. Our God is not merely a collection of beautiful ideas; He is a Person of beautiful action, freedom, and love.

CONSIDER

- Pondering ways that we may appear freedom-giving or forceful to those we are trying to reach. How can we continue to offer truth in a mission-driven, intentional way and also extend God’s love and freedom to those we are trying to reach?
- Making two lists: One list of the things that you feel that you could compromise or agree with nonbelievers on, and another list of things that you cannot compromise on because of your faith in Jesus. How might you be able to utilize both of these lists to converse in a friendly, win-some way with nonbelievers?
- Going online and looking for stories of people who are currently oppressed by persecution. What would your faith look like in their circumstance?
- Watching “Skit Guys - God’s Chisel” on YouTube. Compare and contrast God’s working in our lives with Satan’s working. What is the difference?
- Writing a prayer of thanksgiving to God for all of the positive ways that you enjoy the freedom He extends to you.

CONNECT

Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, chap. 2, “Persecution in the First Centuries,” and chap. 39, “The Time of Trouble”; *Steps to Christ*, pp. 18–22.

Francis A. Schaeffer, *How Should We Then Live? The Rise and Decline of Western Thought and Culture* (F. H. Revell Co., 1976), chap. 1.

David Kinnaman, *unChristian* (Baker Books, 2007), chap. 8.