

The Land Beast

Revelation 13:11-18

INTRODUCTION

- A. This world has seen many men rightly deserving the title “monster” — Stalin, Hitler, Saddam Hussein, Osama bin Laden, to name but a few in recent history.
 - 1. Our text this evening focuses on a monster from nearly 2000 years ago — we do not know his name — perhaps he represents a group of individuals — but we clearly see his work.
 - 2. Tonight, we want to examine this monster. for we can learn valuable lessons from him.
- B. In ancient tradition, there are two primeval monsters — one inhabited the sea and the other inhabited the land.
 - 1. In this passage, we see these two monsters working together to propagate the worship of the first beast.
 - 2. Throughout the remainder of Revelation, the land beast is called the false prophet; as a matter of fact, from verse 14 on, “the beast” refers to the sea beast, not this beast.
 - 3. Let us examine the land beast, the false prophet, to see what applications we can find for the modern world.

THE DECEIT OF THE PROPHET, vv 11-15a

- A. John saw a beast coming up out of the earth, v. 11.
 - 1. That this beast arose from the earth may indicate that he rose to power in Asia Minor, the place to which John wrote.
 - 2. If that is the case, this beast is probably an official who oversaw emperor worship in Asia Minor.
- B. This prophet had two horns like a lamb and spoke like a dragon, v. 11.
 - 1. The reference to a lamb mocks the description of Jesus as the Lamb in Revelation 5.
 - a. The horns, no doubt, speak of his power and authority.
 - b. Not only does the reference to a lamb parody Christ, this probably also refers to the prophet’s attempt to seem gentle.
 - 1) Scripture warns Christians about false teachers who appear harmless.
 - a) “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves” (Mt. 7:15).
 - b) “Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light” (2 Cor. 11:14).
 - 2) We need to be on guard against false teachers who, like this prophet, appear harmless.
 - a) There are many who would love nothing more than to see the church ripped apart by error.
 - b) We must be vigilant and examine everything we hear in light of Scripture lest we be led into error!
 - 2. The prophet also spoke like a dragon — this probably means that he speaks with a great, demanding voice.
- C. This prophet exercised all the authority of the first beast in his presence, and caused the world to worship the beast, v. 12.
 - 1. The false prophet received his authority from the beast.
 - a. This becomes even more obvious in verse 14 — “He deceives those who dwell on the earth by those signs which he was granted to do in the sight of the beast.”
 - b. This adds further evidence that this false prophet was a person who received authority from Rome to force people to worship the emperor.
 - 2. The prophet caused the world to worship the beast — this is his main role, one he received from the beast.

- D. The false prophet performed great signs, so that he even made fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men. v. 13.
1. This prophet performed great signs.
 - a. Emperor worship in the first century did not usually involve miracle workers, although miracle workers were involved in other cults of that era.
 - b. Some want to say that John envisioned a joining of the different religions prevalent in Rome, but this is probably just an apocalyptic way of saying that the prophet deceived the world.
 - c. Through Moses, God had warned the Israelites about false prophets who performed miracles (Deut. 13:1-3).
 2. This prophet even made fire come down from heaven in the sight of men — Like Elijah and the two witnesses in chapter 11, this prophet can cause [fire to come from the sky].
- E. The prophet deceived those who dwelt 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, v. 14.
1. The deceit this prophet propagated was accomplished by his ability to perform miracles.
 - a. Because this prophet was able to perform these miracles, many people believed in him.
 - b. Remember, one purpose of the miracles the apostles performed was to confirm the word they spoke.
 - 1) “They went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word through the accompanying signs” (Mk. 16:20).
 - 2) If someone came around here who could call down fire from heaven and perform great miracles, we would have a hard time not believing him. Many in the world believed this false prophet.
 2. The prophet told those on the earth to make an image to the beast — this probably has reference to making a statue to the emperor.
- F. The prophet was given power to give breath to the image of the beast that the image could speak, v. 15a.
1. Some magicians simulated the moving and speaking of idols. Lucian, a Greek writer, skeptically described how a prophet named Alexander made an idol come to life.
 2. The ability of this prophet to make this idol seem to live continues to propagate his deception.
- G. This is a very important passage in Revelation:
1. We see how those who claim to be teachers of truth can deceive their hearers — So many in this world are deceived by miracle workers, by false teachers, and by paganism.
 2. Unless we stay on guard and examine everything in light of Scripture, we can become deceived.
 - a. Luke praised the Bereans, for they “searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether” the things taught by Paul and Silas were true (Acts 17:11).
 - b. The Bereans did not want to fail for anything but the truth. We must just examine the Scriptures so that we fall for nothing but the truth.

THE TERROR OF THE PROPHET, vv. 15b-17

- A. The false prophet gave breath to the image of the beast in order that as many as would not worship the beast’s image might be killed, v. 15b.
1. The Christians to whom John was writing knew full well what John meant — they were seeing their fellow brethren killed for standing firm for Christ.
 2. These Christians also understood their present situation in light of history.
 - a. Daniel and his three companions were cast into a fiery furnace for their refusal to worship an idol.
 - b. Antiochus Epiphanes commanded Jews to sacrifice to idols and follow other pagan rites (I Macc. 1:50-51).
 3. What the first-century Christians could understand from this verse is that Satan stood behind the persecution — Satan gave the beast his power, and the beast gave the false prophet power.
- B. The false prophet caused all to receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads, v. 16.
1. In the Intertestamental Period, a Greco-Roman king required Jews to be branded with the ivy leaf, the emblem of Dionysus (3 Macc. 2:28-29).

2. There is an emphasis that all had to receive the mark — notice the text says “small and great, rich and poor, free and slave.”
 3. Religious cults in the first century often had their members receive a tattoo.
 - a. The mention of the mark here is probably an allusion to that practice.
 - b. The idea is that those who worshiped the beast and his image would receive a visible mark; one could tell who had worshiped the beast and who had not.
 4. This mark clearly identified those who were Christians and those who were not- Christians could in no way worship the beast.
 - a. Likewise, there needs to be a demarcation between us and the world - we cannot look like the world, we cannot talk like the world, we cannot live like the world. We must be different.
 - b. Is there a line of demarcation between you and the world? Are you different than the world?
- C. No one could buy or sell except one who had the mark or the name of the beast, or the number of his name, v. 17.
1. Those who did not worship the beast and receive his mark could not engage in business; the world tried to shut Christians out.
 2. The world continues to try to shut Christians out.
 - a. At work, many times Christians are expected to engage in activities that are sinful, and if we refuse to do so, we may jeopardize our position.
 - b. At school, many times Christians are expected to engage in activities that are sinful, and if we refuse to do so, we may jeopardize a grade.
- D. The point of this whole text is that the false prophet brought about a great persecution of the church. We will face persecution today.
1. The persecution we face in this society is nothing like the persecution our brethren in the first century faced.
 2. But, we will face persecution nonetheless.
 - a. “If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you” (Jn. 15:20).
 - b. “All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution” (2 Tim. 3:12).
 - 1) I seriously wonder if we have never faced persecution in any form — never been made fun of, never been passed over for a promotion, or something similar—if we are trying to live godly.
 - 2) Let us strive to live godly. Let us endure persecution.

CONCLUSION

- A. What about the number of the beast?
1. This number has been applied to everyone from the Pope to Martin Luther to Hitler to Henry Kissinger.
 2. However, the number more than likely applies to Nero Caesar.
 - a. In the ancient world, letters were used as numbers, and each letter had a numeric value.
 - b. People’s names were added up to have a numeric value — Graffiti was found in the rubble of Pompeii that read, “I love her whose number is 545.”
 - c. If one takes the name Nero Caesar and transliterates the characters into Hebrew characters, the number comes to 666.
 - 1) Many claim that since Revelation was written in Greek, that 666 can’t refer to Nero Caesar, since you have to put it in Hebrew.
 - 2) However, the Revelation contains many Hebraisms; therefore, we shouldn’t be surprised to see another reference to Hebrew here.
- B. Both the land beast and the sea beast lived among people.
1. There are still those today, like the land beast, who want to deceive people and persecute Christians.
 2. Will we stand firm in spite of those who want to deceive us and persecute us? Will we abandon our faith because of these people?