

The False Prophet's Deception

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 17 March 2024

[0 : 00] Please stand, if you're able, for the reading of God's word from Revelation chapter 13, verses 11 to 18. Then I saw another beast rising out of the earth.

It had two horns like a lamb, and it spoke like a dragon. It exercises all the authority of the first beast in its presence and makes the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose mortal wound was healed.

It performs great signs, even making fire come down from heaven to earth in front of people. And by the signs that it is allowed to work in the presence of the beast, it deceives those who dwell on earth, telling them to make an image for the beast that was wounded by the sword and yet lived.

And it was allowed to give breath to the image of the beast so that the image of the beast might even speak and might cause those who would not worship the image of the beast to be slain.

Also, it causes all, both small and great, both rich and poor, both free and slave, to be marked on the right hand or the forehead, so that no one can buy or sell unless he has the mark, that is, the name of the beast or the number of its name.

[1 : 35] And this calls for wisdom. Let the one who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man, and his number is 666.

This is God's holy and authoritative word. Please be seated. Jesus warned us in Matthew 24, if anyone says to you, look, here is the Christ, or there he is, do not believe it.

Because he said, for false Christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect.

Jesus warned us of that, that false Christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs.

Last week, in the first half of chapter 13, we saw how the first beast is that false Christ.

Some call him the Antichrist, but he is really a sum of all the Antichrists that arise from the time of Jesus' first coming and till the time of his second coming. He is the counterfeit Christ.

[2 : 54] He is the image of the dragon, just as Jesus is the image of the Father. And just as Jesus received authority from the Father, this beast received authority from the dragon.

And then today, we meet the second beast, who elsewhere in Revelation is called the false prophet. And this false prophet bears witness to the first beast, performs signs and wonders, and seals and marks the worshipers of the beast in the same way that the spirit of God, the third person of the Trinity, marks and seals the people of God, the church of Christ, and performs signs and wonders to verify the proclamation of the gospel.

And so in this way, the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet form an unholy triad. That's a mockery and an imitation of the true triad God.

But this false prophet not only parodies the Holy Spirit, he also imitates the people of God who are the witnesses of Jesus Christ. The false prophet facilitates the worship of the beast in the same way the church of Christ facilitates the worship of the Son.

And this second beast, the false prophet, dresses up the first beast, makes him look more plausible, makes him look more persuasive. He applies economic pressure upon people to get them to submit to the lordship of this second beast.

[4 : 19] But the main point of this passage is that we must remain faithful to Jesus and resist the spiritual deception and the economic pressure of the false prophet. And we're gonna first talk about the speech of the beast, and then the signs of the beast, and then finally the mark of the beast.

First, it says in verse 11, then I saw another beast rising out of the earth. It had two horns like a lamb, and it spoke like a dragon. Unlike the dragon who stood on the sand of the sea in chapter 12, 17, and then rising out of that, the Leviathan's watery chaos that Old Testament often speaks of in order to wreak havoc upon the earth.

And unlike the first beast that also rose out of the sea in chapter 13, verse 1, this second beast rises out of the earth. Unlike the dragon and the beast that come from the spiritual realm of evil and

chaos, this false prophet has his origin on earth.

He is the dragon and the beast's earthly representative. And he is particularly associated with those who dwell on the earth. And I've said this to you many times, that those who dwell on the earth is the technical phrase that John uses throughout Revelation to refer to people who are unbelievers, people who do not repent of their sins and are still living in rebellion against God.

We can see this in verse 14, which tells us that the false prophet deceives those who dwell on earth. And that's the connection there, why he rises from the earth, to deceive those who dwell on the earth.

[5 : 53] And the false prophet deceives people by looking like the lamb. He says in verse 11, that he had two horns like a lamb. The only lamb that's been mentioned in the book of Revelation so far is the lamb of God, the slain lamb of God that we saw earlier in Revelation chapter 5.

And that lamb representing Jesus also had horns representing his authority. And this false prophet, the second beast, also has two horns like a lamb. And number two, I'm not numbering one, two here.

The number two has symbolic significance in the book of Revelation, like all the other numbers that we see in the book of Revelation. In Revelation chapter 11, if you remember the church that bears witness to Christ was represented by two witnesses and also by two lampstands and also by two olive trees.

Two is a number that represents witnesses because the Old Testament law requires at least two witnesses as a basis for establishing a legal charge against somebody.

And that gets carried over into the New Testament. And that's why in Matthew 18, Jesus says that if someone sins against you and they don't listen to you, you have to take two or three with you as a testimony because that's the only way you can establish in the presence of witnesses the charge.

[7 : 19] And this is also why in Luke 10, when Jesus sent out his disciples, 72 disciples, he sent them out two by two to bear witness with a testimony. And so like the two witnesses who proclaim Jesus and his gospel to lead people to the worship of Jesus, this second beast with two horns makes the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast.

He is the witness. The witnesses. He represents the witnesses of the first beast who also was wounded by the sword and yet lived in another way.

He's imitating Jesus, the Lamb of God. And in the same way that the two witnesses of chapter 11 were patterned after Elijah and the most famous scene or miracle from Elijah's life is him calling down fire from heaven to burn up the sacrifice that were being offered to demonstrate that Yahweh, the Lord God, is the true God while Baal is a false God and an idol.

And so he is here. The second beast, the false prophet, imitates that by making fire come down from heaven to earth in front of people and in so doing he deceives the people who live on earth. But despite the fact that this second beast looks like a lamb and imitates the church, we know that he is not of the lamb and we know that he is not the true witness of God because even though he looks like a lamb, he speaks like a dragon.

[8 : 49] He says in verse 11, Jesus warned us in Matthew 7, 15 to 18, beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves.

You will recognize them by their fruits. Our grapes gather from thorn bushes or figs from thistles. So every healthy tree bears good fruit but the diseased tree bears bad fruit.

A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. This is, this false prophet is the wolf in sheep's clothing or rather a dragon in sheep's clothing.

And as Jesus taught us, we can recognize him by his fruit. And the fruit that we have to pay special attention to is his speech, what he says.

Because Jesus also said in Luke 6, 45, out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks. What comes out of the mouth comes up from the heart.

[9 : 50] The heart is the tree from which the words of our mouth come, are the fruit. People who make lewd comments with their mouths have hearts that are filled with lust.

people who gossip and slander with their mouths have their hearts filled with hatred and envy. People who seem to talk nonstop with their mouths often have hearts that are filled with social anxiety and insecurity.

People who are critical, frequently critical with their mouths often have in their hearts pride and ingratitude. The things that we say are never mere slips of the tongue.

They represent what's in our heart. They reflect what's in our heart. And that's the case also with this false prophet. He looks like a lamb but we know what's in his heart because he speaks like a dragon.

Like the dragon, this false prophet denies that Jesus is the Christ, the son of God who came in the flesh, human flesh, to save us. Like the dragon, the false prophet utters blasphemies against God and his people, slanders the church, says that we are not the people of God.

[11 : 12] The false prophet speaks the lies of the dragon rather than the truths of God. And that's how he recognized the false prophet. And this is why it's so important for us as God's people to read and study and meditate on and memorize the scriptures.

Psalm 119.11 teaches us that this is how we live an obedient life and avoid sin by storing up God's word in our hearts. The false prophet's whole purpose is to make the beast look plausible and persuasive and we will not be able to tell Christ apart from the counterfeit Christ unless we are intimately familiar with the character of Christ and the word of Christ.

nowadays it's scary how artificial intelligence can create these deep fake videos of real people saying things and doing things that they never actually did.

I don't know if you've seen some of those before. The false prophet is a living deep fake. deep fake a living deep fake of the people of God.

He is an impersonator and a deceiver and how are we going to expose him? By testing his words against the word of God. Do his words glorify Christ?

[12 : 37] Please Christ according to scripture or do his words lead us astray from scripture and to the worship of another? When Russia's war on Ukraine began on February 24th or 2022 I can't believe it's already been two years there was a Russian orthodox pastor named Yonin Burden who was fined \$273 which doesn't sound like a lot to us but in their currency that's over a month of his salary and then he was threatened with jail and then tried in a sham court and then he was forced to resign from his pastorate in his church because he spoke out against the war.

This is what he said Russian soldiers are killing their brothers and sisters in Christ. We Christians cannot stand on the sidelines while brother kills brother. Christian kills Christian.

We cannot bashfully close our eyes. We cannot call black white. The blood of Ukrainians is not only in the hands of the leaders of the Russian Federation and the soldiers who carry out their order.

Their blood is on the hands of each of us who approve this war or stand silent. In contrast the patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church Kirill of Moscow put his official stamp of approval on the war calling those who don't support it as internal enemies of Russia and calling patriotism the greatest virtue.

In the past he has called Putin's reign in Russia as quote a miracle of God and that the Russian soldiers who die in their war against Ukraine have quote undoubtedly committed an act equivalent to sacrifice.

[14 : 28] They will have sacrificed themselves for others and therefore we believe that this sacrifice washes away all the sins that a person has committed. I don't find that in the Bible.

He's promising forgiveness of sin and salvation to Russian soldiers who die in the war regardless of whether they have saving faith in Jesus Christ or not. But scripture teaches us that it's Christ's sacrifice not our sacrifice that atones us.

scripture teaches that every empire will fall including Russia and including the United States of America. Only the kingdom of God will stand forever.

Scripture teaches us that our ultimate allegiance is not to country but to God because they're not one and the same. Patriarch Kirill might be the highest spiritual authority in Russia but he is not getting the people to worship Christ by saying those things.

He's getting the people to worship the beast the state powers. So don't be deceived by the sheep's clothing. Pay attention to how the false prophet speaks like a dragon.

[15 : 56] Even in our country don't believe the religious leaders who try to sell you these messianic intentions. That's the speech of the beast.

Now let's look about the signs of the beast. Verse 12 says that the false prophet exercises all the authority of the first beast in its presence and makes the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast.

Since the dragon gave his authority to the first beast and now the first beast gives all of his authority to the false prophet the false prophet is ultimately exercising satanic authority.

The dragon's authority. And it is with that authority that this false prophet as it says in verses 13 and 14 performs great signs even making fire come down from heaven to earth in front of people. And by the signs that it is allowed to work in the presence of the beast it deceives those who dwell on earth telling them to make an image for the beast that was wounded by the sword and yet lived. This is treachery.

[16:58] in the same way that Moses similar to the way that Moses did miraculous signs in Egypt to demonstrate that Yahweh is the true God not these Egyptian gods or Pharaoh in the same way that Elijah called on fire from heaven to prove that Yahweh not Baal is God this counterfeit prophet does similar signs and miracles but not to speak the truth not to proclaim the true God but to instead to deceive people who dwell on the earth to worship the beast as God.

So this false prophet is not unlike those sorcerers in Pharaoh's court who tried to imitate or copied Moses' miracles and this is a stark warning for us to not run after miraculous signs.

While the signs and wonders that Jesus did and later his apostles did serve to verify and to show that they were true messengers of God doing God's work and proclaiming God's word Jesus also often decried those who came to him looking for signs instead of paying attention to his words what he taught.

He says in Matthew 12:39 an evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign. As I said earlier we can recognize the dragon the beast and the false prophet by their speech by what they say not by their signs.

Deuteronomy 13:1-4 is very clear. It says if a prophet or a dreamer dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder and the sign or wonder that he tells you comes to pass and if he says let us go after other gods which you have not known and let us serve them you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams for the Lord your God is testing you to know whether you love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul you shall walk after the Lord your God and fear him and keep his commandments and obey his voice and you shall serve him and hold fast to him even if the so-called false prophet so-called prophet does signs and wonders if he tells you to go worship other gods if he leads you astray from Jesus our Lord and Savior then we must not follow him I mean think about how compelling that would be signs and wonders wouldn't that be tempting this is a warning against our human tendency to judge according to the appearance of things and not according to the substance of things this is a warning against our human tendency toward pragmatism seeking practical working solutions without considering whether those solutions are true or good how many Christians have been led into unfaithful churches because they were attracted to the most impressive signs and shows rather than to the faithful preaching of the gospel how many

[20:20] Christians have been led to unfaithfulness by the same things because we've been asking what works what's popular what's trending rather than asking ourselves what's biblical the social gospel works in mobilizing people in bringing about some social change it works the prosperity gospel works it brings thousands of people through the doors of the church and fills the church coffers but they don't actually save anyone because these are empty signs when we ask you know what works rather than what's biblically leads us to man-centered worship rather than God-centered worship when we ask what works rather than what's biblical we appoint as ministers of the gospel people who are gifted but do not meet the scriptural criteria or have the necessary character they might look successful at first as gifted people often are but eventually abuses and scandals and heresies follow because they don't have the character to weather the rigors and the pressures and the temptations of ministry but wait he performs miracles he must be a true prophet not necessarily the false prophet has impressive authority he performs signs he is backed by powerful figures he is very plausible and persuasive but we must not follow him and they may come with consequences it says in verse 15 in the false prophet was allowed to give breath to the image of the beast so that the image of the beast might even speak and might cause those who would not worship the image of the beast to be slain in the first century when revelation was written priests of the imperial cult would make literal idols of emperors and other gods and demand that people bow down before them and worship them emperor

Caligula even tried to place an idol of himself inside the most early place of the Jerusalem temple and emperor Domitian also set up a colossal statue of himself in Ephesus and demanded that people worship him and historians note that some of these imperial cult priests employed ventriloquism and false lightning and other similar signs to persuade people that there is real divinity

and deity behind these idols not all of these things happened during John's day necessarily but similar events may have happened already afoot by John's time and those who refused to join in that idolatry were sometimes slain and often faced dire economic consequences as we see in the following verses this setting up of the image of the beast is an allusion most likely to Daniel chapter 3 where the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar sets up a golden image of himself and demands that all people and nations and language bow down before it and worship it and you know the story Daniel's three friends Shadrach Meshach and Abednego they refused to worship the image and when Nebuchadnezzar threatens them with the fiery furnace and they finally says to them who is the God who will deliver you out of my hands Shadrach Meshach and Abednego reply if this be so our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace and he will deliver us out of your hand O king but if not be known to you O king that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up they believe that God can deliver them and that he will deliver them from the hand of the king Nebuchadnezzar but even if he doesn't they said we will not bow down before your golden image we know that early church that was persecuted took inspiration from the story because if you go to the catacombs of Priscilla which is an underground cemetery that the

Romans used you can see a fresco painting on the wall of the three friends of Daniel in the fiery furnace accompanied by Holy Spirit in the form of a dove and not harmed by the fire Christians because they were so frequently persecuted sometimes took shelter and used the catacombs the tombs as a sanctuary and sometimes they worship there which is why we see and this is the image that they had to remind us that we don't suffer alone there are those who have gone before us who have borne faithful testimony to Jesus in order to enforce the worship of the beast the false prophet will mark the earth dwellers with the mark of the beast it says in verses 16 to 18 also it causes all both small and great both rich and poor both free and slave to be marked on the right hand or the forehead so that no one can buy or sell unless he has the mark that is the name of the beast or the number of its name this calls for wisdom let the one who has understanding calculate the number of the beast for it is the number of a man and his number is 666 this number has sparked all kinds of imaginative speculation and controversy throughout church history

[26 : 36] I mentioned to you you might remember this I mentioned to you my first sermon in our revelation series a few years ago no not the sermon wasn't a few years ago but a few years ago some people were proclaiming that the COVID vaccine is the mark of the beast that's unfortunate because our pastoral intern was working for the company that made one of them and they were saying that because the word corona has six letters so that's obviously the first six of the 666 and then you count up the numerical value of the letters in the word corona c is the third letter in the alphabet so it's number three and so on and then you add up the numbers you get 66 can that be coincidence 666 that is certainly not the mark of the beast a few decades ago when Ronald Regan was elected president some people noted that the winning lottery number in Maryland on election day

November 4th was 666 that of course got the conspiracy years going and later some people noted that Ronald Wilson Regan the first middle last name all have six letters he's kind of a hapless president because he didn't help his case when after his retirement he purchased a house in Belle Air Los Angeles with the address 666 St.

Cloud Road and his wife was wise to promptly change the address to 668 if you think only Republicans can be the antichrist then think again because it was rumored that John F. Kennedy received precisely 666 votes during the 1956 Democratic Convention which I looked into and it turns out that he didn't but doesn't stop rumors from spreading and also JFK died of a head wound like the beast that dies of a mortal wound and some people have written books predicting that JFK will come back from the dead as the antichrist still others have suggested that the beast is Mohammed saying that a certain Greek spelling of his name Maometis adds up to the number 666 666 the only problem with this theory is that his name is never rendered Maometis in all extant literature and the numbers do not add up to 666 many other names have been suggested throughout church history Caligula

Domitian Caesar God the Nicolaitans Ioanthus Taten Saladin King Charles I King George III of the American Revolution Napoleon Latinus which means Latin speaking man which some people claim Pope is the antichrist Phoebus Balaam Oliver Cromwell Kaiser Wilhelm Hitler Mussolini Anwar Sadat and Saddam Hussein among others this should caution us against numerological

speculations theologian George Salmon suggests some tongue in cheek rules for how to calculate the number of the beast he writes this is his first rule first if the proper name by itself will not yield 666 add a title secondly if the sum cannot be found in Greek try Hebrew or even Latin thirdly do not be too particular about the spelling it's it's really funny but not so funny because it's exactly what's happened with some of these suggestions

[30 : 44] Salmon concludes from this quote we cannot infer much from the fact that a key fits the lock if it is a lock in which almost any key will fit this is a wise general caution against mathematical and numerological speculation having said that I'm going to kind of break that rule and suggest to you that there is one historical name however that I do think John is referencing this is not definitive and it is a bit speculative but because John alludes to this man and the legend surrounding him repeatedly throughout the book I think the identification is likely and that man is Nero in many ancient languages the letters of the alphabet were also given numerical value and gematria which is the practice of representing names and words with numbers was commonly practiced by

Jews and Greeks and Romans there are many examples literary examples that we have of names of emperors names name of Jesus and even name of God being represented with gematria with using these numbers in other literature and normally I don't think you should use gematria on the number that you see numbers that you see in the Bible but because I think that leads to this kind of fruitless speculation and conspiracy theories however I do think that John is pointing us to that practice here because verse 15 says let the one who has understanding calculate the number of the beast for it is the number of a man and his number is 666 John uses many symbolic and figurative numbers throughout his book but never not once does he tell us in those other places to calculate the number and or tell us it's the number of a man but here he tells us that to calculate the number for it is the number of a man and that indicates that number 666 represents a man's name somehow if you transliterate the

Greek for Nero Caesar into Hebrew the letters add up to 666 it isn't the most common spelling of Nero Caesar but there was an Aramaic papyrus document that was discovered dated to stating the second year of Nero Caesar and that's spelled exactly that way and that name spelling yields 666 some people object that John wouldn't have used Hebrew for Nero Caesar to yield 666 by Gematria if he's writing to Greek speakers which he is here because Revelation is written in Greek that's a fair point but verses like Revelation 9 11 and 16 16 where John explicitly gives the Hebrew name for words like Abaddon and Armageddon suggest that John did have in mind that some of his audience would know Hebrew or be familiar with Hebrew words moreover there are some ancient manuscripts of this passage in Revelation that have variations of this verse 18 and that those variations have instead of the number 666 number 616 and if you use

Gematria on the Latin translation of Nero Caesar you get 616 and I think these variations confirm that that's what the original audience and the people had in mind the Nero identification is confirmed by the fact that John as we saw creatively uses the Nero returned or the Nero living again legends that were popular in his day beasts to refer to the beast who dies who has a mortal wound but recovers is seen living again for example the Ascension of Isaiah which is basically fan fiction in the style of scripture from the first or second century writes of expectation of Nero's return saying all people in the world will sacrifice to him and he will set up his image before him in every city the Sibylline Oracle which predicted the return of Nero called him the great beast and that appears to have been a nickname that was quite often used of

Nero because of emperor Marcus Aurelius also called Nero a beast and a Greco-Roman philosopher Philostratus represents Apollonius of Tiana as describing Nero as a beast more savage than the wild beasts like lions and panthers because flattering him makes him even more ferocious and vicious and he says and Apollonius writes even wild beasts do not eat their own mothers but Nero quote has gorged himself on this diet this is referring to the fact that Nero killed his own mother so he is often referred to as the beast John could have simply used the name Nero for Gematria but he uses a title Nero Caesar because he has a literary and theological reason for why he wants the number to add up to 666 first if you translate the Greek word for beast into Hebrew it has the numerical value of 666 by showing that

[36 : 20] Nero Caesar has the same numerical value as the beast both in Hebrew John is driving home the point that Nero is in fact the beast I don't think he's saying that Nero would literally be resurrected and come back to life at the end times but because Nero