

The Coming Man of Sin

Message #2 in a series of 4 on Bible Prophecy

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Last week we looked at the biblical teaching concerning the coming time of trouble we are facing in this world; various predictions from both the Old and the New Testaments which taken together form a composite picture of what Jesus called "The Great Tribulation,"

"a time of trouble such as never has been in the history of the world and never will be again."

Those words are very dramatic in their possibilities and we tried to take a look at what the Scripture calls them. Jeremiah for instance calls them, "The time of Jacob's trouble," which highlights the fact that this will be an especially serious time for the Jewish people, for Israel as a nation. We are all aware, of course, of the terrible injustice and awful slaughter that the Jews went through under Hitler in the Holocaust, the like of which has probably never been seen on earth before. Yet judging from the record of Scripture, the time that lies ahead for Israel is even worse than that. A time anti-semitic spirit will be manifest in the whole world. Perhaps some of the rising anti-semitism of our day is indicative of the approach of this time when Jews will be hated of all nations, not for any reason in themselves but because they are the chosen people of God.

In the book of Revelation this time of trouble is called "The harvest of the earth." It is the time when God is going to at last correct the injustices, the wickedness of men. I am often amazed at the patience of God when you think of how many times everyday his name is blasphemed, his ideas laughed at, his own person and power scorned and mocked and set aside, his values ignored and his warnings totally ignored as well. It is amazing, when you think God has been as patient as he has and has allowed human existence to go on. But the Scripture has always promised that there is coming a day of recompense; a day when God will at last avenge himself for all the injustices that man has perpetrated upon him. This is the nature of the great time of trouble that is coming.

Tonight we are going to take a look at one of the strange personages that appears on earth during this time of trouble. He is familiarly known as the Antichrist, the Man of Sin, or the Man of Lawlessness. Actually it is strange that this individual ever gains the title "The AntiChrist" because there is no one place in Scripture where an individual is referred to or prophesied under that title. The only use of the term is found in the epistles of John. In I & II John reference is made to "many antichrists." Nevertheless the Scriptures do focus upon a very remarkable person who is to appear to whom that title has been given, and we will refer to him under that name. As you know, it has been the practice of Christian believers for centuries to pick out some person in their own day they could regard as the Antichrist. If you look back over the scope of almost 2,000 years of Christian history you can find a great number of names that have been proposed as the Antichrist. Early in this era Tamerlane, Genghis Khan, Muhammad the prophet were all regarded as fulfilling the prophecies of the Antichrist. Later on in the Protestant churches of the Reformation it was very popular to regard the Pope as the Antichrist, and many people, still today, regard the Pope and the papacy as the fulfillment of these predictions of the coming "Man of Sin." I remember back in World War II, it was very common to hear that Hitler was the

Antichrist and Mussolini. Today you can buy a lot of books on prophecy very cheaply that picked out men like that and labeled them as definitely the antichrist. Since that time there have been men like Kissinger and Khrushchev. I once saw a book in which Eleanor Roosevelt had been picked to be the antichrist. We don't want to be sexist in these areas. All of these figures have passed away, and it should serve as a warning to us against trying to identify any one individual living today as the antichrist. We will only contribute to the list of defunct antichrists who have passed from the scene of history.

What we do want to do tonight is take a careful look at what the Scriptures say about this amazing figure. Though this planet on which we live, the stage where the great "end times" drama is going to be worked out is clearly in the Scriptures, nevertheless, the real antagonists are behind the scenes. We'll never understand the Bible, nor will we understand history, until we see that earth, almost since the very appearance of mankind on it, has been the scene of a great battle. Earth is the battlefield, and all those who are born into life on this earth are born into battle conditions. This is the Biblical and Christian explanation for the fact that life does not go the way we would like it to go. Man has many dreams for peace on earth. Individually, collectively, as nations, there has long been before the human mind a picture of a beautiful earth filled with peace, harmony, righteousness, gladness and joy. Everybody longs for that. Everybody hopes for it. When I was just a young man a popular song of the day spoke of a young married couple building their home. The words said something like this, "We'll build a sweet little nest, somewhere in the West, and let the rest of the world go by." That has been the hope and dream of many people. A decade ago a whole generation of young people tried to drop out and find that kind of blissful utopia by going out into nature, into the woods, into the parks and the flower children appeared. Yet that experiment, too, fell apart. The dream faded, disillusionment set in and today you find very few left who still hope that kind of fulfillment can be realized.

The reason, of course, is that the earth is engaged in a battle, a tremendous conflict between cosmic powers which are far greater than any human forces and which have been engaged in a life and death struggle during the whole scope and sweep of human history. I do not mean to imply by that that the Devil, who represents the evil side of those cosmic forces, is a kind of god on the equal of God himself. The great personages of this drama are, on the one side, the Son of God himself, the Lord Jesus ascended into the heavens, seated on the throne of his Father and waiting, as the Scriptures tell us, until the earth be brought into subjection to him. Not only is he seated in the heavens but, as he himself told us, by means of the Spirit, who can be everywhere at once, he also is on earth working among the nations, present in his church, and in this strange and mysterious way God is carrying on an eternal conflict with the Devil. Associated, of course, with the Son is the Father. The Son of God appears in many titles and descriptions in the Scriptures. He is the one who Daniel described as "The Son of Man" comes to the Ancient of Days to receive the kingdoms of the earth from his hand. He is the one whom David described as God's Son whom he "sets as his king on his Holy Hill of Zion." All these Old Testament prophets spoke of him. He is the "Angel of the Lord" that Moses described in the books of Genesis and Exodus, etc. He is the one whom John the Revelator saw as the "Lamb slain before the foundation of the world," the only one who has authority to open the seven sealed book of the last times and bring to pass the consummation of the history of the world.

When you read the Bible you get a look behind the scenes, and you see the explanation, very relevant, very real, of why we struggle so in this life. Idealist, liberals, naive people of various sorts try to forget all that or write it off as though it does not exist. Yet the hard harsh realities of history tell us that this is what happens. Mankind cannot work out his problems because we are engaged in a great battle between these opposing forces.

In the other corner is Satan, the great Dragon, in his character as a deceiver, as a destroyer. He is the one who loves to take humanity and destroy it in any possible way. He is the one behind the widespread traffic in drugs to destroy the mind. He is the one behind the widespread illicit practice of sexual wrongs to destroy the body and destroy the whole beauty that God intended in sexuality. He is the one behind every murder, every accident. Every taking of human life by violent form that occurs in the world is the result of the activity of the Great Destroyer that is loose among us. We will never understand our lives until we understand that. He's the liar who is behind all the deceitful secular illusions of our day, the propaganda concerning how to look at yourself and how to look at life that is beamed at us constantly from the propaganda mills of the media around us. We must understand this if we are going to understand life at all. He is the one who Moses spoke of as the "Serpent" in the Garden of Eden, the deceiver, "more subtle than all the beasts of the field," subtly setting forth

his lies before the human race. He is the one who appears in Revelation as the Great Red Dragon whose tail draws the stars, the angels, the angelic hosts into collaboration with him and whose power shakes the earth when he is thrust out of heaven and cast down into the earth knowing that his time is short. I just survey all this that we might catch the mood of Scripture concerning the opposing forces of earth.

As we learn from Scripture, God himself exists in threefold unity. There is not just a single God, but there is one God existing in a threefold unity of being. I am not going to preach upon the Trinity tonight or try to explain it. It is a difficult concept I grant you. But we know that this is the nature of God.

If it is the nature of God, it makes sense that Satan in his attempt to deceive the race, as Jesus said "a murderer, a liar, and a deceiver" would also try to appear historically in a triune form. This is what you have in the book of Revelation with the appearance of the Great Red Dragon who is specifically called "Satan" that old serpent the devil, who raises into being two remarkable beasts. Those two beasts constitute, with the Great Red Dragon, a satanic trinity. Satan in the counterpart of the Father. Just as the Father is the source of all good, the source of love, the source of life, so the Great Dragon becomes the power behind all evil in the universe, and the source of all lies and deceits and delusions among men. The Son is the visible focus of the life and the truth of God. When he came among us John declares "We beheld his glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father full of grace and truth." That is the life of God. As the Son is the visible focus of all that is in the fullness of the Godhead so the Beast out of the Sea which we see in Revelation 13 becomes the focus and center of all the power of evil in the earth. Just as the Holy Spirit becomes the witness in history to the reality of the Father and the Son, making these two invisible personages (to us now) visible, real, not visible by eyesight, of course, but visible to our inner eye. So, there is a second beast in Revelation 13 who is called The False Prophet who is a witness to the reality of the great Red Dragon and of the first beast that rises from the sea.

The question that many have ask in reading the book of Revelation is "Which of these two beasts described in Revelation 13 is the Antichrist?" Some say that the first beast that seems to exercise political power over a great part of the earth, the great political leader of the western world, the one who rules over the nations and seems to be able to consolidate the nations into one confederacy and yield their power to him, some say he is the Antichrist. You can read commentators that take that position. There are other that say, "No, it is the second beast that is the Antichrist." This is the religious ruler. This is the one who is concerned about religious matters and who propagates a false faith throughout the world. He enthrones himself, at last, in the temple to be worshipped as God. They feel that is the Antichrist.

In viewing the 5th chapter of John and the first intimation you have in the gospels of the coming of an Antichrist from the lips of the Lord Jesus, one might judge that perhaps the second personage is the Antichrist. Remember Jesus said to the Pharisees of his day, John Chapter 5, verse 43, "I have come in my Father's name and you received me not. Another will come in his own name and him you will receive." That has often been taken to refer to that religious person who seems to confuse and deceive all the peoples of the earth and especially the Jews as to who he is, what his role is in history. Yet from Paul's letter in II Thessalonians, which we will also look at tonight in more detail, one would judge that perhaps the Antichrist is the political ruler whom Paul calls "The Man of Lawlessness," who opposes and exalts himself and who causes people to believe a great delusion. One would think that that might refer then to the first beast who rises from the sea, the political leader of the last days.

You have the same problem in the Old Testament when you read the vision of Daniel, for instance, with those strange and remarkable beasts that he sees. Isn't it interesting that when you get the Divine viewpoint of "nations" they are always called "beasts." Nebuchadnezzar had a great dream in which he saw the nations of the world, including his own, and he saw it as a great exalted man with several divisions made of different metals, gold and silver and brass, etc. That is man's view of man, but when God looks at man, he sees snarling, angry, fighting, rapacious beasts who are ready to leap at one another's throats. I leave it to you, judging from the morning papers, which view is right. When you read the papers you can see this is the way the nations appear.

In the 7th chapter of Daniel, you have a vision of a great kingdom, the fourth kingdom on earth, which seems to begin shortly after Daniel's day. It is identified clearly as the Roman empire that is to come into existence

and into world supremacy in the first century, or just a little before that time. It will rule the earth in the first and second century and into the fourth and fifth century. This fourth beast would be, in some sense, the last great world kingdom to appear on earth. A little horn would arise on the fourth beast which would exercise tremendous political power. Many have read that, and identified that, as the Antichrist. On the other hand, when you get to the 11th chapter of Daniel, there is another figure called the "Willful King" who exalts himself against God and claims to be and takes to himself the titles of God. This seems to be a religious figure and many identify him as **the** Antichrist.

I think the best answer to the question is given by John in his epistle. If you will look with me at I John the 2nd chapter, you will find the use of the term antichrist as it appears first in the Scriptures.

I John, chapter 2, verse 18:

"Children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come; therefore, we know that it is the last hour."

This is one of several verses indicating we have been living in what might be called "the last hour," (it is called that here) ever since the first coming of our Lord, that indeed all of history in these 2,000 years of the church age is part of that last hour, and in that last hour, we are told, there have been many antichrists. Many had already come when John wrote these words about the end of the first century, and he says still there is coming "an antichrist."

In the 2nd letter of John he refers to this again in verse 7.

II John, verse 7:

"For many deceivers have gone out into the world, men who will not acknowledge the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh; such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist."

"Many deceivers have gone out," so there is a spirit of antichrist which appears throughout the whole of this age and apparently will culminate in at least one, or more, personages who properly can be call Antichrist.

When you look at the Greek language in that term "antichrist," you discover that the prefix anti means both against and instead of, i.e., anyone who is against Christ is an antichrist. Also Jesus spoke himself of certain false prophets and christs who would come, pseudo-christs. Those are coming not against Christ so much as instead of Christ, so the idea contains clearly those two concepts. I believe, therefore, that we can call either of the two beasts of Revelation 13 the Antichrist. The Scriptures tell us that they work together. One gives its power to the other. They are in cahoots to accomplish their purposes. I believe, therefore, it is quite proper to refer to either of them as the Antichrist. They combine to be both against and instead of Christ. The political ruler especially is against Christ. The religious ruler is instead of Christ.

Now let's turn to Revelation 13 and see if we can trace through some of these patterns. As I said, I have chosen this chapter because it comes at the end of Scripture and gathers together many themes which appear in Daniel, in the Minor Prophets, Zechariah, and in the words of Jesus in Matthew, etc. They all come together here in the great Union Station, the book of Revelation. Dr. Vernon McGee often called this the "Union Station" because it is like a station in which trains from all parts of the country come together, or you can think of it as a great airport, if you like. where all these planes of thought fly in and come together in this closing book of the Bible.

Now let's look at chapter 13 where we see John, after having seen in chapter 12 the Great Red Dragon who is identified as Satan and who pursues and persecutes the man child who is born of the woman who is clearly Israel in this passage [chapter 12] and who is caught up to God. It is clearly a picture of the Lord Jesus as he

was caught up to God, and the woman is then pursued by the great serpent and she hides herself in the wilderness.

Revelation, chapter 13, verse 1:

"And I saw a beast rising out of the sea, with ten horns and seven heads, with ten diadems upon its horns and a blasphemous name upon its heads."

In chapter 12 the Great Red Dragon is described in verse three as having seven heads and ten horns and seven diadems upon its head. It is almost the same beast. The only difference is there are seven crowns in chapter 12 and ten crowns in chapter 13. Most of the commentators, who take this in any literal sense whatsoever, agree that the dragon, who is clearly named to be Satan here (the seven headed beast with ten horns), gives his power to an earthly kingdom, the beast that rises out of the sea. (If you have time to check this out yourself), which corresponds very carefully with the fourth beast of Daniel's seventh chapter. The final beast, which is identified, begins with the Roman Empire of history, and in some remarkable way vanishes for awhile and then reappears in history.

You have this figured here in Revelation chapter 13, verse 2 which says

"And the beast that I saw was like a leopard, its feet were like a bear's, and its mouth was like a lion's mouth."

And comparing the beasts which Daniel saw; The first three beasts were, a leopard, a lion and a bear, and all of them came together in the last strange indescribable beast that Daniel saw, so you have an identification with it here.

Revelation 13, verse 2b:

"And to it the dragon gave his power and his throne and great authority. One of Its heads seemed to have a mortal wound, but its mortal wound was healed, and the whole earth followed the beast with wonder."

The wounding of the head and the healing again has been taken by some commentators to mean that some great political leader will actually be put to death and then come to life again. However, I do not think it is necessary at all to read this that way. The beast you have here was in Daniel's 7th chapter clearly an empire, and I think it is still an empire as it raises here. The figure of a wound and a healing is the figurative way of describing what has happened to the Roman Empire. One of the remarkable things about history is that the Roman Empire has persisted in the history of the western nations in a very remarkable way. When we think of our own nation, for instance, we have to face the very clear fact that America is very Roman. We have a Senate, just like the Roman Senate. We got the very name from the Roman Empire. We have laws that are derived from the laws of Rome, which were propagated in the days of the power of the Roman Empire. Our court system is Roman. Our very national emblem is Roman. The Roman eagles were known all over the world of that day, and the American eagle is similarly known in our world today. Not only is the United States Roman in many ways, just a few of which I have just traced, but every single nation in the western hemisphere including our own is Roman, derived from nations which were part of the Roman Empire. That is a most remarkable phenomenon. There is no other part of the world with that kind of record. Ordinarily the native peoples of this hemisphere would have formed their own kingdoms and empires of their own that persisted to the present day, and if you read back in ancient American history you know there were remarkable empires here. The Aztec empire in Mexico, the Inca empire in Peru, the Mayan empire in Central America were most remarkable civilizations with advanced technology and every reason and right to survive into modern times, but none of them did. Everyone of them has disappeared. In their place has come an invasion from the west of Europe that has been reproduced in the nations of the Western Hemisphere. So, we have clearly a Roman strain running through all the western world.

In the 17th chapter of the book of Revelation, you find a little further information about this beast, and in verse 8, after John sees a woman, who represents false religions, seated upon this beast, the beast is described further.

Revelation chapter 17, verse 8:

"The beast that you saw was, [i.e., in John's day] and is not, and is to ascend from the bottomless pit and go to perdition; and the dwellers on earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, will marvel to behold the beast, because it was and is not and is to come. This calls for a mind with wisdom: [Are you listening? Do you have that kind of a mind?] the seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman is seated; [that identifies it with the city of Rome, historically known as the seven-hilled city] they are also seven kings, [or kingdoms] five of whom have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come, and when he comes he must remain only a little while."

I think this is a very significant statement. Here we learn about this strange beast consisting of these seven kings, or kingdoms. Historically this seems to be not just a certain kingdom but a form of government that is in view. It is most interesting to note that when John wrote this book at the close of the first century, around 100 AD, the nation of Rome had already passed through five forms of government. I won't list them for you, but the republic was one, the principate was another, etc., five distinct forms of government, "one is, five had passed away," John is told. "One is," another form of government existed which at that time was the imperial form, the emperors of Rome. Then there was yet one more which was to come, and, when it came, it would last only a little while. The question then is raised, "When did the Roman Empire, the imperial form of Roman government, end?" And the amazing answer is in 1917. The proof of that is in the world "Caesar." Caesar was the name of the Roman emperors. So, when did the Caesars cease? Well, according to history, they maintained themselves in power in the city of Rome until about the 5th century when the center of empire shifted from Rome to Constantinople, what we now call Istanbul, on the Bosphorus between the Black Sea and the Aegean Sea. That great city, then, became the center of empire. In 1453, the city of Constantinople was invaded by Russian hordes. The city was captured, and the government was transferred, carried away, into the pagan regions of the north, but persisted under the name of the Czars of Russia, C-Z-A-R is simply a Russian form of Caesar. So the Caesars persisted in Russia. In the 5th century the city of Rome was invaded and sacked by the Visigoths and the hordes from the north, and that government was transferred, first to France, then to Spain and then to Germany where the German rulers maintained their titles as the Kaisers, the Germanic spelling of Caesar. The amazing footnote to history is that both the Czars of Russia and the Kaisers of Germany came to an end in the same year 1917. From that time on there has never been a Caesar in the world. That is a most remarkable thing. In light of it, it indicates there would come, then, a new form, a strange, indescribable form of the beast that once was Rome, which would have Roman culture, Roman background, Roman ideas, Roman forms within the government, but would be an amalgamation of nations, a confederation, if you like, and it would be in this form that there would appear at last the final ruler who would be this first beast of Revelation 13. So, the beast that arises out of the sea, (the sea, by-the-way, is the symbol in Scripture of many nations, the multitudes of peoples of the earth), out of this conglomeration of nations, at last appears another beast who is likened to and has the characteristics of the fourth beast of Daniel 7. This is what gives way to the predictions of many of a revived form of the Roman Empire.

Now look at Revelation 13, verse 5:

"And the beast was given a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words..."

This seems to indicate that not only is this beast an empire which comes into existence, but it is at last headed by an individual who is symbolized by a mouth, "a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words." Here you have the same picture that Daniel gives us in his 7th chapter, he says:

Daniel, chapter 7, verse 7:

"After this I saw in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, terrible and dreadful and exceedingly strong; and it had great iron teeth; it devoured and broke in pieces, and stamped the residue with its feet. It was different from all the beasts that were before it; and it had ten horns. [That is the empire coming again.] I considered the horns, and behold, there came up among them another horn, a little one, before which three of the first horns were plucked up by the roots; and behold, in this horn were eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking great things."

You can immediately see the correlation now with this scene in Revelation 13. Back to that now.

Revelation, chapter 13, verse 5b:

"...and it was allowed to exercise authority for forth-two months; [i.e., 260 days or 3-1/2 years, which in many places is clearly the duration of what Jesus calls "The Great Tribulation."] it opened its mouth to utter blasphemies against God, blaspheming his name and his dwelling, that is, those who dwell in heaven. Also it was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them. And authority was given it over every tribe and people and tongue and nation, and all who dwell on earth will worship it, every one whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb that was slain. [Then we have a word to John himself] If any one has an ear, let him hear: [Jesus said that many times] If any one is to be taken captive, to captivity he goes; [into captivity he goes, that is literally what it says] if any one slays with the sword, with the sword must he be slain. [Force is now going to rule the earth] Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints."

These words are almost self explanatory. Here is to arise a great political ruler who will gain authority in world affairs and at last gain some kind of authority and power over almost the whole of the earth. I do not think it is all of it. There are parts that are excepted, but at least his influence will extend throughout the world. He will be a power to reckon with in those days.

Now, in verse 11 you have the second beast.

Revelation, chapter 13, verse 11:

"Then I saw another beast which rose out of the earth; it had two horns like a lamb [Here is clearly the counterpart to the Lamb which was slain from the foundation of the world] and it spoke like a dragon. [It would make peace. It would be a peace lover. Here's the ruler who would establish a covenant with the Jews and solve the problem between the Arabs and the Jews and divide the land for a price, etc. He appears in many Scriptures in this way] 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 works great signs, even making fire come down from heaven to earth in the sight of men; [What does that sound like? Nuclear warfare, fire descending from the heavens] and by the signs which it is allowed to work in the presence of the beast, it deceives those who dwell on earth, bidding them make an image for the beast which 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 should even speak, and to cause those who would not worship the image of the beast to be slain."

There is a strange image which seems to accord with the words of both Daniel and Jesus himself when they speak of an "abomination of desolation." An abomination is an image worshipped as God. That was always the case throughout the Old Testament. When the Israelites worshipped images they were called abominations, and this is an abomination which when it is worshipped makes people desolate, a destroying image. Our Lord spoke of this as the indication of the beginning of the Great Tribulation. "When you see," he says, "the abomination which makes desolate standing in the Holy Place," in the temple in Jerusalem, the rebuilt temple, "then," he says, "shall be great tribulation such as has not been since the beginning, no, nor ever shall be."

Here we come back to it. Revelation, chapter 13, verse 16:

"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: [We are warned several times to think penetratingly and carefully about what is being said here] let him who has understanding reckon the number of the beast, for it is a human number, its number is six hundred and sixty-six."

That is probably the most famous number in the world. Everybody is guessing what it means. Today you hear many reports that there are already various systems, economic supply systems, banking cards, etc., that incorporate the number 666, and one of these days all of us are going to be branded either on the forehead or on the back of the hand with an invisible number. You simply slide it under a light which will read it and thus you are given the privilege of either buying food or not. That may be true. I don't know. There certainly is an indication of some strange economic control in the last days, and it may take this form. It is difficult to say. I do know we have not come to that yet, and every time you see 666, do not jump to the conclusion that the Antichrist is here. Rather, the number seems to indicate the quintessence of humanity. Six is the number of man. Just as seven is the number of God. Six is one short of seven. 3 is the perfect combination of that quintessence, a threefold God. A three person God means deity in the fullest manifestation. Here 3 individuals here making a trinity of evil indicates man in his fullest manifestation. I don't want to go beyond that at this point.

I want to turn back now to II Thessalonians and the Apostle Paul's word about the Man of Sin. With this we will conclude this evening.

In chapter 2 the apostle tells us about the Man of Sin who is coming. He says:

II Thessalonians, chapter 2, verse 1:

"Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our assembling to meet him, we beg you, brethren, not to be quickly shaken in mind or excited, either by spirit or by word, or by letter purporting to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. Let no one deceive you in any way; [That will be difficult to avoid because deceit is the characteristic of the day] for that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself against every so called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God. [Do you remember Jesus' words, "Another will come in his own name, and him you will receive.] Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you this? And you know what is restraining him now so that he may be revealed in his time.

"For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way. And then the lawless one

will be revealed, and the Lord Jesus will slay him with the breath of his mouth and destroy him by his appearing and his coming. The coming of the lawless one by the activity of Satan [Notice that? The great dragon will give him his power and authority and throne.] will be with all power and with pretended signs and wonders, and with all wicked deception for those who are to perish, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. Therefore God sends upon them a strong delusion, to make them believe what is false, [literally "to make them believe THE lie."] so that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness."

In a passage like this, several questions immediately leap to mind and I know at least two you are thinking of that you hope I will answer. One is, "Is the church involved in this time of trouble?" and two, "Who is the restrainer that holds back the revelation of the Man of Sin?" Well, those are the two questions I am going to answer next week.

What I want you to see is in verses 11 & 12 where we are told that because of the revelation of the Man of Sin and his power to deceive, God sends upon men a "strong delusion," literally "the working of delusion." It suggests a continual barrage of propaganda that widely misleads people on the earth and causes them to believe THE lie. Now what lie? What is the falsehood that has been perpetuated on this earth century after century after century. It began in the very Garden of Eden and has been THE lie ever since? You will find a reference to it in the book of Romans, chapter 1, where Paul speaks of the wrath of God being revealed from heaven and the reaction of certain individuals. In verse 24 he says:

Romans, chapter 1, verse 24:

"Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for the lie [If your version says, as mine does, "a lie," that is wrong. There is a definite article there. It is the lie. What is it?] and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator."

That is the lie, to worship and serve creatures, namely man himself, rather than the Creator. This clearly indicates, in conjunction with II Thessalonians, that the religion of the Antichrist is Humanism, the worship of man, the exaltation of man.

Now, let me gather up the characteristics of Humanism as it appears in various prophetic Scriptures. Humanism, of course, views man as self-sufficient. He does not need God. He has no room for him. Therefore, man himself is his only hope for deliverance in the trouble that he may encounter. In many, many books and on every side today, you will find this lie. Take classes in a great university such as Stanford, or any great university today. You will find the idea that man is his own god and adequate and sufficient to handle his problems as the most widespread underlying philosophy taught today. Man is deserving of the very best and is able to achieve it by his own efforts. This is the lie of Humanism. You find it coming at you continually all day long, as I have often pointed out. Even in television commercials you are fed this, aren't you? You deserve the best. You ought to buy this product or get this car or take this trip because you deserve it. You've got it coming to you. The one thing that philosophy will do is totally eliminate gratitude. If you are only getting what you deserve, you can't be grateful for it, can you? You are only angry because you didn't get it earlier. Yet gratitude and thankfulness are the only proper stance of a dependent creature before a gracious Creator. Everything we get, we get from God. This is why everywhere in Scripture the counterpart to Humanism is the development of a thankful spirit, everything coming to you from God's hands. The more you give thanks, the more you glorify God. That is what he tells us. The counterpart, you see, is to assume that because you are such a wonderful creature, you deserve the best, and the best is none too good.

Humanism, therefore, treats God as irrelevant. In the book I referred to last week, "The Fate of the Earth," which deals with the problem of the nuclear threat in our day, it is very evident to anyone who reads it that

God is expected to play no part in the drama of the unfolding events of our day. If he exists at all, which the writer never fully concedes, he is a distant God, sitting up on some distant Mt. Olympus hardly caring what goes on with poor struggling mortals down here, playing no part whatsoever in the affairs of men and with no control over human history. That is the religion of Humanism and one that you are going to hear more and more as the darkness of our age deepens. Furthermore, according to this, Humanism relies upon force and upon power to accomplish its end. The net result of that is persecution of all who do not conform, unto death if need be. Force becomes the process or the resource used. Humanism involves, therefore, economic control of all of life. Today we are seeing a rapidly increasing thrust toward the loss of national sovereignties and the rise of a world government including pressure to drop our national distinctives, even in terms of money and of measurements. We must all adopt the metric system. There is no room for differences of money systems or measuring devices. Languages are beginning to disappear. More and more a few languages are taking over the communications of earth. There is increasing pressure for an international banking system to control the monetary funds of all nations upon the earth. It is very present in our day and will increase.

Humanism, of course, points to man and describes him as loving, kind, considerate and desiring the benefit and welfare of others. In practice, however, he becomes cruel, heartless and vicious, carrying out his judgments regardless of what any individual, or collection of individuals, may feel.

Of course, the supreme manifestation of the humanistic spirit is to despise the message of the cross, to hate the presence of Jesus, the person of Jesus, and especially the message of his death. Jesus himself said to the Jews, remember, "The world cannot hate you because you are of the world, but the world hates me because I testify of it that its deeds are evil." The message of the cross is a universal declaration of the worthlessness of fallen man. He cannot be bettered. He cannot be redeemed. He cannot be restored. He cannot be educated into value or worth. He must be eliminated, which is what the cross does, without destroying the person. In his place appears a new man, a new creature. That message is increasingly going to be hated. You will find it infiltrating and penetrating many so-called Christian messages today. If you want to be alert for the infiltration of a humanistic message into preaching today, listen for the message that does not bother to deal with, or to present the dealing of God with, the reality of human sin but eliminates the cross, invites people to believe in themselves, and to believe that God loves them without any conversion or any need for change on their part. It invites them to trust in the goodness of God and to accept themselves before God without ever passing through the judgment of the cross. That is the mark of the humanist faith.

I believe we are getting very close to that. I have to tell you that, as I view our age and the deepening darkness around us, it seems very difficult for me to conceive that we can make it to the end of this century without the appearance of Jesus Christ. However, I hasten to add I may be wrong. No one ever can say when Jesus Christ is coming until he comes. It may be God, in his grace and mercy, will yet cause all this tremendous upsurge, seeming to coalesce so remarkably, to fade back again and allow a period of peace and exploration, etc., to again develop on earth. I don't know. It seems impossible to me, but it could happen. But, if this is the end of the age, as it certainly could be and increasingly appears to be, then the great question for each of us is again what I said last week, "Where is your treasure? What is important to you?" James 4:4 says, "If any man loves the world, he makes himself an enemy of God." and if you are going to have an enemy, for goodness sakes don't let it be God, because he cannot be thwarted.

What a basis this gives us to speak of the gospel to men and women everywhere. As fear increasingly grips human hearts, as despair spreads widely at the failure of man to accomplish the great dreams that he is continually having, as the terrible weapons of destruction increase in the arsenals of the nations, as pollution and corruption spread widely around the earth and people's hearts are indeed trembling with fear in looking at the things coming on earth, what an hour this is to declare the mercy and the grace of God, that in Jesus Christ there is a new humanity being formed.

Well, that is it. You have been very patient and I appreciate it. We will close in prayer.

Prayer:

Thank you, our Father, for this look at the remarkable events of history predicted by this book so long ago. It is hard for us to believe, Lord, the accuracy with which these ancient

prophets saw into the future and saw the events that seem to be taking place in our own day. Lord, we thank you that we know you. What a sanctuary you are for your people. What a refuge in time of trouble, and we pray, indeed, as we see these things coming to pass that we may lift up our heads and rejoice for our redemption draws nigh, but more than that that we may share it with those who are troubled and hopeless and distressed in the earth today, we ask in the name of Jesus. Amen.

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