

CHAPTER 4

The Unholy Trinity

We ended the last chapter with the locusts that came up from the abyss. And we saw that we can chase them all the way back down to the pit because they cannot touch us—we have been given authority to tread on snakes and scorpions. It reveals something about them, too, when it tells us that “*on their heads they wore something like crowns of gold*” (Rev. 9:7) and that “*they had breastplates like breastplates of iron*” (Rev. 9:9). If we apply that to the world in which we live, it speaks of people who are imposers, people who are their own kings and who think only of themselves. They do not have real authority. They only have what look like crowns. But it’s a pose and a posture. They say, “I am in charge. I am all that matters. I am king of my own life. I am lord of my own destiny. I make my own decisions. I rule.” Of course, that is the ultimate rebellion against God.

Not only do they wear things that look like crowns of gold, but they also have iron breastplates. That is, they are untouched and unmoved by anything but their own desires. They have encased their hearts in iron shields. They are indifferent to anybody else, to the needs, desires, or hurts of others. Demons do not just fly around in the air; they come to affect society. We cannot be certain exactly what form and nature this takes, though I have suggested some possibilities. It is important to note that the demon powers are not just floating around in the sky; they are at work now in the sons of disobedience (see Eph. 2:2). That is why, in our preaching of the Gospel, we cast out demons and heal the sick.

As we have been considering the kind of society that demonic activity produces, let me take you back to chapter 11 and show its connection with chapter 13. In chapter 11 we were looking at God's prophetic company. There we had two witnesses, whereas in chapter 13 we have two beasts, one from the sea and one from the land. There are some remarkable contrasts between the two witnesses and the two beasts. I would like to point some out to you. The witnesses are called to prophesy (see Rev. 11:3); the beast is given a mouth to blaspheme (see Rev. 13:5). The witnesses prophesy for 1,260 days (governed by the sun) because they are God's sunshine people; the beast has authority for 42 months (governed by the moon) because he is a worker in the darkness. Fire comes from the mouths of God's prophets (see Rev. 11:5); fire is called down from Heaven by the false prophet (see Rev. 13:13). The beast from the land, by the way, is, after this moment, called the false prophet, and because he calls fire down out of the sky, he is particularly a false Elijah.

The Beast from the Land

The beast from the land, the false prophet, is said to look like a lamb, having two horns. But though he looks like a lamb, he speaks like a dragon. Part of the strategy of the beasts that are against the purposes of God is to deceive us. Jesus said, "*Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves*" (Matt. 7:15). We must not take anything on face value. We test the spirits to see if they are of God. Paul, in fact, when he is saying farewell to the Ephesian elders, encourages them to remain in the faith and shepherd the flock that God has purchased with his own blood because "*I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock*" (Acts 20:29). Then he says, soberly, that some of those wolves will come "*even from your own number*" (Acts 20:30). Now these may not be the ultimate beast described in Revelation, but they are bestial manifestations.

An interesting teaching of the Scriptures is that the further away you get from God, the more bestial you become. The evolutionists will tell us that we started off as animals and evolved into these wonderful creatures that we recognize as human. The Bible tells us that we started off perfect and ended up like animals. It is full of bestial imagery to describe humans apart from God: those that reject the Gospel are like dogs that turn back to their own vomit; those who deny Christ are like pigs that get out of the mire and turn back and wallow in it again (see 2 Pet. 2:22).

We are told in chapter 11 that the beast from the abyss will attack, overpower, and kill the prophets of God (see Rev. 11:7).

In chapter 13 it is restated that the beast is given power (right and might) to make war against the saints and to conquer them (see Rev. 13:7). What we are seeing is the same thing happening but from a different perspective. Here is another interesting observation: the inhabitants of the earth rejoice over the death of the prophets (see Rev. 11:9), and the whole world follows the beast (see Rev. 13:3). One of the reasons they follow the beast is because the beast has a fatal wound that has been healed (see Rev. 13:3). He has a false resurrection.

What does that mean? Well, this was a dilemma for the early church. They knew that the Son of God was going to bruise the serpent's head. They wrote that Jesus, through His death, would destroy him who had the power of death, the devil. That was their confidence and their expectation. And in the first flush of their excitement as the Gospel spread throughout the whole world, there seemed to be no stopping them.

It seemed as if they would soon fulfill the Great Commission and bring all nations in submission to the Lord, but then came vicious opposition and persecution. Here was the reemergence of terrible evil and wickedness and awful happenings, and perhaps they thought to themselves, "This beast is not dead after all!" The continuance of evil in our world is one of the great arguments people use to deny the truth of the Gospel. But we must recognize that the beast has been defeated. He has been overcome even though his ultimate destruction is yet to come. The purposes of God cannot be held back. We will trample on serpents and scorpions because that is what we are equipped to do.

When the Scripture talks to us about putting on the whole armor of God in the sixth chapter of Ephesians, it describes

that armor from the helmet down to the boots, the big hob-nail sandals like the Roman soldiers wore. These boots have a name. Every piece of armor has a name. The helmet is called Salvation, the breastplate is called Righteousness, the belt is Truth, the shield is Faith, the sword is Word of God, and the boots are called Peace. Now that is an odd name for boots in which people are going out to war. You would think the boots would be called War or Conflict or Strife. But these boots are called Peace, because, although we are marching to war, our war song is all about the Prince of Peace.

We win by bringing people into submission to His lordship. That is why, when Paul writes to the Romans, he says, "*The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet*" (Rom. 16:20). It is the God of peace whom we follow. You have got boots on that are called Peace and, if you have got ears to hear, listen to the squelching as you walk; you are treading on snakes and scorpions everywhere you go, and you are creating a path of peace.

In chapter 11, after three and a half days, the breath of life from God enters into the two witnesses. But look at this horrific parallel and parody in chapter 13. This is the second beast, the false prophet, who has made an image of the first beast, and we are told that he was given power to give breath to the image of the first beast (see Rev. 13:14-15). Now it is not that he has created some kind of android, an automaton or robot. He is producing a society. When God created man he breathed into him life that the man might become the father of a new society (see Gen. 2:7). When Jesus rose from the dead and met his disciples, he breathed on them and said, "*Receive the Holy Spirit*" (John 20:22) because he was making them into

his new redeemed community, a new society in the world. So when the false prophet breathes breath into the image of the beast, he is producing a society that is demonized. Just as the spirit of Jesus makes us like himself, so the breath of the beast makes his followers conform themselves to "*the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient*" (Eph. 2:2).

There are only two kinds of people in this world: the redeemed and the lost, those who are in the light and those who are in the dark, those who are in the Kingdom of God and bow to His lordship and those who are in the kingdom of satan and are manipulated by his power. There is a society out there that has been breathed on by evil and is motivated by evil intention. There is another society that has been breathed on by the Spirit of God and is empowered not only to overcome but to transform it into the society of the redeemed. It is the demonic, satanic, sinful society that receives the mark of the beast's ownership upon them. That is where our warfare lies. That is where our conflict is.

There is an unholy trinity in operation: the dragon, the beast from the sea, and the beast from the land known as the false prophet. There is a satanic power that manipulates the political powers of our world, and there is a conniving, religious authority harnessed to that beast in order to pursue all that satan wants to do. Now we have seen already, and we know in our own hearts, that it is an unequal battle, for the Holy Trinity outweighs the unholy trinity infinitely. And yet the war is still being fought. The beast may have overcome the saints and killed them, but we have come to understand that being killed does not mean being defeated.

The Dragon and the Woman

Chapter 12 begins with an incredible vision of a woman in the heavens. Let us note the key thing here. In the second part of this vision, there is, in front of the woman, as she is waiting to give birth, a huge red dragon. The sole intent of this dragon is to devour her child as soon as it is born. Now this image takes us way back in the Bible to the first declaration of the Gospel, to what theologians call the "protoevangelion." The first preaching of the Gospel is actually directed at satan, to whom it is not good news! And it happens in the Garden of Eden after satan has tempted the woman and sin has come into the world.

God says to satan that he is cursed above all the animals, and he says, "*And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel*" (Gen. 3:15 KJV). From that moment on, satan has lived in fear. We find this concept of the devil's fearful reaction to newborn children occurring all the way through Scripture.

That is why, when Moses was about to come into the world, the serpent whispered to the king, "Kill the babies; kill all the babies" and that is what Pharaoh sought to do, because there is always enmity between the serpent and the seed of the woman. He tried to do it when Jesus was born and came into the world. The serpent whispered again, this time to Herod, "Kill all the babies; kill all the babies." Our enemy, Peter warns us, is like a roaring lion that goes around seeking whom he may devour (see 1 Pet. 5:8). He wants to devour the seed of the woman, but God preserves his chosen seed.

This picture in the twelfth chapter of Revelation, then, is the climax, the ultimate picture, of what has been going on down

throughout history. There has always been enmity between the serpent and the seed of the woman, but here is the good news: the chosen seed is always preserved. Moses actually enjoys the privilege of growing up in Pharaoh's house. It proves that God is able to keep His own secure.

The Beast from the Abyss

The dragon is poised to devour the seed of the woman and pursues her into the wilderness. This is nothing less than a reenactment of Israel's escape from Egyptian bondage and from Pharaoh, of which more later. The old dragon lurks in the waters, but now the beast from the Abyss is described in this way,

The beast I saw resembled a leopard, but had feet like those of a bear and a mouth like that of a lion (Revelation 13:2).

He is a pretty awesome creature. He looks like a leopard because he is swift. Have you noticed in the Scripture how sinners are often described as those who are swift to shed blood, as those who are in the fast lane of evil? Well this beast is swift to do evil. He has bear's feet because he is strong. Jesus describes satan as the "strong man." He has got a mouth like a lion, as did those demon powers from the pit, which inevitably have some of his characteristics. He has a mouth like a lion because he is savage. It is interesting, by the way, that David, even before he was anointed, before he ever came into his kingdom, killed a lion and a bear. God's people can overcome this beast. And later on he kills a giant, Goliath. If you read the description of Goliath and the bronze armor he wore, and then compare that with Job's description of Leviathan, it

looks as if Goliath was a monster. He had that scaly armor just like Leviathan did from head to foot. He seemed invulnerable. He seemed unbeatable. And when God spoke to Job about Leviathan, he said, "What can you do? Can you overcome him? Are you strong enough to handle him? Can you pull him out with a hook?" The clear implication is, "Oh no, you can't. But I can" (see Job 41:1). Our God overcomes all the beasts, all the evil, and all the giants, for He is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

But the beast from the abyss comes forth with all its great horror and is given power to conquer. It is interesting that it says that he has *authority* over the nations but he can only *conquer* the saints. He has no authority over us. The only authority under which we live is the authority of Jesus Christ. The nations, the rebellious, the lost, live under the authority of satan. With us, he can sometimes exercise power, and sometimes he can even kill us. But he never has the authority. He only has authority over all those who worship the beast and all those whose names are not written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

The Number of the Beast: 666

At the end of chapter 13 we are introduced to this great 2,000-year-old mystery that every generation has sought to resolve: the number of the beast. The number that is his name is simply the number that represents man. In some ways, that is all we need to know. It tells us we are not looking for some kind of Godzilla to arrive. The beast comes in human form: 666 is the number of a man.

Initially it was the evil emperor Nero whose name and title in Hebrew characters totaled 666, for in ancient times all

letters were assigned numerical values. Also, it is 666 because man and beast were created on the sixth day. He is 666 because Nebuchadnezzar, who, withstood the God of Heaven and said, "My own power and authority has done this," was turned into a beast. He lived out in the fields with the cattle. He ate grass. His hair grew like feathers and his nails like talons. God turned him into a beast. For he had set up a golden idol before which all had to bow, and it was 60 cubits high and 6 cubits wide. It was a 66 edifice that men would fall before to acknowledge Nebuchadnezzar as the ruler of the world.

The number six, is eternally less than seven, the number of completeness, and throughout Scripture it illustrates man's arrogant display of opposition to God's Kingdom. Og, the giant king of Bashan exercised his cruel dictatorship over a kingdom that consisted of 60 cities, all of which fell to the advancing forces of the armies of God. David, as he was about to bring in the kingdom and establish his rule in the world, had to overcome giants. Goliath was six cubits tall. David dealt with Goliath in his youth, and he killed him by crushing his head and finishing him off with his own sword. David's men killed five other giants who sought to resist the kingdom, totaling six in all. Four of them were Goliath's brothers, one of whom had six fingers on each hand and six toes on each foot. The last was a huge Egyptian, seven and a half feet tall (see 1 Chron. 11:23; 20:4-8).

We should note here an interesting spiritual strategy: God declared that the crushing of his head would bring about the destruction of the serpent. This is exactly what David did in his victory over Goliath. With his slingshot he struck the giant on

the forehead, then to demonstrate his utter victory, he took the Philistine's own sword and severed his head. This sword that had once defiantly threatened the life of God's chosen king had now become David's own weapon of overcoming and victory. Later, one of David's mighty men, Benaiah who, like his lord, was also a giant slayer, conquered his adversary, a huge Egyptian, by snatching his spear and turning it into his own weapon of destruction. In an earlier chapter we looked at Habakkuk's song of the triumphs of God. He declared, "*You crushed the leader of the land of wickedness, You stripped him from head to foot. With his own spear You pierced his head*" (Hab. 3:13-14). The enemy's weapon of defiance is, by the power of God, turned into the weapon of his defeat.

The ultimate weapon that satan devised was the cross. It was to be the end of all the purposes of God. It was a cruel, wicked, hateful means of death. Satan hounded the seed of the woman to the cross. With a dark glint in his evil eye, satan rubbed his wicked hands together and thought, "Now I am going to win; now He is going to die." And Jesus carried the cross, the weapon devised by the evil one, to Golgotha. Now Golgotha means "hill of the skull." He took the cross to Skull Hill because Golgotha, for all intents and purposes, looked like the top of a human head. It looked like a skull. And when he got to the top of the hill, they took the weapon that satan had devised, and they thrust it into the ground and crushed the head. It was at Golgotha that the enemy was utterly defeated, and satan's weapon of destruction was turned upon himself!

The dragon, the beast, and the false prophet are all there to do us harm. The dragon is a nasty piece of work. The Bible tells us he is enormous. He is blood red because he is baptized in the

blood of all those he has slain. He stands ready to devour. He stands with mouth open. He stands with demonic dribble hanging off his chin. He slavers with anticipation at the thought of devouring everyone. But every time he postures at you, every time he roars and snarls at you, revealing his fangs or unsheathing his claws, just remind him of this: he got beaten by a lamb! "You are just a poser!" tell him. "You got beaten by a lamb!" For the Lamb has triumphed over the dragon, and the Lamb will rule forever and ever. A dragon to devour us, a beast to dominate us, and a false prophet to deceive us, but God is with us to do us good.

We are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. He always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ Jesus, and, even if we die, our cry will be "*Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?*" (1 Cor. 15:55).