

The Final Deception

An evil, counterfeit trinity is now making ready for war.

What is it that Seventh-day Adventism has to offer the world? Are we kinder than other people? Are we more Christ-like than the average Christian? Do we offer a clearer picture of the gospel than other churches? Are we more psychologically healthy? The research is in on that one, and it isn't pretty. So that's not where it's at.

The decisive difference between Adventists and all other faiths, it seems to me, is that we are a "people of prophecy." God has called us as a people to play a unique role in the final events of earth's history. As in the case of the ancient Israelites, we weren't called to this role because we're kinder, nicer, or smarter than other people. We came to understand this role because it's been marked out with prophetic certainty. God has many faithful ones in other denominations, but no other movement has been given as clear a picture of end-time reality.

The Demonic Trinity

Why is the Adventist role in God's plan important? For the answer to that question we need to turn to the book of Revelation.

I'd like to begin with Revelation 12:17, a nutshell summary of the whole end-time scenario: "So then the dragon was furious (enraged) at the woman, and he went away to wage war on the remainder of her descendants-[on those] who obey God's commandments and who have the testimony of Jesus" (Amplified).^{*} We see here that there are two sides in the final conflict, the dragon on the one hand, and the remnant on the other.

But a strange thing happens here. The text says that the dragon "went away" to wage war. Now, that is strange. If I wanted to wage war with someone, I would walk up to them and punch them right in the nose. But the dragon doesn't do that. Instead, he "goes away" to wage war. Why? Because the dragon was furious (verse 12) and frustrated by his repeated failures. He was not strong enough to last in heaven (verse 8), he failed to destroy the Man-Child of the woman (verses 3-5), and he failed to destroy the woman herself (verse 16). So now all that is left is to wage war with the remainder of her descendants (verse 17).

But the dragon goes away instead of confronting the situation. Because of his repeated failures he realizes he doesn't have the strength to defeat God's purposes, so he decides to enter the final conflict with allies: a beast from the sea and a beast from the earth. So now the remainder are faced with three opponents: the dragon, the sea beast, and the land beast.

In the book of Revelation, God is often spoken of in threes: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Rev. 1). So the dragon, the sea beast, and the land beast (Rev. 13) would seem to be a counterfeit of the holy Three. They portray themselves as a divine alternative to the true Godhead.

Counterfeit

The parallel becomes even more interesting when we examine the features of the sea beast (Rev. 13: 1 - 10), portrayed as a parody of Jesus Christ.

We see this in verse 1: "And the dragon stood on the shore of the sea. And I saw a beast coming out of the sea. He had ten horns and seven heads, with ten crowns on his horns, and on each head a blasphemous name. The beast I saw resembled a leopard, but had feet like those of a bear and a mouth like that of a lion."

This, in fact, is a double parody. First of all, if you saw an animal with seven heads and 10 horns, you would know that you had been drinking. There is no such animal. But if you saw two animals with seven heads and 10 horns, you would suspect that you have a species-two of a kind. As strange as the dragon looks, the sea beast looks just like him, with seven heads and 10 horns. In the Gospel of John, Jesus said, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). So at this level also the sea beast is a parody or counterfeit of Jesus Christ.

Consider the following passages:

1. Revelation 13:2: "The beast I saw resembled a leopard, but had feet like those of a bear and a mouth like that of a lion. The dragon gave the beast his power and his throne and great authority." This text tells us that the sea beast gets his authority from the dragon. In Matthew 28:18 Jesus said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." So once again the sea beast relates to the Dragon in the same way that Jesus relates to His Father.

2. Revelation 13:3: "One of the heads of the beast seemed to have had a fatal wound, but the fatal wound had been healed. The whole world was astonished and followed the beast." What is a fatal wound? A fatal wound is a wound that kills you, right? Now, if you're dead and a healing takes place, what do we call that? A resurrection. So this sea beast counterfeits the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Might it also be that this program of counterfeit even attempts to mimic the ministry of Jesus? Jesus' ministry lasted three and a half years. But the sea beast has a ministry too. Notice verse 5: "The beast was given a mouth to utter proud words and blasphemies and to exercise his authority for forty-two months." Which amounts to three and a half years. Thus the sea beast counterfeits not only the position of Jesus within the Godhead but also the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

So although there are many animals in the Revelation story, it really is not about animals at all. The message, rather, is that there will be a counterfeit of Jesus Christ in the last days of earth's history. There will be powers (and perhaps even a person-see 2 Thessalonians 18, 9) that will talk, look, and act like Jesus Christ.

Now, if the dragon is a counterfeit of God the Father and the sea beast is a counterfeit of God the Son, then the land beast would seem to be a counterfeit of the Holy Spirit. And so it is. Notice Revelation 13:11: "Then I saw another beast, coming out of the earth. He had two horns like a lamb, but he spoke like a dragon."

In the King James Version the word "lamb" occurs 29 times in the book of Revelation, 28 of which are references to Jesus. The other occurrence is here. This beast too is like Christ. But do you remember what the Holy Spirit is called in the Gospel of John? A comforter? Yes, but that is not the whole story. In John 14:16 the Holy Spirit is called "another Comforter" (KJV). Who is the Comforter? It is Jesus.

The scene is the upper room just before the crucifixion of Jesus. The disciples are quite depressed. They have heard that Jesus is going away. But Jesus says, "Don't worry; I will send you another Comforter. Someone who will comfort you the same way I do." The work of the Holy Spirit is to replace the work of Jesus in the lives of the disciples. The Spirit operates on the model of the work of Jesus and carries it out for Him. The Holy Spirit is "like the Lamb." And so the land beast of Revelation 13 is like the sea beast.

3. Revelation 13:12: "He exercised all the authority of the first beast on his behalf, and made the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose fatal wound had been healed." The land beast is interested in promoting not himself, but rather the power and interests of the sea beast. The Holy Spirit speaks not of Himself, but rather of Christ (John 16:13). It is therefore clear that the dragon, the sea beast, and the land beast together are portrayed as a deliberate parody or counterfeit of the true Godhead.

4. Revelation 13:13: "And he performed great and miraculous signs, even causing fire to come down from heaven to earth in full view of men." It was the Holy Spirit who brought fire from heaven to earth to anoint the original disciples at Pentecost (Acts 2). What we have here is a counterfeit of not only the Holy Spirit, but Pentecost.

Why does the fire come down here? Verse 14 says: "Because of the signs he was given power to do on behalf of the first beast, he deceived the inhabitants of the earth. He ordered them to set up an image in honour of the beast who was wounded by the sword and yet lived."

These texts indicate that there is to be a great, final, worldwide deception in which a counterfeit trinity will stand in the place of God. The purpose of the counterfeit is to deceive the world. The counterfeit Pentecost confuses people about the true God and His purposes for the last days of earth's history.

The devil has two primary methods of dealing with human beings: on the one hand, he counterfeits the work of God to deceive and persuade; and on the other, he uses force, trying to persuade by intimidation and persecution.

In the course of history, force has had its limits and persecution has often backfired. When a person's faith comes under threat, it often becomes stronger. In the face of violent opposition, prayers become charged with importance and fervency.

In the last days of earth's history, Satan brings in deception refined almost to perfection so that people will not be able to tell which side is right whether they are dealing with Christ or Satan. In the last days things will not be as they seem to be.

Unclean Spirits-Like Frogs

There is one further passage in Revelation that speaks to this end time deception. It's Revelation 16:13 - the famous battle of Armageddon passage. "Then I saw three evil spirits that looked like frogs; they came out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet" (verse 13).

Who are the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet? They are the same counterfeit trinity as in Revelation 13. The "beast" refers to the sea beast, and the "false prophet" refers to the land beast (see also Rev. 19:20). Out of the mouths of each of these characters comes an evil spirit that looks like a frog.

Why frogs, of all things?

The background of Revelation 16 is thoroughly grounded in the plagues against ancient Egypt just before the Exodus. One of those plagues consisted of an overabundance of frogs. But of all the plagues that fell on Egypt, why would frogs be mentioned at this point?

When Moses first came in to Pharaoh, his God-given authority was demonstrated when his brother, Aaron, threw down his walking stick and it became a snake (Ex. 7:8-10). But Pharaoh's magicians weren't worried. They threw down their walking sticks, and they became snakes also (verses 11, 12).

Then Moses and Aaron went out and turned the waters of the Nile into blood (verses 14-21). Again Pharaoh's magicians were able to counterfeit that miracle (verses 22, 23).

Next Moses and Aaron struck Egypt with a plague of frogs (Ex. 8:1-6). And again Pharaoh's magicians were able to duplicate the feat (Ex. 8:7).

But as it turned out, the plague of frogs was the last that Pharaoh's magicians were able to duplicate (Ex. 7:18, 19). The frogs, therefore, constituted the last deception of the Exodus. That is why there are frogs in Revelation 16:13. They signal that the message of Revelation 16 has to do with the last deception of earth's history.

Revelation 16:14 says that these frogs are "spirits of demons." They are the demonic counterparts of the three good angels of Revelation 14:6-12. Both groups of angels have a mission to the whole world (Rev. 14:6; 16:14), one trio calling the world to worship God, and the other gathering the people of the world into the service of the unholy trinity. "They are the spirits of demons performing miraculous signs, and they go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them for the battle on the great day of God Almighty" (Rev. 16:14).

Three angels speak on behalf of the true God throughout the world, and three angels speak on behalf of the demonic trinity throughout the world. In the end it will be Trinity against trinity, and three angels against three angels. Not only is there a counterfeit of the Godhead and a counterfeit of Pentecost at the end; there is also a counterfeit of God's end-time message. This counterfeit is what the battle of Armageddon is all about. "Then they gathered the kings together to the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon" (verse 16).

Showdown

What is Armageddon?

I have come to the conclusion that the best way to understand the term, in the light of the biblical evidence, is as the Greek form of a couple Hebrew words that mean "mountain of Meggido." The problem is, however, that there is no mountain in all the world named Meggido. Meggido was a city on a small elevation at the edge of the plain of Jezreel. Looming over the place, however, is a range of mountains called Carmel.

Carmel is the mountain of Megiddo in the same sense that Mount Rainier is the mountain of Seattle, or Table Mountain the mountain of Cape Town. Mount Carmel is the mountain you could see from all over town, even though Megiddo itself was not in the mountains.

What counts in Revelation is that Mount Carmel was the place where the great Old Testament showdown between Elijah and the prophets of Baal took place (1 Kings 18:16-46). On that occasion God answered Elijah's prayer to bring fire down from heaven onto an altar to prove who was the true God.

According to Revelation, the Mount Carmel experience will be repeated at the end. Once again there will be a showdown between the true God and a devious counterfeit. But it will be different this time. At the end the fire from heaven will fall on the wrong altar.

And it will be the counterfeit Elijah and the counterfeit angels who bring it down (Rev. 13:13, 14). On that day all the evidence of the five senses will suggest that the counterfeit trinity is the true God.

We are already living in such a time. Secular people are set up for such a deception. Secular beliefs focus on what can be seen, heard, tasted, touched, or smelled. Reality is based on what the five senses are capable of perceiving. But Scripture says that in the final crisis of earth's history, those who trust in their five senses will be deceived. It will be a battle between two truth systems: one will be confirmed scientifically; the other will be confirmed only by Scripture. To quote the words of Jesus: "I have told you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe" (John 14:29).

That is why the message of Adventism is so important for today. Things are not always what they seem. People need to know that those who trust primarily in their senses will be deceived. The Mount Carmel experience will be repeated at the end, in support of the counterfeit trinity. In that crisis all the evidence of our eyes and our ears will tell us that we've been wrong to follow the Bible.

Scripture portrays the end-time as a time of great deception, a time when reason will lead us astray. Revelation portrays the end-time in terms of a battle between the Scriptures and perception, between reality as experienced by the five senses, and ultimate reality as revealed by God Himself. This is the heart of the message that Adventists have to bring to the world.

It is true that Jesus is the centre of our faith. It is true that the gospel is the root of Christian life. And it is true that Christ-likeness is our goal. We share these beliefs with many other Christians, and we must never lose sight of them. But let us also never lose sight of the unique mission to which God has called us. We are a people of prophecy. We were called to prepare the world for events that are yet to come. If we lose sight of this message, who will give it? If we don't give it now, when will we?