

# REVELATION—UNVEILING THE END, ACT 2 THE EARTHLY DRAMA

## STUDY THIRTEEN

### Antichrist's Lieutenant: The Beast Out of the Earth

*Revelation 13:11–18*

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*Few things please Satan more than deception. Never forget this. He's powerful. He's attractive. He's alluring. And those who work alongside him are all the same. Therefore, his deception works beautifully as he engages in his goal of moving us away from truth.*  
—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

A love-struck woman enters a relationship with a kind and caring man, only to realize—months or even years later—that he simply wore a mask around her to disguise his ugly character.

A company struggles as managers discover that a promising new hire exaggerated his experience on his resume, while another new hire in a different department learns that her manager misrepresented some of the expectations on the job description.

A young family sits in their beautiful, newly purchased house in a pool of tears because they discovered that the seller hid tens of thousands of dollars' worth of problems under the veneer of fresh paint, new fixtures, and a flashy showing.

The moment each of these people realize they have been deceived, they can't help but look back and think, *How? . . . Why?*

Deception is a terrible thing, but *spiritual* deception is a different kind of beast altogether. What *seems* to be good and right and true actually assaults your relationship with God, claws at your joy, and devours your soul.

So how can we resist such spiritual deception? Scripture offers us an essential shield to guard against this gut-wrenching reality. We will see how we can equip ourselves with this protection by looking to a time when the *whole world* faces its worst form of demonic, spiritual deception.



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## PREPARE YOUR HEART

Have you ever been deceived by someone close to you? Such experiences are painful and tempt us to harbor bitterness, resentment, and anger. If you have such feelings in your heart today, bring them to God in prayer. Acknowledge your own need for forgiveness and request His power to give you the wisdom, strength, and courage to forgive. Spend some time with Him and record a prayer in the space below.



## TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

*Revelation 12–13* functions as a complete literary unit that presents the true antagonists of the drama. First, we meet the dragon, whom John identified as Satan (*Revelation 12:9*). Then, we encounter the dragon's two closest allies. The dragon takes his stand on the shore and summons two beasts—one from the water and the other from the land.

The dragon gave the sea-dwelling beast rule over the world (*13:7–8*). And the earth-dwelling beast, whom John would later identify as a “false prophet” (*20:10*), received demonic power to perform miracles that led humanity to worship the first beast.

These three creatures formed a sort of “unholy” trinity: an anti-Father, an anti-Son, and an anti-Holy-Spirit. This trio worked in harmony to deceive humanity and to draw them away from God. Let's turn to *13:11–18* to see what part the beast out of the earth played in this unholy song.



## Observation: Another Beast

*Revelation 13:11–18* is one of the most infamous passages in all Scripture. In fact, the imagery is familiar even to nonbelievers, and for centuries, people all over the world have wondered about its meaning. Yet before we start to speculate what these images might represent, we must first understand what the passage says. By engaging in careful observation, we will be able to determine the timeless meaning, purpose, and valuable application of John's ancient words.<sup>1</sup>

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How did John describe the beast in *Revelation 13:11*? What did John *see*, and what did he *hear*?

According to *13:12*, what was this beast's essential goal? According to *13:13–14a*, how did he accomplish this goal?

Like King Nebuchadnezzar of the Babylonian Empire, this beast built a statue, and he dictated that all people worship it (*13:14b*). According to *13:15*, what would happen to those who refused to worship this false idol?

According to *13:16*, what other demand did this second beast make of all people? According to *13:17*, what would happen to those who defied this demand?

What exhortation did John offer in *13:18* to those struggling with the message of this passage?

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“Wisdom is needed here” (*Revelation 13:18*). John knew his words posed a challenge to his readers, so he reminded them to turn to God for wisdom. As you prepare to interpret this challenging passage, say a prayer, and ask the Holy Spirit to guide you as you explore the meaning of John’s message.



## **Interpretation: The Mark of the Beast**

In your observation of *Revelation 13:11–18*, some very important questions likely flooded your mind. *What is the mark of the beast? Am I in danger of receiving it? What is the meaning of 666?* As you wrestle with these difficult questions, remember *why* John wrote the book of Revelation—not to *frighten* followers of Jesus but to *fill* them with hope.

To include a reminder of hope in this passage, John echoed a previous section of the book. Amid the series of seal judgments, John experienced an interlude in which God “sealed” 144,000 believers for protection and for ownership. Read of this seal in *7:3* and compare it to the mark of the beast in *13:16*.

In what ways are the seal of God and the mark of the beast similar? In what ways are they different? Why is this contrast important for understanding the nature of the mark of the beast? What does this connection reveal about true followers of Jesus and their protection from the beast’s deception?

For John’s Jewish readers, this picture of something on the forehead and hands would have reminded them of a very close and very personal prayer: the Shema. This prayer functioned like a pledge of allegiance for the people of Israel. They would recite these words daily to reaffirm their loyalty to God. In the Shema, God urged the Israelites to “tie [His commandments] to your hands and wear them on your forehead as reminders” (*Deuteronomy 6:8*).

Read the Shema in its entirety in *Deuteronomy 6:4–9*. In what ways does the message of the Shema affirm loyalty to God—and God *alone*—rather than to Satan and his wicked minions?

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What is the theological significance of 666—the number of the beast? Remember, John didn't say this number was cursed. Research what he wanted to communicate with this point. To discern this truth, feel free to consult your Bible-study tools like Pastor Chuck Swindoll's, *Insights on Revelation*, or *Constable's Notes*, which is available for free at [netbible.org](http://netbible.org).<sup>2</sup>

*The world longs for someone who can promise relief and hope from all the torment and all the anguish the lost are going through. And Satan wants to lead us away from the hope of Christ and into the worship of another god.*  
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



## **Correlation: Deceived by the Devil**

Those who receive the mark of the beast won't be tricked into it. In fact, John affirmed the opposite. Those who receive the mark will do so only because of their willful worship of the beast. In other words, they will be *deceived* into following this evil figure. There's an important difference between trickery and deception. And there is perhaps no better demonstration of true deception than Satan's first interaction with humans.

What command did God give the man and the woman in [Genesis 2:16–17](#)? How did the serpent distort God's words when he approached the woman in [3:1](#)? To answer these questions, read these verses in a more word-for-word translation, like the New American Standard Bible, and look carefully for the similarities and differences between God's words and the serpent's.

The serpent's work of deception produced immediate results. When the woman recalled God's original command in [3:2–3](#), how did she misrepresent it to the serpent?

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How did the serpent respond to the woman in *Genesis 3:4–5*? In what ways did he lie to the woman? In what ways did he tell the truth? How did this blend of truth and dishonesty allow him to deceive the woman?

Satan didn't trick Eve into thinking the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil was something it wasn't. No, he *deceived* her by getting as close to the truth as possible. As a result, she trusted the serpent more than God, so she knowingly and willingly decided to eat the forbidden fruit.

*The adversary is like an angel of light—dazzling, eloquent, dripping with charisma! He knows exactly what buttons to push to attract us to his message. That's the way it is with deception. What appears to be true is false. What appears to be valid is invalid. And lamb-like qualities turn to beast-like savagery. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



## **Application: Defeating Deception**

So what is the antidote to the satanic plague of deception? Pastor Chuck suggests it's *discernment*. When you cultivate discernment, you learn to . . .

- Hear what isn't said.
- See what is hidden.
- Realize what isn't obvious.
- Focus on what isn't addressed.

Have you ever experienced spiritual deception? What were the consequences of this deception? If you could go back and relive this experience, what would you do differently?

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As you reflect on a previous experience with deception, what practical steps can you take to develop greater spiritual discernment? Write down two or three action points in the space below.

No matter how discerning you are, Satan won't stop trying to deceive you and lead you away from God's truth. Now is the time to take your stand. Open your Bible. Ask God for wisdom. Seek counsel from the wisest person you know. And never stop pursuing the truth.



## A FINAL PRAYER

*Father, I know that I am not immune to demonic deception. Keep lies and deception far from me. Be gracious and patient with me as I seek to grow in spiritual discernment. I want to be a person of the truth—not simply someone who knows the truth but someone who lives it as well. I pray these things in Jesus' true name. Amen.*

## ENDNOTES

1. To learn more about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method, go to the web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."
2. Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on Revelation*, Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2014).

For the 2024 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by Brad Smith, writer and content strategist, *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages. Copyright © 2003, 2024 by Charles R. Swindoll, Inc. All rights are reserved worldwide. Duplication of copyrighted material for commercial use is strictly prohibited.

