

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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Revelation 11:19 to 14:20 - The Trinity of Evil

Good morning. When I was a young lad it was not unusual to hear the expression, "things always come in threes". This was often mentioned when something had gone wrong or there had been a disaster of some kind. The Bible is full of threes. Ecclesiastes states "a threefold cord is not quickly broken". "A three days journey" said Moses to Pharaoh. The Lord was to be in the grave three days and nights. God is revealed as three persons: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. In Genesis 1:26 God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness". Man was made a three part person, spirit, soul and body.

Not all three's are good. The subject today is the trinity of evil found in Revelation 12 and 13. Satan imitates, but whatever he does it is always against God and God's people. Satan is the "god of this world", 2 Corinthians 4:4. The Lord warned believers when He said, "In the world you will have tribulation", John 16:33.

Before considering the trinity of evil, we should note that 11:19 sets the scene with a view into heaven. The temple speaks of the display of glory, the ark speaks of a covenant keeping God. Lastly, there is a graphic display of judgements on this world. We need to remember that some of the language in Revelation is symbolic. The same symbols are usually found elsewhere in the Bible, to help understand their meaning.

As to their order in time, the trinity of evil is brought out in all their fullness during the seven years of tribulation. They are specifically active in the last three and a half years. The Church, all true Christians, will have been raptured and the glorious Kingdom reign of Christ not yet commenced. The tribulation period is "the time of Jacob's trouble", as mentioned in Jeremiah 30:7.

The first sign we have mentioned in chapter 12 is that of a woman, a woman who is displayed gloriously. Verse 1, "Now a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a garland of twelve stars." In Genesis 37:9 we see similar symbols in one of Joseph's dreams. Joseph, a picture of Christ, receives homage from the sun, moon and stars. The woman represents the believing nation of Israel. Chapter 12:2 states, "Then being with child, she cried out in labour and in pain to give birth". This is the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. Verse 5, "She bore a male Child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron. And her Child was caught up to God and His throne." The ruling with a rod of iron is the thousand year reign of Christ. Caught up to God is the ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ. The events of the woman and Child are brief and selective.

The first of the trinity of evil.

Verse 3, "And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great, fiery red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads." This is a fitting description of the dragon who is represented as having complete rule over this world (the god of this world) and who rules through powers in this world. The dragon is sometimes presented as Satan or the Devil, as mentioned in verse 9. The description of the dragon gives the true character of this fallen angel, Lucifer. See Isaiah 14:12-15 for a description of one who was created originally in great magnificence yet rebelled against God. He was cast out from the innermost places of heaven. A dragon is symbolic of a destructive creature openly attacking God's people. When referred to as the Devil he is the accuser, one who seeks to cast doubt in our minds. See for example how he deals with Eve, (Genesis 3). Alternatively, he accuses God of over-protection as with Job, read Job 1. When referred to as Satan, he is the adversary, one who opposes, directly or indirectly, God's people and seeks to cause division.

In verse 4 we see the destructive power of the dragon against a third of the stars of heaven. Stars, representing individuals or groups, are symbolic of heavenly character. However the dragon is active in bringing down those who should be shining for Christ. There are many ways in which the dragon will be active but all to nullify the testimony as he seeks to thwart God's purpose. You and I know that God's purpose cannot be hindered but Christians can be brought low, made ineffective and sometimes feel like giving up. More openly, in verse 4, is the dragon's opposition to Israel. He seeks to destroy the babe of Bethlehem's manger. Who did the dragon use? Herod! Herod who slew all the male children from two years old and under.

Verse 6 is currently 2,000 years further on from the events of verses 4 and 5. The woman is kept safe by God during the tribulation period. Matthew 24:22 states, "Unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened." This verse indicates the immense suffering to come upon God's people during the tribulation years; but the duration is fixed. Deliverance will come.

Another major event happens as the tribulation starts. There is war in the last part of heaven where the dragon has access. Michael, with other angels who stayed obedient to God, fight against the dragon and his angels. The war ends with the great dragon and his angels being cast out to the earth. Barred from heaven forever, the dragon now realises that his time is short, verse 12. Then an amazing and dreadful announcement is made, "Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea". This whole world will be subjected to unprecedented evil. If you as a Christian think the world situation is bad enough, be thankful that you will be in heaven before evil floods this world.

It will be as well to say at this point that "earth" and "sea" are symbolic references. Earth refers to that area of the world which has Israel as its centre. The sea refers to all other nations of the world with a primary focus on those mentioned in Scripture. This will help us to understand the "woe" of verse 12.

Many believers will become martyrs at this time but their salvation, like today, is through the blood of the Lamb. Verse 13 to the end of the chapter shows the dragon redoubling his effort against Israel and those who believe God.

The second of the trinity of evil.

Revelation 13:1 to 10 provide the details of the first beast - the beast out of the sea. The origin of this beast is the Gentile nations. The restless turbulent sea gives rise to a political and military power, probably with a single, malignant, evil person at its head. The picture is similar to that of the dragon and clearly points to his power, verse 2. The horns, symbols of power, are seen with crowns. The dragon is the source of evil that energises the beast. If the word beast was not descriptive enough of this emerging force, further detail follows. Blasphemy is characteristic of this mighty empire, which is against God.

Turning to Daniel 7 we have a vision of four kingdoms. The kingdoms are described as follows; the first a lion, the second a bear and the third a leopard. The fourth kingdom is described as a beast. Remarkable is it not that the same description is given in Revelation 13, a beast. The beast in Daniel includes the primary features of the previous three kingdoms. Historically the features of the four kingdoms match those of Babylon, Medo-Persian, Grecian and lastly the Roman Empire. God's description clearly matches what subsequently happened historically. Is this not a solemn warning concerning what God states here in Revelation though it is currently unfulfilled. Revelation 13:2 states that the beast has the features of a leopard, a bear and a lion. The kingdom is a mongrel, bringing forth the worst features of what went before. This was historically true of the Roman Empire and is more so of this revived version.

Sadly there is some Satan worship today. Verse 4 shows that it will become almost worldwide in the worship of the dragon and the beast. The dragon gives the beast its authority and power. The beast is presented as a thing that is invincible. History clearly shows that no empire or kingdom lasts forever. This revived Roman Empire will also perish. Verses 5 and 6 show the character of the beast, "blasphemy against God, His name, His tabernacle and those who dwell in heaven." Does this remind you of people of today? The name of God, of Christ, of Jesus, is used as a curse in everyday language. Even today non Christians show the features of the beast and Satan!

There is a verse of a children's chorus which comes to mind:

*"Oh, be careful little tongue what you say.
There's a Father up above,
Who is looking down in love.
Oh, be careful little tongue what you say".*

Don't be characterised by the ways and words of this world!

From verses 7 and 8 the main purpose of the beast comes to light - to fight against those who believe in God and to be a powerful force ruling over all nations. Verse 8 has the expression "all who dwell on the earth will worship him (the beast)". This does not include believers in God. "Dwell on the earth" is an expression meaning those who are totally earthly minded, who have rejected God and are willing to follow anything or anyone who opposes God. As such they worship the beast and, in so doing, the one who controls the beast, Satan. God clearly declares that those who worship the beast are not in the Book of Life of the Lamb. Only those who believe God and our Lord Jesus Christ have their names in this Book of Life. From verse 9 God appeals to people to listen. There is no clearer warning than the message of the book of Revelation. Verse 10 states in unmistakable terms that our life-style is a determining factor which indicates our end. The myth that I can plead with Peter at the pearly gates is completely dispelled! Determine your eternal destination in this life or miss out altogether.

The third of the trinity of evil.

Verse 11 to the end of chapter 13 give us the second beast. There are differences as to his origin and outward character. Verse 11, "Then I saw another beast coming up out of the earth, and he had two horns like a lamb and spoke like a dragon". He comes from that area in which the land of Israel is the centre, and probably from the nation of Israel itself. The character and appearance is different from the other beast. He is described as having two horns like a lamb. This person is the true antichrist or false prophet that is foretold in scripture. He will seek to make the first beast the centre of worship instead of God in the nation of Israel. But he speaks like a dragon. His true nature cannot be hid; his authority comes from the first beast. The dragon is the ruling power behind both.

There will seem to be no limit to his power. "He performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men", verse 13. The signs are used to deceive people. His intention is to have an image of the first beast for people to worship or be killed if they refused. There is a similar event in Daniel 3 - the story of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego and Nebuchadnezzar's gold image. Worship the idol or be killed was the command.

In Daniel 11:31 we have a prophecy about the idol of the beast that will be set up in the temple at Jerusalem: "they shall defile the sanctuary fortress; then they shall take away the daily sacrifices, and place there the abomination of desolation". How obnoxious these events will be to God.

The antichrist is able to make the idol speak, another means of deceiving people to think that this is from God. Even today there are many professedly Christian groups that are mixing up Christianity with debasing signs. Careful examination draws the conclusion that such activity is not God honouring or consistent with heavenly blessing. It will be the same in this coming day of tribulation when the rule of the dragon holds sway.

In Revelation 7:3 God sealed His own servants in their foreheads. I do not think this is a physical mark but that which is of the Spirit of God, establishing in their minds the reality of their salvation. This marking guarantees their safe protection by God from the troubles and judgements on the world. The trinity of evil also mark their own. "He causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads, and that no one may buy or sell except one who has the mark or name of the beast, or the number of his name", 13:16-17. The people of the world are summarised in their various groups. Those with power and authority and those without, both will be marked. Those who are rich and those who are not, both will be marked. Those who have freedom and those who are slaves, both will be marked.

The effect is to make it impossible to live without the mark. Everyone is to become a slave to the beast. George Orwell in his book '1984' had a fictitious totalitarian state which controlled totally the lives of all its citizens. I do not believe any one, not even George Orwell, can fully understand, what it will be like to be a slave of the beast. There will be no civil liberty movement, no charitable concerns to alleviate suffering, and no possible escape from the bondage into which the world falls.

Verse 18 contains a puzzle which has occupied the minds of Christians and non Christians alike for many years; "His number is 666". Recently my attention was directed to two developments of recent years. Bar coding has been with the commercial world for decades; it contains the number 666. The number 6 is used to mark the start, middle and end of a bar code. As Scripture refers to buying and selling requiring the mark of the beast, then possibly in this future day everyone will be bar coded like a commodity item. The second development that has occurred more recently is the ability to insert a micro chip under the skin. Dogs can have a micro chip implant to ensure owner traceability. A similar micro chip for people has been proposed as an alternative to the credit card and money. Your hand is scanned and the details read in the same way as passing a credit card through a machine. With these developments already here it would be very simple to implement the mark of the beast!

What is happening in heaven?

To close this section of Revelation and to balance the rapid rise on earth of the trinity of evil, chapter 14 provides God's seven point agenda.

1. There will be a redeemed people belonging to God who will meet and be with Christ when He returns to establish His Kingdom. The 144,000, a representative (not actual) number of believers who have been kept through the tribulation, have their own special song of praise. They lived true and blameless lives for God.
2. God will have His everlasting gospel preached; "Fear God, and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgement has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water".
3. The world idolatrous religious system, Babylon, will be finally judged.
4. Everlasting torment for those who follow the beast.

5. Encouragement for God's people to remain faithful. For the martyr there are better things in heaven.
6. The harvest time is coming, the wheat gathered into barns and the tares burned; see also Matthew 13:30; and finally,
7. The judgement time, the graphic picture of grapes going through the winepress.

What we have looked at today in God's word provides a sufficient glimpse into the future to conclude,

1. Opposition to God will not go on forever.
2. There are very dark days ahead for this world.
3. It is vital to be right with God now through His Son our Lord Jesus Christ.

Therefore, Peter writing in his second epistle about this coming judgement, raises the challenge, "what kind of people ought we to be in holy conduct and godliness" 2 Peter 3:11.

Let us pray.

Lord, give us understanding of Your word, this book of the Revelation, which at times seems so difficult. If this world is moving steadily towards Your judgement on sin and sinners, how thankful we are to know that You are coming soon. Help us to serve You with a clear testimony that others might come to accept You as their Saviour. Bless us this day, we ask in Your name. Amen.

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