

Message #80 of Scripture Beneath The Surface
“Understanding End-time Prophecy - Part 2”

With Randy Smith
(269) 763-2114

Preparation Ministries, Inc

PO BOX 475 OLIVET, MI 49076

preparationministries@gmail.com

(Please feel free to call, or send messages)

Web Site: <http://www.preparationministries.net>

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Hello! Thanks for being with us. Today I'd like to continue our series on “Understanding End-time Prophecy,” with part 2. Last week we talked about how Bible prophecy needs to be understood from within the symbolic content of scripture as well as from a strictly physical viewpoint. We discussed the concepts of parables, and some interesting applications from a couple of the Bible's parables; one from the Old Testament, and one from the New Testament.

If you missed the previous message, or in the near future you miss one of the succeeding messages on this or any other subject, or even if you didn't miss it, and you would like a copy of this series, please feel free to call or write to us. Our material is free for the asking. Just listen at the end of the program and Kim will give you my number and our address, as well as an e-mail address with which you can reach us. We would be glad to hear from you, and no, you will not be solicited for money. We don't do that.

So now, let's continue with our study on “Understanding End-time Prophecy,” by turning to the book of Revelation and see what we find. However, as we do this, keep the concept of the right hand and the left hand in mind which we discussed last week, for it will come in handy as we eventually discuss Revelation 13's ‘mark of the beast’. Without the right hand, left hand, concept, it is very difficult to understand what the mark of the beast really is.

I'm going to read now out of Revelation, chapter 13, starting with verse 1, and read through verse 9. It says, “And I stood upon the sand of the sea, and saw a beast rise up out of the sea, having

seven heads and ten horns, and upon his horns ten crowns, and upon his heads the name of blasphemy. 2 And the beast which I saw was like a leopard, and his feet were like the feet of a bear, and his mouth was like the mouth of a lion: and the dragon gave him his power, and his ruling seat, and great authority. 3 And I saw one of his heads as if it was wounded unto death; and his deadly wound was healed: and all the world wondered after the beast. 4 And they worshiped the dragon which gave power to the beast: and they worshiped the beast, saying, Who is like the beast? Who is able to make war with him? 5 And there was given to him a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies; and power was given to him to continue for forty two months. 6 And he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme his name, and his tabernacle, and those who dwell in heaven. 7 And it was given to him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them: and power was given him over all kindred, and tongues, and nations. 8 And all who dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. 9 If any man has an ear, let him hear.”

If you would, I would like you to notice what that last verse said. It says that if someone has an ear, that they should hear what is being said. Now, of course we all have ears. All human beings have ears. In this verse God is not asking us to check ourselves out to see if we have human ears. What he is suggesting is that some people have ears that can hear what the Holy Spirit is revealing, and some people have ears that cannot hear what the Holy Spirit is revealing. To hear spiritual things requires a person to have spiritual ears. In all the Bible, this is a central concept which must be kept in mind. It is only those who understand through the Holy Spirit who will comprehend the deep spiritual things of God.

In Amos 3:7, we see that God will do nothing without revealing his secrets to his servants, the prophets. It is this promise that encourages us to seek for understanding. Because Christians are under the New Testament Covenant, we all have the Holy Spirit abiding in us. Because of this, we all have the ability to understand the deep hidden things of God, just as the prophets in the Old Testament Covenant did. 1 Corinthians 2:4-12, tells us that the Holy Spirit seeks the deep hidden things of God, and then reveals those things to us. It says that though the things of God are spoken in a mystery, which is the hidden wisdom of God, we humans who accept Jesus Christ as Savior will receive the Holy Spirit and therefore will be able to come into a knowledge of the truth. If we have spiritual ears, we then will be able to understand the things of God's spiritual realm which are hidden to others who do not have the Holy Spirit residing in them. To have ears to hear means that we have ears that are tuned to the spiritual voice and can therefore hear the spiritual things of God.

Now, in the verses we just read from Revelation 13, notice that the scripture is telling us that there is a first beast, and that it rises up out of the sea. Later in the chapter, the Bible describes a second beast, but for now, let's try to understand the principles surrounding the first beast. Unless we understand what the first beast is, we will never understand the rest of the chapter. If you are a person with spiritual ears, then listen to this concept of the first beast and try to understand the substance of it. And, in order to understand it, we must consider first the concept

of what a beast is. If you don't understand what the Bible is referring to when it talks about the first and the second beasts, then neither will you understand the rest of the chapter, nor much of end-time prophecy at all, for that matter.

When the Bible says, “beast,” it means animal. Sometimes, when we read prophecy, we have a tendency to see the word beast, and immediately develop a picture in our minds of a ferocious animal which is frightening to behold. In a sense, the beasts of Revelation 13 are ferocious, and in a sense they are frightening to behold. But if we just think of them as a monstrous scary animal, we lose the overall picture of what a beast is. Beast just means animal. Of course the animal can certainly be ferocious, but basically it just means animal. It is the concept of the beast being an animal that is most important for understanding the symbolism of this chapter.

Remember, Revelation is a symbolic book, and is filled with many graphical portrayals of events and figures, but the true understanding of what is implied can only be understood by understanding the symbolic terminology. As you study Revelation, whether you're listening to me, listening to other ministers, or just reading your Bible, take the time to pray about what you're reading and ask God to reveal the hidden mystery of it. Of course, if you do this, you must also have a true heart before God, willing to also apply the knowledge he gives you. The Holy Spirit can, and will, reveal God's word to his children, but only to those children who are ready to apply the knowledge and understanding to their lives. God doesn't care much to reveal himself to those who will ignore the truth. He wants to reveal himself to those who will gladly receive him, not to those who reject him. The real purpose of revealing himself to his children is not to satisfy their curiosity, but to give them opportunity to come closer to him. By comprehending the things of the Bible more clearly, we have opportunity to come into a closer relationship with him, to become much more intimately acquainted with him.

So, when you see the word, “beast,” recognize the concept that it is an animal. The animal concept is used extensively throughout the Bible. In scripture, the designation of animal is used to describe all things which are lower than humans, and who have no ability to comprehend the deep hidden things of God. As an example of this, think about your pet dog or cat. If you have one, you can most probably see that your pet cannot contemplate the existence of God. For that matter, they cannot comprehend anything which asks a question. An animal's existence is based on instinct, and it cannot comprehend a question. An animal cannot ask the question, “why,” nor enter into a thought process which explores reasons for things. Reasons of why this thing works that way, or that thing works this way, or why the sun shines or why the stars shine, or why people disappear when they are old, are concepts that animals cannot comprehend. It is too great for their minds. They are brute beasts.

And what I mean by being brute, is that animals have no ability to reason. Humans can apply the attribute of reason, but animals can't. Animals have no ability to apply the attribute of reasoning when there is a, “why,” situation. In the Bible, the term, brute, is used in referring to animals which have no ability to ponder the reason of why things are like they are, and scripture calls these animals brute beasts, which are animals without reason.

To adequately explore this concept of brute beasts having no ability to apply reason, we can take a look at the old Popeye cartoons of yesteryear. One of the characters in the Popeye cartoons was Brutus. He was one of the villains. His name, Brutus, is a take-off on the word, brute. And Brutus accurately portrayed the dumb animal nature, in that he had no ability to apply reason to a situation as the hero Popeye supposedly did. Popeye was the smart one, and Brutus was the dumb one. Brutus was brute in nature, and had no ability to use the attribute of reason. He made dumb decisions. Brutus was always looking at the situation from an improper perspective, and therefore always acted inappropriately. Of course, these were just cartoons, but they adequately describe the nature of mankind in two stages of growth. The first stage of mankind is as brute beasts. In this first stage, they have yet to apply reason to their lives, and therefore have not contemplated God, nor contemplated their eventual end. God's purpose for mankind is that they pass into the second stage of their lives, leave the animal nature behind, and become born again in spirit, thereby coming into a right knowledge of God and of his supreme righteousness and ultimate authority. In this born-again experience, human beings apply reason to their lives and finally conclude that God exists, and that he is good. They also conclude, through the powers of reason, that they themselves do not want to end up in outer darkness with no future. It is this passing from the brute beast stage, or shall we say, from the dumb animal stage, and into the spiritual awareness stage of knowing God, that completes mankind's progression. If a man remains as a dumb animal, if he remains as a brute beast, if he rejects the goodness and glory of God, then he does not become born-again, and his eventual end will be in the great sea of destruction. He will be doomed forever.

It is this concept of being an animal, rather than being a born-again child of God, that is at the very basis of Revelation 13's beast. This first beast, that rises up out of the sea, is the animal nature of the earth. Satan is animal in nature, and has not applied reason to his actions. He has rejected the authority of God, and therefore is a dumb animal, he is a brute beast. In scripture he is referred to as an animal many times, starting with the Garden of Eden account in the book of Genesis where he is referred to as a serpent. And, not only is he referred to there as an animal, it is also mentioned there that he was more subtle, meaning more deceptive, than all the other animals of the garden.

Now, we know that animals cannot actually be deceptive. But that's not really what the Bible means when it refers to the serpent being more deceptive than all the other animals. This is symbolic in nature, and means that Satan was deceptive through his animal nature. Deception is anything which misleads us from God's truth. In the Garden of Eden, Satan misled Eve and caused her to act in opposition to God's word. This account in scripture is actually indicating that Satan was acting in the form of brutishness, which is the animalistic nature of not applying good reason to words and actions. An intelligent decision on the part of Eve would have been to apply reason, and therefore realize that to act in opposition to God's word would be an unreasonable thing to do. But because Satan deceived her, she reacted from her flesh nature rather than her spirit nature. It was her fleshly self which controlled her response instead of her spiritual nature. In essence, the Bible indicates that to speak or act in any way against the wisdom of God is to be

brutish, to be animalistic in nature, and therefore outside of the realm of God's kingdom. It is not flesh and blood which shall inherit the Kingdom of Heaven, but it is the born-again spiritual man which will inherit it. The brute animal nature of man will always act without reason.

And now, most importantly, we must realize that it is this animal nature which the Bible refers to which is the seat of authority of unregenerated mankind. The animal nature is that which acts in opposition to God, and uses poor reasoning techniques to arrive at a poor decision. Satan exhibited the original beast nature, for he rejected the supreme authority of God and chose rather to follow his own reasoning. His own reasoning was animalistic. It was brutish in nature. It was stupid. It lacked good sense. It was not well thought out. The first beast, that rose up from the sea, was the animal nature which sprung out of Satan's rebellion against God. In heaven, Satan had been the archangel. He had walked among the stones of fire in heaven, and had been in the throne room of God. His position was highest among the angels. But he refused to use sound reason, and decided instead to follow his own thoughts, and attempted to set himself up as an authority equal with God. This was the first beast, and it was the beast that rose up out of the sea, according to Revelation 13:1.

Now, it's not easy to comprehend the idea that this first beast, this first animal nature that reared up its head against God, was the animal nature which was introduced to the planet Earth. But Satan, exhibiting the original animal nature, fell from being the archangel of God to becoming the archenemy of God. In addition, he also deceived a third of the angels and drew them away from God. In keeping with the animal concept, the Bible, in Revelation 12:4, speaks of how Satan drew a third of the angels away from allegiance to God with his tail. Animals have tails, mankind doesn't. It is the animal concept to have a tail and to walk on all four feet. Revelation 12:4 is just speaking symbolically and pointing out that it was the animal nature rather than the spiritual nature which Satan used to convince one third of the angels to leave their first estate and rise up with him in opposition against the authority of God. We see this same concept of an animal's tail being significant when we read about Behemoth in the book of Job, chapter 40. In verse 17 of that chapter we read how Behemoth moves his tail like a cedar tree. The name, Behemoth, means some kind of very large land animal that dwells in the rivers and lowland water areas. This is a symbolic reference to the gigantic animal nature of mankind from his flesh and blood perspective. The great size of Behemoth's tail, equated with a cedar tree, is a reference of its extreme animal nature. We'll talk more of Behemoth when we discuss the second beast of Revelation 13.

Satan's rejection of God's authority, and the ultimate rejection of God by another third of the angels, points out that neither Satan nor the evil angels used good reason in making their decision to rebel. If they had used good reason to make a good decision, they would have remained loyal to God. But this did not happen. It was the brutish nature of the animal which rose up in Satan and his angels, and it was this animal nature which was the first beast. It was Satan's animal nature, the self centered nature, which is so contrary to the Holy Spirit nature of God.

Satan had first been under God's authority. But instead of rejecting the desire to be like God, he entertained the idea of himself sitting on the throne of God. In Isaiah 14:12-14, we read about what Satan allowed himself to think. Let me read these verses. It says, "How are you fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How are you cut down to the ground, who weakened the nations! 13 For you have said in your heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: 14 I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High."

This is the temptation that Satan gave into instead of subjecting himself to God's ultimate authority. But all creatures must accept God as the Almighty God, who rules over all people, nations, and tongues. It is this central concept of obedience to God's authority which is at the basis of God's purpose in the earth. We were created to become children of God. Satan, as the one who first opposed God's throne, was the initiator of evil. This evil is nothing more than the animal nature which refuses to use good reason in determining who is to be the Almighty God. In essence, Satan determined in his heart to be the almighty God. He, Satan, was the first beast which rose up against God, and because of his original rejection of God's authority we humans have also been introduced to a world where we will make a choice of whether to serve God or to serve our own fleshly nature. Mankind was created as flesh and blood, and the nature of our flesh and blood body is to be selfish, to be self-centered. But whether we remain fleshly in our nature, or become born-again in spirit, is yet to be determined by each and every person on earth. Satan has already demonstrated his hatred of God's righteousness, and has determined that his own goodness is greater than that of God. It is now mankind's turn to make that choice.

However, just as Satan enticed a third of the angels away from God using the instinctive animal nature of self-righteousness, he is also attempting to entice all of mankind away from serving God. And, he uses the physical things of this world to entice us. If mankind gives in to this temptation, and allows the things of this world to become important enough, then it is only a short step to hell. But we are not called to hell. We are not called to spend eternity in the lake of fire. We are called to turn away from the nature of fleshly man. We are called to turn away from the brutish animal nature which first established itself in Satan, and to set our eyes on God and on the eternal things of heaven. Colossians 3:2 tells us to set our affection on things above, not on things on the earth. But Satan knows that we have been created as flesh and blood human beings, and he knows that we are strongly moved toward earthly desires. He tempts us with all kinds of worldly things, knowing that as flesh and blood humans we enjoy the stimulation that these things bring to us. But God has called us to resist those things of the world which have no lasting eternal value, and to rather set our sights on the things of heaven, the eternal things of God. Yes, the animal nature is great, but we can overcome it through the strength and power of God, and through his Son Jesus Christ.

The animal nature is strong, it is self-centered, and it does not encourage us to worship God. It encourages us to worship those things which stimulate our flesh. It encourages us to be more concerned with our earthly physical existence than with our eternal existence. God has set us in this world to find out who will serve him. Satan has already made that decision in some age past,

therefore demonstrating his ignorance of the awesomeness of God's supreme goodness, and thus also demonstrating his inability to use reason. By not using reason, he demonstrated the animal concept of being too stupid to make a good sense decision.

Well, enough for today. Next time we'll continue this topic, and we'll have part three of, "Understanding End-time Prophecy."