

Episode 259

Shea Houdmann

Welcome to the Got Questions podcast. Today we're continuing our series on the end times, questions about the end times. And we're going to kind of, as best we can, go through sequentially, based on a literal chronological reading of the book of Revelation, but things are going on throughout overlap and so forth. So not everything we're going to do is exactly in this order. But today, Jeff, the managing editor of BibleRef.com, and Kevin, the editor-in-chief of Got Questions Ministries and I are going to be discussing the Antichrist. Who is the Antichrist? What is the Antichrist? And also closely related to that, who is the false prophet?

Shea Houdmann

Lots of passages in the Bible refer to the Antichrist or an Antichrist, or as we'll talk about later, to the spirit of the Antichrist, and all of these things.

But Revelation 13 is likely the passage most people think of when they think of the Antichrist. And actually in that passage, the word Antichrist isn't specifically used, rather it's, there's two beasts. But most Bible prophecy experts, teachers tend to think one beast is the Antichrist, the other beast is the false prophet, and then it brings in the image of the beast and the mark of the beast. So how in the world are we going to cover all this in one episode? I don't know, but we're going to do our best.

Shea Houdmann

But just thinking through kind of a chronological order, in Revelation chapter six, when we get to the seals in Revelation, and the first four seals are actually known as the four horsemen of the apocalypse. So Revelation chapter six, verses one through two read, Now I watched when the Lamb opened one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures say with a voice like thunder, come. And I looked, and behold, a white horse, and its rider had a bow, and a crown was given to him, and he came out conquering and to conquer.

Shea Houdmann

This passage used somewhat similar language to Revelation 19 with the second coming, but most people view this as something happening earlier in the tribulation. This is actually the imitation Christ, the false Christ, the Antichrist coming to power. How exactly he comes to power, the Bible doesn't say, but it seems that he will have a great deal of power over the entire world. Also in Revelation it talks about the entire world is worshiping and following this beast. So Kevin, where else in the Bible do you go to learn

about the Antichrist and kind of our slogan for this whole series is what can we know for sure about the Antichrist?

Kevin Stone

Well, what we can know for sure about the Antichrist is he is a very deceptive person. He's going to be a very powerful world ruler, and he is going to be totally against Christ. And that's what Antichrist means. He is against Christ. A lot of people think he's going to set himself up as if he were Christ, as if he is the Messiah, the one who's going to save the world. And a lot of people will be following him. We're going to turn to him. It's interesting that that first horseman of the apocalypse that you just referenced, Shea, pictures him as riding in on that proverbial white horse. You know, he's coming to save the day. He's coming as a man of peace. He's coming with the promise of saving the world.

Kevin Stone

And remember that the tribulation time is going to be a very difficult time of natural disasters or really supernatural disasters, but taking the form of all kinds of horrible things happening in the world. And so here's a man that says, I can save you from all of this. I can save you from the wrath of God. I can make this world a better place. You just follow me. You give me all the power. But he comes in promising peace and security, but he later changes his tune. And it looks like at the midpoint of the tribulation is when he really solidifies his power, takes control of the whole world, and has brains as an absolute monarch over the kingdoms of the world.

Kevin Stone

First John chapter 2 and verse 18. In fact, the apostle John is the only one who uses the term antichrist in scripture, I believe. But in chapter 2 of his first epistle, he says, Dear children, this is the last hour. And as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, this guy's coming. Even now, John says, many antichrists have come. This is how we know it's the last hour. He also mentions the antichrist later on in chapter 2, but also in chapter 4. And then in 2 John, he mentions this personage as well.

Kevin Stone

But a lot of antichrists have already come, John says. This is how we know that it's the last days. It's the last dispensation before Christ comes because there is a proliferation of false teaching. A lot of people setting themselves up against Christ and teaching false doctrines, doctrines of demons. But there is the antichrist that is still coming. And John points to that.

Kevin Stone

In the tribulation, there's going to be a man that comes to oppose Christ and to oppose Christ's followers more than any man has ever done in history

before. It's going to be the ultimate guy against Christ. The ultimate enemy is going to make his appearance. In Scripture, he's called the willful king or the boastful king in Daniel chapter 7. In Daniel chapter 9, he's the king who establishes a seven-year covenant with Israel. But then he breaks the covenant and makes war on Israel at the midpoint of the tribulation. We have the king that sets up the abomination of desolation that's mentioned in Daniel chapter 9, but also Jesus references this several times in the Gospels, Mark chapter 13 being one. He's called the man of lawlessness in 2 Thessalonians chapter 2, and he is the son of perdition also in that passage. If I could go ahead and read that passage because it gives us a little bit of a sequence here of when the Antichrist is going to come because there are some things that have to happen first.

Kevin Stone

2 Thessalonians 2, this is verses 1 through 8, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers and sisters, not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by the teaching that the day of the Lord has already come. That was the fear of the Thessalonian church, that the day of the Lord had come, Jesus had come, the rapture had happened, and they missed it. They were left behind. Paul says, that's not the case. Don't be alarmed, even though people are telling you that that is the case. We're not in the tribulation yet, Paul says. Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, verse 3 says, for that day will not come until the rebellion comes first. The rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. It's the son of perdition. He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped so that he sets himself up as God in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God.

Kevin Stone

Verse 6, and now you know what is holding him back. There is some force that is holding the Antichrist back. He's not going to be able to take power yet so that he may be revealed at the proper time. For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work, but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so until he is taken out of the way, and then the lawless one will be revealed. So there's a sequence here, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming.

Kevin Stone

And so we have, before the Antichrist can come, there has to be an apostasy, a great falling away, Paul reveals here, a rebellion occurs, and there is also the restrainer that has to be removed. We believe that the restrainer is the Holy Spirit working in the church. Once the church is removed, Holy Spirit's

work through the church is removed from the world, that restraining power is gone, and God allows the man of lawlessness to be revealed. The Antichrist will be revealed at that time. And then he has his heyday, he's given his fun in the sun, and the end of the Antichrist is guaranteed. We see that in the book of Revelation, you get toward the end there, and the beast and the false prophet are both thrown into the lake of fire, where they are judged by God forever and ever. There are other passages, and I just mentioned Revelation, but Revelation has actually a lot to say about this Antichrist figure.

Shea Houdmann

So, Kevin, I think that's funny you described it as the fun in the sun. I can't remember which trumpet or bowl it is, but it kind of describes the sun getting blazing, blazing hot and scorching the entire planet. So I'm not sure that'll be the fun in the sun you were referring to. But Jeff, why don't you take us into Revelation 13, and as we discussed and prepared, a lot of things that people normally attribute to the Antichrist in Revelation 13 are actually referring to the false prophet. So break it down for us. What does Revelation 13 tell us about the beast and the false prophet and so forth?

Jeff Laird

Yeah, that is the interesting thing, is that when we talk about the Antichrist, most people are thinking of what Revelation describes as this first beast, which is another reason to remember that Antichrist is not a term that comes in the book of Revelation. We've used capital A Antichrist as a reference to this world leader. And then like a lot of things do, it kind of takes on pop culture assumptions and things like that.

Jeff Laird

But in Revelation 13, you have these two beasts that John sees in his vision. The first one that comes out has 10 horns, 7 heads, and it's wearing 10 crowns. That is the beast that we associate as being the Antichrist.

And the second beast that comes, you don't see that until verse 11. That one is only said to have these two horns like a lamb, and that it speaks like a dragon. And the dragon is typically associated with Satan. The difference between those would be that the first beast has this incredible amount of political power. That's what the crowns would represent. So this is a person who has an immense amount of earthly political power, government, social, etc. Whereas the little horns or the horns on the lamb would have more of a religious leaning.

Jeff Laird

So the way we typically look at that is that's why we have the Antichrist and the false prophet. And when you look at the two things that they're associated with, you see the Antichrist is more involved as being the one in charge, the

figurehead, the leader. Whereas a lot of the things that we think of in the end times that have to do with religious persecution, the mark of the beast, worshipping an idol and those things, a lot of those things are driven by the false prophet. So the first beast is said to be haughty and blasphemous. He says all kinds of nasty stuff. He's allowed to make war on the saints and conquer them. And then he's given authority over every tribe and people and language and nation. So there's our political idea, this single world leader who comes on the scene.

Jeff Laird

Then the second beast is the one who says it performs signs, fire from heaven and creates an image of the beast. And it makes people worship this image. And it's the false prophet who tells people, you have to take this mark. And that's something we'll get into shortly. But the idea of that is that it's the false prophet who says, if you're not going to swear allegiance to Antichrist, then you can't participate in society. And we're even going to kill you.

Jeff Laird

Then the end of that chapter brings up the idea of the number of the beast. And even that reference is interesting because it mentions the number 666. And so often we talk about 666 being associated with the Antichrist. But the way you read the grammar in Revelation chapter 13, the mark where it says his mark or the number of the beast is mentioned in connection technically with the second beast. So probably we should be more accurate and be talking about how there's the number of the false prophet, but ultimately it doesn't really make that big of a difference. So that number is hard to understand. There's not a lot of detail there. So you can see how these two would sort of work together. One being the political, sort of the material side of ruling the world or running the world. And then the other is the religious or the spiritual side of that. And then all these other things that we read about in Revelation 13 have something to do with how those two working together enact their plans.

Kevin Stone

Yeah, those two work in tandem, the Antichrist and the false prophet. And so the one is the political leader. The false prophet is the religious leader. And I think that the description of those two beasts in Revelation are just so night and day in some respects. The first beast is this terrible, terrifying, very imposing thing that comes out of the sea. And then you have a lamb. So you have this one that comes seemingly very, very gently, you know? And the thing is, though, scripture says, it's lamb is speaking like a dragon. So he's got the devil's words, but boy, how he can fool so many people.

Kevin Stone

I think we're going to be dealing with an orator like we've never seen before. This guy is going to be golden-tongued on a level that the world has never seen, going to be able to lead so many people astray with his high-sounding oratory and his ability to influence people through what he says. Seems like a lamb. He seems like he's got your best interests at heart, but it's quite the opposite. He's speaking like the dragon.

Shea Houdmann

So interesting to see what the Bible actually says and compare that with both the questions we get and the things most people think about these issues. It's impossible to do—not impossible, we totally could, but we'd end up having to do a second episode. It's difficult to do an episode on who is the Antichrist, what is the Antichrist, without discussing his actual identity. Those are the type of questions we receive the most. Revelation 13, as Jeff was discussing, there's this mark of the beast that identifies either the Antichrist and or the false prophet. Somehow 666 is a clue to identify who the Antichrist false prophet is.

Shea Houdmann

How actually it does, the passage doesn't say. Will this be like a hindsight 2020 that after the Antichrist is revealed, oh, okay, duh, that's obvious now, but now we're kind of thinking, well, do you add up the numbers of his name? And if we do so, is it in the Latin alphabet or the Greek alphabet or which form of numerology do we do to do the calculations? And so many people want to spend a whole lot of time figuring that out, but the passage seems to indicate that it's going to remain a mystery until this man of lawlessness is revealed.

Shea Houdmann

And then another thing we deal with is people asking us questions of specifically, is this person the Antichrist? Is this person the Antichrist? And generally speaking here in the United States, whoever the president of the United States is, that's who people are asking, is this person the Antichrist? I mean, been around since 2002, so it's going through the different presidents. I mean, we got questions, is George Bush the Antichrist? Is Barack Obama the Antichrist? Is Donald Trump the Antichrist? Strangely, I'm not going to make any commentary. I don't know that we got any questions about Joe Biden. Well, set that aside. And now again, is Donald Trump the Antichrist?

Shea Houdmann

Why we're so focused on the American president has to be this charismatic, awful, evil world leader when the book of Revelation, end times prophecy never really explicitly even mentions the United States. So could it be

possibly, could the United States not even exist in its current form when the end times come? We don't know, but the whole United States centric focus of a lot of American Christians is really not all that biblical.

Shea Houdmann

But all that to say, I don't think the Bible gives us enough information to identify the Antichrist at this phase. Could he be alive and in the world today? Yes, he very well could. Could it be a generation or more away? Yes, it could. The first clue, if someone signs a seven year peace treaty with the nation of Israel, that's a really big clue. So to me, looking at scripture, that's the first sign, first identifier. This man is the Antichrist, or at least the Antichrist will be on the scene very, very soon.

Shea Houdmann

So yeah, that's kind of a brief survey of the type of questions.

How does 666 identify? Is this person, this person, this person? I think just recently published an article written by Jeff on is Elon Musk the Antichrist or is Donald Trump the Antichrist and Elon Musk is the false prophet? Two men who are very secular in approaches, not sure how either of them could be the false prophet. But just to give you an idea is yes, eschatology is, so much of the Bible is eschatology. There's so much in the Bible about warning us, giving us clues, giving us hints to help us to know how to live, how to think about these things. But the Bible does not give us so much information that we should be obsessing or spending excessive amounts of time trying to actually figure out specifically who these individuals are.

Jeff Laird

Yeah, when we talk about that, it's important for people to understand when we say that you can sort of make a case for almost anybody to be Antichrist. We're not saying that that in a literal sense, but when we look at what's in the Bible, we don't get a whole lot of very explicit details. And remember, John is talking about seeing a beast with seven heads and 10 crowns and all these horns and everything else like that. Most people are not expecting a literal kaiju to crawl out of the water and stomp around like Godzilla. So anything that we read about Antichrist, there's some form of symbolic issue going on there. So even that number, when John has the need to actually say, calculate it, that's going to take wisdom. I think that's a good caution for us to give.

Jeff Laird

And we're not being flippant when we say you can turn anybody's name or some detail about a person into a connection with 666. You could do that with me. So you could say 666 is Jeff's number, because if you take tenths of an inch, that's how tall he is. Well, great. You know, if you want to do it that way,

I'm actually, am I that tall? No, whatever. Something like that. You can do the same thing with names. You can take names, and if you put them in a Greek alphabet or a Hebrew alphabet, or if you convert the numbers in a certain way, there's infinite ways that you can do it. If you really want to, you can make anybody's name connect to 666. So it's an interesting number.

Jeff Laird

But to what you were saying, Shea, about recognizing that number, I think it's probably going to be more of an after the fact. The signs of who Antichrist is are going to be much more clear in the things that are done in the world. So I think when it's there, we're going to know, and it's going to be more obvious. And I would say the same things about things like the mark. It's not going to be something subtle. It's going to be something we're well aware of when it happens.

Kevin Stone

Right. Nobody takes the mark by accident. And when the time comes and the false prophet is dictating that everybody must take the mark or you can't buy or sell, and there's actually, you know, you're under the threat of death if you don't take the mark, there's going to be the executions that are starting. People who take that mark of the beast are going to know full well what they're doing. It's going to be pledging allegiance to that leader. And it's really going to be an act of devil worship because the whole religious system is being empowered by the devil. The beast gets his power from the dragon. And so it's going to be a very clear cut thing. And most people are going to be following that.

Kevin Stone

But there are going to be some, the Christians and the tribulation, those who have come to faith in Christ during that time, they're not going to take the mark. And so it's going to be war on the saints. Antichrist is going to try to get them. False prophet is going to try to get them. But they're not going to get everybody. And it's going to be a terrible time. But God is going to preserve so many of his saints. And it's going to be a time of God's power on display in opposition to this furious and dictatorial figure that we have in the Antichrist.

Kevin Stone

What's interesting to me, too, is how history has kind of repeated itself. I mean, Apostle John talks about how the spirit of Antichrist is already at work in the world and I think it has been for a long, long time. You've got King Nebuchadnezzar, way back in Daniel chapter 3, who sets up an image of himself and commands everybody to worship it. We see that with the Antichrist and the tribulation. And false prophet sets up this image of the beast

and commands everybody to worship it. So, I mean, what goes, it's like the more things change, the more they stay the same.

Kevin Stone

We have the two witnesses, remember earlier in Revelation, who are calling down fire from heaven and they're doing all of these signs and wonders as they witness the true gospel during the tribulation. And then we have the false prophet that comes and he, too, is calling down fire from heaven and doing these signs and wonders. So, it's like everything that God is doing, Satan tries to mimic in order to say, hey, I've got just as much power as God's people do. Well, where have we seen that before? How about when Moses and Aaron went to Egypt and they did the signs and wonders in Pharaoh's court? And so, the Egyptian magicians have to come in and try to mimic everything that Moses and Aaron are doing. Because the more things change, the more they stay the same. And Satan has always said, hey, I've got, I'm just as good as God. I've got just as much power as he does and I can do those miracles, too. Problem is, Aaron's snake ate up the magi's snakes and God is always more powerful.

Shea Houdmann

It's an excellent point. I love bringing in the Nebuchadnezzar, the plagues of Egypt. We just discussed that last time. There's some parallels between that and stuff you see in the tribulation. So, history does have a way of repeating itself. Or even, you mentioned earlier, and we'll talk about this more in a future episode, the abomination of desolation actually happened in the time of Antiochus Epiphanes before the blanking on the name. Again, we'll go into it. But the Antichrist seems to be someone who will repeat that act in some form by desecrating the temple that's rebuilt in Jerusalem. So, we see history repeating itself.

Shea Houdmann

Specifically to the, maybe the last thing I think we really need to cover in this episode is the mark of the beast and the speculation about it. You covered it well, real briefly, Kevin. But my in-laws recently told me that they remember when barcode scanners at the grocery store first started coming out and that some people thought, I can't use those. That could be the mark of the beast. So, over the years, there's been lots of speculation about those sorts of things. The idea of having a microchip implanted into your right hand or forehead where you can do financial transactions. Could that be the mark of the beast? Well, that would make sense because you can't buy or sell without it. That would be something. But it's not just a implanted microchip. No one is going to get the mark of the beast by mistake. It will be obvious that you are pledging your allegiance to the kingdom of the Antichrist by getting this mark.

No one can get it by mistake. No one will. Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't know. That's not what's going to be happening. It's going to be clear what the mark of the beast is when it comes around.

Shea Houdmann

Or even the image of the beast. Revelation 13, the false prophet creates this image. How is this image all around the world? Well, right now everyone's speculating it'll be an AI version of the Antichrist where you have to worship or make some sort of pledge at one of these ATM type things in order to get your mark of the beast renewed or implanted or whatever. Then you can go on and function in society. But could that be? Sure. That would actually fit what the Bible says. But if it's another generation from now, the technology could be completely different and all the speculation we're going through today. It's interesting. It's fascinating.

Shea Houdmann

You can see how is that even possible 2,000 years ago when John first predicted it, prophesied about it. You can see how it's possible today. Shouldn't we be in the business of specifically identifying this exact technology is the mark of the beast? Because it can't be until the beast is here and until we're required to perform this technological act in order to worship him.

Shea Houdmann

So again, just a reminder that lots of people, myself included, find eschatology exceedingly interesting to study and even enjoy speculating. But don't spend so much time speculating that you lose the focus on what the Bible actually says. I think that's one of the key points to make here. What about you two? Have you experienced this both in questions we received or people you've talked to over the years where get lost in the weeds, lose the forest for the trees in terms of this particular eschatological issue, the antichrist and the false prophet?

Kevin Stone

Yeah, I've talked to people who believe today that it's the QR code that they're putting on products and things and on websites. You see it everywhere. But they won't use that. They don't want anything to do with that because that is the mark of the beast or it could be or something. And so dealt with that on a personal level. And just people, there's always speculation. Is this person the antichrist? Is that person? And there's fear that goes along with that. In most cases, those types of questions are born of fear. And that's something that Christian is not supposed to have in his life. We are not to be anxious about anything. We are to not fear because Jesus is with us. He's preparing that place for us, and he will come again and receive us unto himself.

Shea Houdmann

We have a QR code on the back of the Got Questions card and on the Got Questions brochure. So maybe we need to reconsider that. What about you, Jeff? What's some of the interesting speculations that you've had to do?

Jeff Laird

One of your epic eye rolls that I've had quite a few people who want to present cases for different things. I can say some of those are more compelling than others. They're more interesting than others. But the idea of don't fear to me always becomes the primary issue. And I don't say it in a dismissive sense, but I say it more aggressively than people maybe think when I say I don't care who the antichrist is. Now, I can say that as a believer. I don't care who the antichrist and the false prophet are because it's not going to change anything about what I'm doing. It doesn't matter if they're here now or if they're here later. It doesn't matter if they're working in the world now or later. I have the same exact obligations. I'm going to have to make the same decisions about things in the world, and I'll have to make those decisions when they happen. So not fearing for me is the big thing. And I try to drive people to that when they seem to get too obsessed with the topic is to say, look, you can't stop this from happening. You can't make it happen sooner or make it happen later. So why are you so what are you worried about so much in that?

Jeff Laird

And I think it's really helpful to remember that Revelation was not written in verses and chapters. When those texts were written, it was just words altogether. We split them up into chapters and verses to make it easier for us to discuss them and talk about them. And if you look at the very beginning of chapter 14, so in chapter 13 in the book of Revelation, John talks about these beasts and the very start of chapter 14 says, Then I looked and behold on Mount Zion stood the lamb and with him 144,000 who had his name and his father's name written on their foreheads. And I heard a voice from heaven like the roar of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder. And it goes on as he's discussing and explaining these two beasts and all these awful things. John transitions right into the idea that God is still in control and Christ is coming back. So no matter who it is, no matter what it is, no matter what's going to happen, it's fun to speculate as long as we are understanding that the first priority we have is to have a good relationship with Christ and do the work he wants. After that, sure, we can, you know, do it as a sidelong chat and things like that. But it's not something we have to be paranoid about. And it's not something I have to lose any sleep about.

Shea Houdmann

Excellent point. And I love the transition in Revelation 14. It's a reminder of, yes, there's these awful beasts. And yes, you're going to have to have their name somehow marked on your forehead. And 14 can belong to Jesus Christ and be on his team, on his side. And there's a mark there as well. Again, we'll cover that a little bit later when we get into the 144,000 and so forth.

Shea Houdmann

But I thought the most fitting way to conclude this episode would be just to read the passage to discuss the ultimate fate of the Antichrist and the false prophet. And so in Revelation 19 verses 11 to 21 refers to the second coming of Jesus Christ. And when you get to verse 19, it says, And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth with their armies gathered to make war against him who was sitting on the horse and against his army. Referring to Jesus. And the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who in its presence had done the signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped its image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur. So the ultimate fate of the antichrist, the false prophet, the first beast, the second beast from Revelation 13, is they will spend eternity in the lake of fire. They will be defeated at the second coming of Jesus Christ. And they will spend eternity in the lake of fire. So as horrible as these men are, what they represent, what they do, how they persecute God's people, even kill many of God's people, God is just and will bring justice on these two, presumably, these two men who serve in these roles in the end times. So amen. Come Lord Jesus.

Shea Houdmann

This has been the Got Questions podcast on who is the antichrist, who is the false prophet, what is the mark of the beast. Got questions? The Bible has answers and we'll help you find them.