

Armageddon at the Door
By Jon Paulien

Chapter Five
Going Away to Make War

Things are not always what they seem. One of the best places to get away around Andrews University is the shore of Lake Michigan. For those who have never visited Michigan, the Lake (which is what the locals call it) looks just like an ocean. You cannot see the other shore and on stormy days the waves can reach six to eight feet in height. It is the fifth largest lake in the world. The main difference between Lake Michigan and an ocean is the lack of saltiness in the water.

A string of seashore parks in our area run from the city of St. Joseph right down to the border of Indiana. The beaches in those parks have a beautiful white sand that squeaks when you walk on it because of the high quartz content. Prevailing winds from the west have piled up the sand into enormous dunes, well over a hundred feet high in places. These dunes are covered with green beach grass, so they look like mountains with sand patches from a distance. But in winter the sledding is awesome! Without rocks and trees in the way and soft sand under the snow one can reach exhilarating speeds down the steep lee slopes of the dunes without endangering life and limb!

On a brisk Sabbath afternoon in the Fall, it is delightful to stand on top of one of the dunes and look across Lake Michigan toward Chicago. In fact, on an exceptionally clear day one can see the top half of the Sears Tower (109 floors) peaking up out of the water! But there is one thing that stands out above all others, the overwhelming impression that the lake is flat and that, therefore, the earth must also be flat! You see, things are not always what they seem. In actual fact there is a faint but real curvature to the surface of Lake Michigan, but this is undetectable to the eye. It underlines the point that what the eye sees and the ear hears is not always accurate. Our senses are limited and they can easily be deceived. This truth is of major importance to the study outlined in this chapter. We turn now to the text of Revelation itself.

While the word Armageddon occurs only in Rev 16:16, the final battle of earth's history is the major concern of the second half of the book, running from Rev 12:17 all the way through chapters 19 and 20. So in order to gain a clear picture of the battle of Armageddon it is important for us to begin our study in the foundation text, the one that sets the big picture for everything that follows, Rev 12:17. It is the last verse of chapter 12 and sets the stage directly for chapters 13 and 14 and indirectly for chapters 15-19.

An Angry Dragon

Revelation 12 takes us from the original war in heaven, through decisive events of the birth, death, ascension, and enthronement of Christ (Rev 12:1-5, 7-12). It goes on to describe the persecution of the church (by a dragon who could no longer continue the war in heaven) through the intervening period (Rev 12:6, 13-16), and concludes with an introduction to the

final battle of the dragon against the remnant of the woman's seed (Rev 12:17).

From this verse (12:17) on in the book of Revelation, the focus is almost entirely on the final events of earth's history. The same dragon who fought the heavenly Christ (Michael— 12:7) also fought the earthly Christ (the male child of the woman— 12:5). He then sought to destroy the woman (who represents those who overcome by the blood of Christ— 12:11-16). After this he mounts his final attack on the remnant of her seed (Christ's last day people). So the actions of the dragon mark the different stages of Revelation 12 and show that chapter 12 portrays a sequence of events running from before the cross all the way to the final battle of earth's history.

And the dragon was angry with the woman and he went off to make war with the remnant of her seed, those who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus.

Revelation 12:17

Why is the dragon angry? Actually he stays angry, since he was already angry when he was cast out of heaven in verse 12. He is angry and frustrated by his repeated failures. He was not able to devour the male child of the woman in verse 5. He was not strong enough to win the war in heaven (Rev 12:8) and was cast out (12:9-12). The earth helped the woman in the desert, preventing the dragon from destroying her (Rev 12:16). Then the dragon went off to make war with the remnant of her seed (Revelation 12:17). This reference to the seed of the woman reminds us of God's promise to Eve in the Garden of Eden (Gen 3:15). Eve was promised that her seed would crush the serpent's head. We are also reminded of the child of the woman in Rev 12:5. Both seeds are a reference to Jesus. It is Jesus and Jesus alone who can

defeat the dragon (Satan). Jesus' people are only safe when they stay close to Him.

Who are Jesus' people in this text? They are called "the remnant of her seed." This concept of remnant is very familiar to Adventists and has a long history in the Old Testament and the Jewish literature of the century before Revelation was written. The concept is important enough I plan to write a whole book on it soon. The focus of this book is a bit more on the dark side of the final conflict.

There is one more thing we need to notice about Rev 12:17. The dragon does not attack the remnant directly. Instead he "goes away to make war." He retreats away from the remnant to stand on "the sand of the sea" (Rev 12:18 in Greek, usually found in Rev 13:1 in English translation). Instead of attacking the remnant he goes to the beach! This is a rather strange way to make war. What is going on here?

Apparently the dragon's repeated failures have made him cautious (paying attention to the story line of Revelation). He realizes he doesn't have the strength to defeat the purposes of God on his own, so he decides to go to the beach and call a couple of allies to his support in the final conflict. He calls up two beasts, one from the out of sea and the other up from the earth. With the addition of these two allies the remnant now faces three opponents instead of one: 1) the dragon; 2) the beast from the sea; and 3) the beast from the land.

Now at this point I want to offer a word of caution for all Adventist readers of this book. Adventists have a tendency to relate all of these beasts and the other symbols of the book directly to history. The dragon represents one power, the beast from the sea represents

another, and the beast from the earth represents a third. And it is not a bad thing to try to understand the implications of Revelation for Christian history. But what often happens is that we get so absorbed in history and its implications that we fail to follow the **story** of Revelation itself. In the process we may miss important information that would be vital to our understanding not only of history, but of the text of Revelation itself. Revelation is a narrative and the story is worth studying in its own right. I will have much to say about history and its meaning in the book on the remnant that will follow this one. But for now I want us to concentrate on the story of chapter 13. I believe that when we do that you will be amazed at the kinds of things that are easy to miss.

An Unholy Trinity

It doesn't take a math genius to notice that the dragon, plus the beasts from the sea and from the land, make up a group of three. What immediately comes to mind is that in the book of Revelation, God is often spoken of in threes. He is, for example, "the one who is and who was and is to come" (Rev 1:4; 4:8). What we seem to have here in Revelation 13 is a counterfeit of the holy three, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. But don't take my word for it. Let's take a closer look at these three and see if that is what is actually going on.

Let's start with the dragon. Of the unholy three, the dragon appears first and has the fundamental authority over them. He is associated with the serpent in the Garden of Eden and is called the devil and Satan (Rev 12:8). So the dragon represents the great counterpart to the

position of God, the leader of all the forces of evil in the universe. He is the source of all evil and he happily shares his authority with the land beast and the sea beast. So it should not surprise us that he plays the role of counterfeit to the position of God the Father in the universe.

The parallel becomes even more interesting when we examine the features of the sea beast (Rev 13:1-10). It seems that the sea beast is portrayed as a parody or counterfeit of Jesus Christ. Let's look at the text.

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.

Rev 13:1

If you were walking around in the forest and you saw an animal with seven heads and ten horns, what would you know? You'd know that you had been drinking! There is no such animal. But if you saw two animals with seven heads and ten horns, what would you know? You'd know that you have found a species--two of a kind. That is what is happening here. The dragon looks really strange, different from any animal in the real world. But as strange as the dragon looks, the sea beast looks just like him, with seven heads and ten horns. But here is where the counterfeit comes in. In the Gospel of John, Jesus said, "If you have seen me you have seen the Father" (John 14:9). In other words, Jesus looks just like His Father. In the counterfeit, the sea beast looks just like the dragon, who is the counterfeit of the Father.

And the beast which I saw was like a leopard, and his feet were like a bear, and his mouth was like the mouth of a lion. And the dragon gave him his power and his throne and great authority.

Rev 13:2

This text tells us that the sea beast gets his authority from the dragon. He does not have authority on his own. This also reminds us of a saying of Jesus. "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." Matt 28:18. Jesus got His authority from His Father, the sea beast gets his authority from the dragon. So once again, the sea beast relates to the dragon in the same way that Jesus relates to His Father.

And one of (the beast's) heads was, as it were, slaughtered to death, but the wound of his death was healed. And the whole world was amazed on account of the beast.

Rev 13:3

What does it mean to have one's head slaughtered to death? It means to be killed. If the seven heads of the beast are actually consecutive (as is the case with the beast of chapter 17:9—sort of like the "nine lives" of a cat) then the slaughter of one of the heads kills the whole beast. So if the beast is dead and a healing takes place, what do we call that? A resurrection! So this sea beast counterfeits the death and resurrection of Jesus!

The author of Revelation does not want the reader to miss this point. He repeats the key word in Rev 13:8: "The Lamb *slaughtered* from the foundation of the world." The word translated "slaughtered" in verse 8 is the exact same word that was applied to the sea beast in verse 3! There are several words for death and killing in the Greek language. The repeated use of the unusual word "slaughter", therefore, is very significant. Since verse 8 is a clear reference to the death of Jesus, verse 3 is a deliberate counterfeit of the cross. The sea beast has a death and a resurrection just like Jesus!

In verse 4 of chapter 13 it tells us that those who admire the sea beast do so with the phrases, “Who is like the beast, and who is able to make war against him?” What is interesting about these phrases is that the Hebrew name Michael means “Who is like God?” This is roughly the same question asked about the beast in Rev 13:4. Since Michael is probably another name for Christ in the book of Revelation (see Rev 12:7), this is a further indication that the sea beast is a deliberate counterfeit of Jesus Christ.

The beast from the sea also has a ministry that lasts for forty-two months: “Authority was given him to exercise for forty two months.” (Rev 13:5) Why forty two months? How long was the ministry of Jesus? Three and a half years. How long is forty two months? Three and a half years! So the sea beast not only counterfeits the position of Jesus within the godhead, He counterfeits the life, death and resurrection of Jesus as well. In a multitude of ways, the beast from the sea is a deliberate counterfeit of Jesus Christ.

One thing you can’t miss about Revelation is all the animals in the story, but this is not really an animal story, is it? It reminds me of the cartoon movie called *The Lion King*. *Lion King* on the surface was an animal story based on the African plains. But it quickly becomes clear that *Lion King* is not really an animal story. It is about people and their character, about how groups of people relate to each other. It is, in fact, an African Apocalypse in which animals symbolize human interactions. It is a cartoon fantasy that teaches lessons about real life in the human dimension.

The Book of Revelation is like that. In today’s language it is like a cartoon fantasy, where

the animals represent kingdoms and institutions and the way they relate to each other under God's ultimate control (Rev 17:17-18). A key part of this cartoon fantasy is the sea beast, a counterfeit of Jesus Christ. The sea beast in the story walks, looks and talks like Jesus Christ, but is really a counterfeit of everything Jesus stands for. Revelation is truly a symbolic book (Rev 1:1). Nothing is exactly what it may seem on the surface.

Now if the dragon is a counterfeit of God the Father and the sea beast is a counterfeit of God the Son, then it would make sense for the land beast to be a counterfeit of the Holy Spirit. And a careful look at Rev 13:11-14 indicates that it is. Notice verse 11:

And I saw another beast coming up out of the earth, and he had two horns like a lamb, but he spoke like a dragon.

Rev 13:11

The beast that comes up out of the earth has "two horns like a lamb." The word "lamb" occurs 29 times in the book of Revelation, and 28 of those occurrences refer to Jesus Himself. The only other occurrence of the word is here. So this beast is also a lot like Christ. How does that fit into a counterfeit of the Holy Spirit? Go a little deeper with me.

Do you remember what the Holy Spirit is called in the Gospel of John? Most people would respond, "The Comforter." And that is true, up to a point, but it is not the whole story. Actually, in John 14-16 the Holy Spirit is called "*another* comforter." That means He is not the original Comforter, that is Someone else. Who is *the* Comforter? It is Jesus.

Picture the scene. It is the upper room, just before the crucifixion of Jesus. The disciples are quite depressed. They have heard that Jesus is going away. They don't know what they will

do without Him. But Jesus says, “Don’t worry, if I go away I will send you *another* Comforter. Someone who will comfort you the same way I do.” Jesus promises the disciples that He will not leave them in the position of orphans (John 14:18). The work of the Holy Spirit is to replace the work of Jesus in the disciple’s lives. His work is modeled on the work of Jesus and He does it in behalf of Jesus. So it is consistent with the role of the Holy Spirit to say that He is “like the Lamb.” So the land beast of Rev 13 is similar to the Holy Spirit in that he is “like a lamb.” But that is not all.

And (the Land Beast) exercises all the authority of the first beast on his behalf, and he causes the earth and everyone who lives in it to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed.

Rev 13:12

Notice that the land beast is uninterested in promoting himself. His role and purpose is to promote the power and the interests of the sea beast. This also reminds us of what Jesus said in the upper room. The Holy Spirit does not promote Himself (John 16:13), instead He is always pointing to Christ and reminding of His words (John 16:13-14). So the land beast relates to the sea beast in the same way that the Holy Spirit relates to Jesus Christ.

That brings us to verse 13. “And he performed great signs, so much so that he even caused fire to come down from heaven to earth in full view of men.” Did the Holy Spirit in the New Testament ever bring fire down from heaven? On the day of Pentecost in Acts 2! On that occasion the Holy Spirit brought fire from heaven to earth to anoint the original disciples. This fire from heaven was the greatest and most powerful act of the Holy Spirit up until that time. So the land beast performs another act reminiscent of the Holy Spirit. The land beast not only

counterfeits the general work of the Holy Spirit, but he specifically counterfeits Pentecost itself.

The work of the land beast at the end of time precipitates a powerful spiritual revival that

counters the work of God. Why does the land beast bring fire down from heaven? Verse 14:

And he deceives those who live on the earth because of the signs he was given power to do on behalf of the first beast, saying to those who live on the earth that they should make an image to the beast who had the wound of the sword and yet came to life.

These texts indicate that there will be a great, final, world-wide deception where a counterfeit trinity stands 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. But there is one further step in the land beast's strategy and this becomes crystal clear in verse 15:

And (the Land Beast) was permitted to give *breath* to the image of the beast, in order that the image of the beast might speak and cause everyone who does not worship the image of the beast to be killed.

The word "breath" in this text is the same word in Greek as "spirit." The land beast gives "spiritual" life to the image of the beast. But instead of a spiritual appeal to the world, the land beast gets ugly and demands worship of the image under the threat of death.

The devil (who is working behind the scenes through the dragon and the beasts) has two primary methods of dealing with human beings. 1) On the one hand, he counterfeits the work of God in order to deceive people and persuade them to willingly give allegiance to him rather than to God. 2) On the other hand, he uses force, persuading people by intimidation to do what they otherwise would not be willing to do. These two forms of persuasion are illustrated in the

Mark of the Beast passage (Rev 13:17). Some will follow his unholy trinity because they genuinely believe that in so doing they are worshiping God. They are the ones who are marked on the forehead. They are truly deceived. Others follow the Beast, not because they really believe in him, but because they want to live and eat and have jobs. They follow out of fear. They are the ones who are marked on the hand.

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 fervency. So in the last days of earth's history, Satan does not limit his attacks to frontal assaults and intimidation, he brings in deception refined almost to perfection so that people will not be able to tell which side is right. They will not be sure whether they are dealing with Christ or Satan. The counterfeit Holy Spirit will use a counterfeit Pentecost to confuse people about the workings of God and to deceive them regarding his intentions for humanity at the end of time. *In the last days, things will not be as they seem.*

The Spiritual Implications of Deception

When we realize that in the last days things will not be as they seem, what difference will it make in our lives? I think at least three things. I think we will pray as we have never prayed before. I think we will search the scriptures as we have never searched them before. And I think we will exercise more self-distrust when it comes to our knowledge of God. Often,

when we learn a little about the Bible, we feel confident that we have a handle on God. It is as if we can put God in a box where we know what He is like and we know what He will and will not do. But the Bible warns us that God's thoughts are not our thoughts. His ways are not our ways (Isa 55:6-7). When we have a true sense of how vulnerable we are to deception, we will know our deep need for His guidance every moment of every day.

I have a little strategy that helps to keep me humble (as much as that is possible in my broken condition). I call it the Ladder of Humility. I first heard a version of this from Fritz Guy, who was a teacher at the Seminary when I was in my doctoral program. The Ladder starts with me. I am at Level One when it comes to knowledge. I know quite a bit. I have a PhD in New Testament. I've studied the Bible carefully for decades and I've written a lot of books about it. I've learned a lot about terrorism and world affairs. I've learned a lot about relationships and how people grow emotionally. So Level One is not a bad place to be. Level One is everything that I know.

But Level Two is infinitely higher. It is what every one on earth knows. That is so much bigger than my knowledge I wouldn't know how to compare them. If you ever get a chance to visit Andrews University, go to the library. Have a look at the stacks and stacks of books that seem to go on forever. Yet that library contains only a fraction of the knowledge that everyone on earth has. What everyone on earth knows is even bigger than all the knowledge you can access on Google and that is so huge I can hardly comprehend it. So knowledge at Level Two is infinitely bigger than what I know.

But that doesn't even come close to Level Three. Level Three is what everyone in the universe knows. Human knowledge right now is limited to the knowledge available on earth. We know next to nothing about the endless procession of galaxies, filled with unimaginable wonders. This is a compendium of all the knowledge every creature in the universe has, and that is infinitely larger than what humanity knows.

But then comes Level Four of the Ladder of Humility. Level Four is what everyone in the universe could know, given an infinite amount of time and opportunity. That dwarfs all the knowledge current in the universe by an infinite amount. But Level Four still pales in significance compared with Level Five.

What is Level Five? Level Five is what God knows. How big is the gap between Level Four and Level Five? As big as the gap between Creator and creature, between infinite and finite. Each step in the Ladder of Humility is so large as to be almost unimaginable. And I am four levels below God. Can you see why it is sheer stupidity to think that we can ever have a complete handle on God? No matter how much I study, no matter how much I learn, my knowledge is as minuscule as dust in comparison with what God knows.

But let me take it the other way for a moment. What is the difference between what I know and what a two-year-old knows? Again this is almost infinitely vast! Can an adult talk to a two-year-old? Yes, you can. You can get down on one knee, cup the child's face in your hands, look into his or her eyes, and talk baby talk! Can you discuss quantum physics? No. Can you discuss the seven trumpets of Revelation? No. Can you talk at all? Yes, but you can

communicate only at the limited level of the child.

Now think about what that means for the Bible. Think of the challenge God faced when He chose to reveal Himself in Scripture. Can we learn about God from the Bible? Yes. Can we gain a basic understanding of God and His ways? Yes. But that understanding will always be limited by our own situation. When God talks to us through the Bible, it is like an adult trying to reach out to a two-year-old, except that the gap between God and us is greater than the gap between us and infants.

The Ladder of Humility keeps me from getting over-confident in my knowledge of God as we approach the end of history. Deception works because our knowledge is so limited in the first place. Put on top of that our tendency to take the easiest way out of any situation and we are all vulnerable to deception. So as we approach the end we need to pray and study as we have never done before. And we need to do so in a full awareness of our limitations and of our deep need for daily guidance from God.

I know that there are some Adventists who will say, "Come on, I know that my knowledge is limited to some degree, but we Adventists have the end-time scenario down. We won't be fooled by any end-time deception! We know where we stand and we will be on the right side when the End comes. I wish that were one hundred per cent true, but I fear that the Bible teaches us otherwise. Let me draw the scenario of deception a little more tightly. To do that I would like to have you read Rev 13:13-14 one more time:

And he performed great signs, so much so that he even caused fire to come down from heaven to earth in full view of men. And he deceives those who live on the

earth because of the signs he was given power to do on behalf of the first beast, saying to those who live on the earth that they should make an image to the beast who had the wound of the sword and yet came to life.

Miraculous, powerful signs! Things will not be what they seem. When the End-time comes you will not be able to believe what you see, hear or touch. It will be unlike any time before. It will get truly scary. If you take a broad read through the New Testament, you will discover that Rev 13:13-14 is one of four passages that explicitly discuss an End-time deception. The other three are 2 Thess 2:8-12, Matt 24:24-27 and Rev 16:13-14. If we want to get the full picture of what the Bible has to say about the End-time deception we need to go to all the passages that directly address the subject.

Deception in the New Testament

Let's start with 2 Thessalonians:

And then the Lawless One will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will slay with the breath of His mouth and destroy by the brightness of His coming, whose coming is according to the working of Satan in all kinds of miracles and signs and lying wonders, and in every deception of unrighteousness among those who are being destroyed. . .

2 Thess 2:8-10

Notice right off that the subject of this passage is the same as that of Rev 13:13-14. It is all about the great deception that will occur on earth just before the Second Coming of Jesus. Notice also that this text uses the same language as Revelation 13. It is about great signs being done with the purpose of deceiving those who live on the earth. So the signs and wonders put forth to deceive the inhabitants of the earth here are parallel to the last deception of earth's

history in Revelation 13.

At this point I want you to see something unusual in the translation above. The last word of verse 8 is “coming” – “the brightness of His *coming*.” The first major word of verse 9 is also “coming” – “whose *coming* is according to the working of Satan. . .” The Greek word for “coming” in both cases is “*parousia*,” the typical Greek word to describe the second coming of Christ. But that creates a problem. Is this text saying that the Second Coming of Jesus will be according to the working of Satan? That would be hard to believe. So what other possibility is there? That the “coming according to the working of Satan” is a coming of the Lawless One (an end-time enemy power in service of Satan– for more detail on this see my book *What the Bible Says About the End-Time*, pages 95-101).

In other words, at the end of time there will be a counterfeit of the Second Coming of Jesus. The Lawless One will have his own *parousia*. But that raises another question. Which of the two comings will happen first? Go back to verse 8. There it tells us that the Lawless One will be destroyed by the coming of Jesus. So if the Lawless One is destroyed by the coming of Jesus, the coming of the Lawless One must be first. After the Lawless One comes, the coming of Jesus will destroy him. So a major part of the miraculous signs Satan will do at the End includes a counterfeit the coming of Jesus.

But the end-time deception is even more severe than a counterfeit coming of Christ. Take a look at Acts 2:22. That text contains the same three words as 2 Thess 2:9 and will help us understand something more about the End-time deception. The speaker is the Apostle Peter on

the day of Pentecost. He is speaking to the Sanhedrin, the same body that had condemned Jesus to death less than two months before.

“Men of Israel, hear these words, Jesus of Nazareth, a man commended to you by God through *miracles, wonders and signs*, which God did among you through Him, as you yourselves know.”

Acts 2:22

Did you notice that “miracles, wonders and signs” are the same words used to describe the satanic deception at the end of time? In Acts 2:22 they describe the earthly ministry of Jesus, when He went about doing good in first-century Galilee and Judea. These are activities the members of the Sanhedrin would have known about. So the words “miracles, wonders and signs” are like a summary statement of Jesus’ earthly ministry. According to 2 Thess 2:9, at the end of time Satan will do the very kinds of things that Jesus did when he was here on earth in human form. In other words, Satan will counterfeit the earthly ministry of Jesus in some form just before the end. Just consider the following scenario:

Your neighbor knocks on the door and says, “Have you heard that Jesus has returned to earth?”

“No! How could that be?”

“Check out the news!”

You turn on your TV. It shows video of a man who looks like the pictures of Jesus you saw growing up. His voice is gentle as He chides the leaders of the earth for their self-centeredness. He calls on all nations to put aside their differences and unite for the common good of humanity. If you didn’t know the Scriptures, you would swear this *had* to be Jesus. But

the Bible tells us it will be a deception. It is one thing to think about End-time deception from a safe distance, but are you ready to actually experience this? To set aside the impressions of your eyes and ears and apply the truths of Scripture to what you experience?

The only way to handle a deception like that is to know the word of God in such a way that you will recognize the deception when it comes. And we still have two New Testament texts to look at. Let's go to Matthew 24:24-27, which expands on what we have just explored:

Then, if anyone should say to you, "Look, here is the Messiah, or there!" Do not believe it! For false messiahs and false prophets will arise, and they will do great *signs and wonders* so as to deceive, if it were possible, even the Elect. See, I have told you ahead of time. Therefore, if anyone says to you, "Look, he is in the desert!" Do not go out. "Look, he is in the inner rooms!" Do not believe it. For as lightning comes out of the East and shines all the way to the West, so will the coming of the Son of Man be.

Notice how the language of Matthew 24 resembles that of Revelation 13 and 2 Thessalonians 2. The sea beast of Revelation 13 is a false Messiah (Christ) and the land beast is a false prophet. They, along with the Lawless One of 2 Thessalonians, do signs and wonders in order to deceive those who live on the earth at the end of time. And this deception will be so severe that even the elect of God will tremble! The severity of the End-time deception should be of concern to all who are interested in the teachings of Scripture.

Perhaps this is a good time for me to reflect on a major teaching in evangelical Christianity that could feed right into this deception. I want to make it clear right from the start that I respect the sincerity and the Christian spirit of those I disagree with on this, but I believe that this popular teaching could be setting many Christians up to believe the lies of Satan at the end of time. Many evangelicals teach that there will be two separate comings of Christ. The first

will be a secret coming in which he “raptures” only the Christians from the earth. Seven years later is the visible appearing in which He sets up His kingdom on the earth.

This teaching is based on an external construct which is imposed on the Bible. Nowhere in the Bible can you find any text in which there are two comings of Christ. You can only come to that conclusion if you arbitrarily say that one statement applies to his secret coming and another applies to the visible one. But no text in the Bible explicitly teaches this rapture theology. In order to find it in the Bible you have to come to the Bible with that conclusion in mind.

Let me take one thing back. There is actually one text in the Bible, and only one, that talks about two comings of Jesus, and that text is 2 Thess 2:8-9. But as we have already seen, that text does not support the rapture theology. According to 2 Thessalonians, the first coming of “Jesus” will actually be a counterfeit. It will be the coming of the Lawless One. When Jesus does come, there will be nothing secret about it, you won’t have to travel to see it because it will be spectacular, visible, public and seen by all, like lightning in the sky. It is possible, by applying an external construct to the Bible, to make the Bible say the opposite of what it is actually teaching. And all this plays into the hands of the Deceiver.

Deception and the Battle of Armageddon

Having looked at the two texts outside of Revelation that speak about the end-time deception, we will want to look at the other passage in Revelation which speaks to this issue,

Rev 16:13-16, the famous Battle of Armageddon passage.

And I saw, out of the mouth of the dragon and out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet, three unclean spirit like frogs.

Rev 16:13

Who are the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet? They are the same three characters we saw in Rev 13. “The beast” refers to the sea beast and the “false-prophet” refers to the land beast (see also Rev 19:20). So this text is taking up the story that we left in Revelation 13. This text is on the same subject as Revelation 13, end-time deception, and describes the same characters that we met there. But something extra is added here. Out of the mouths of each of these characters comes an evil spirit that looks like a frog.

Why frogs of all things? The key to the answer lies in the Old Testament background to this chapter. The language 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 exodus plagues that could be mentioned at this point, why would the plague of frogs be chosen?

When Moses first approached Pharaoh in the story of the Exodus, his God-given authority was demonstrated when his brother Aaron threw down his walking stick and it became a snake (Exod 7:8-10). If Pharaoh was anything like many of us, he probably jumped three feet in the air, stood on the arms of his throne with his knees shaking and said, “Get that thing out of here!” But Pharaoh’s magicians weren’t nearly as worried. They threw down their walking sticks and they became snakes also (Exod 7:11-12).

So Pharaoh relaxed about the threat (Exod 7:13). Moses and Aaron had magical powers, but his side had magical powers too. It seemed to be a manageable challenge to his authority. Then Moses and Aaron went out and turned the waters of the Nile into blood (Exod 7:14-21). Again Pharaoh was upset. But once again his magicians counterfeited the miracle of God (Exod 7:22-23).

Next Moses and Aaron struck Egypt with a plague of frogs (Exod 8:1-6). Again Pharaoh's magicians duplicated the feat (Exod 8:7). Although the plagues of God were always more impressive than the magical arts of Pharaoh's court, the various counterfeits gave Pharaoh a series of excuses to reject God's appeals to him. It turned out, however, that the plague of frogs was the last plague that Pharaoh's magicians were able to duplicate (Exod 7:18-19). The frogs, therefore, were the last deception of the Exodus. That is why there are frogs in Rev 16:13; they signal that the message of Revelation 16 has to do with the last deception of earth's history.

For they are spirits of demons, doing signs, which go out to the kings of the whole inhabited world to gather them to the battle of the great day of God Almighty.
Rev 16:14

Rev 16:14 says that these frogs are "spirits of demons." What is a demon? An evil angel. So the three frogs are the demonic counterparts of the three good angels of Rev 14:6-12. Both groups of angels have a mission to the whole world (Rev 14:6; 16:14). One trio calls the world to worship God and the other trio seeks to gather the people of the world into the service of the unholy trinity. In the End it will be Trinity against trinity, and three angels against three angels. So the counterfeit does not end with Revelation 13, a counterfeit of the godhead and of

Pentecost. It does not end with 2 Thessalonians, a counterfeit of the Second Coming and the ministry of Jesus. There is also a counterfeit of the gospel, God's end-time message in Rev 14:6-12. This counterfeit is what the Battle of Armageddon is all about.

And he gathered them to the place that in Hebrew is called Harmagedon.
Rev 16:16

As you know from the previous chapter, Harmagedon is the Greek form of a couple of Hebrew words that mean "Mountain of Meggido." But there is no mountain in all the world named Meggido. Rather, Meggido was a city on a small elevation at the edge of the Plain of Jezreel. Looming over the place where the city of Megiddo was, 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 and Table Mountain is the mountain of Capetown. Mount Carmel is the mountain you could see from all over town, even though Megiddo itself was not on a mountain.

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 Elijah's prayer brought fire down from heaven onto an altar to prove that Yahweh 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 one thing will be different at the End. The fire that comes down from heaven will fall on the wrong altar! It will be the counterfeit Elijah and the counterfeit three angels who bring fire down from heaven to earth (Rev 13:13-14). On that day your eyes and your ears will tell you that the counterfeit trinity is

the true God. Your five senses will deceive you.

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, NIV).

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. Beyond the five senses is a higher reality that can be tasted in Christ. The higher reality of faith is perceived with the help of Scripture, it is not normally perceived by the senses alone. The Mount Carmel experience will be repeated at the End, in support of the counterfeit trinity. On that occasion all the evidence of your eyes and your ears will tell you that you’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, a time when our eyes, our ears and our total experience will seem to be telling us that the prophecies of Scripture are wrong. Revelation portrays the end-time in terms of a battle between the Scriptures and perception, between reality as perceived by the five senses, and ultimate reality as revealed by God Himself. This is at the heart of the message that

Adventists have to bring to the world. In a secular age, one that trusts in reason and perception, it will never be a popular message, it will go against the grain.

It is probably pointless to project exactly what the End-time deception is or how it will affect people. Prophecy provides us with the core events of the future but leaves many of the details open. The description comes to us in John's language. The future is projected from the context of John's time and place (God meets people where they are). So we cannot know exactly how the deception will take place. But the following scenario is one possibility, given all the New Testament teaches us about the great battle at the end of the world.

It's the ultimate nightmare. You get up from a restless sleep that was vaguely disturbed by things that went thump in the night. You peer past the living room curtain into the street and recoil with horror. A silver 2004 Toyota Camry has jumped the curb across the street, skidded across the lawn, and wiped out most of Charlie's prize peonies before embedding itself into the retaining wall between his driveway and Homer's. Homer is out inspecting the wreck and the damage to the retaining wall. There is no sign of Charlie or of any occupants of the Camry, which is too heavily damaged for anyone to have extricated themselves from its remains.

A glance up and down the street indicates that this is only one of several such mishaps on your block. As more and more neighbors cluster around the wrecks you notice with some concern that none of the "born-again" types seem to be around. You remember Charlie talking about a "rapture" where all the born-again Christians vanish, leaving chaos behind. You

remember him telling you to read the *Left Behind* books and watch Christian television, but you never got around to it.

Now it is a different story. You flip on the TV, and turn to the Christian Broadcasting Network. It is immediately clear that something is seriously wrong. There is chaos on the screen, people milling back and forth, stopping occasionally to chat with one another. Finally, one of them comes to the anchor desk to inform you with a trembling voice that apparently the “Rapture” has come. Christian singers have been vanishing in mid-concert. Evangelical preachers have been vanishing in mid-sermon. Airplanes have been crashing in mid-flight, minus pilot and co-pilot. The entire world has come to a standstill!

Would such an event get your attention? Would it make you wonder if everything you’ve believed was a big mistake? Would you wish you had spent a little more time studying your Bible and a little less time on soap operas and the latest game shows? The above scenario was only an illustration, the end-time deception will probably be much more subtle and severe than that, but I hope you can sense the disorienting power that the end-time Mount Carmel experience will exert. A world full of people who trust in the five senses will experience miracles, signs, and wonders designed to persuade everyone to accept a counterfeit of the true God.

What kind of God would allow a deception so severe that even His own people will tremble in anxiety over it? The answer lies in 2 Thess 2:9-12:

(The Lawless One’s) coming is according to the working of Satan in all kinds of miracles and signs and lying wonders, and in every deception of unrighteousness among

those who are being destroyed, because they did not receive the love of the truth, in order that they might be saved.

2 Thess 2:9-10

Who are the people being deceived? According to the text, not just anybody, it is specifically those who did not receive the love of the truth. At this point we learn something that is very startling.

And for this reason God sends them the working of deception in order that they might believe the lie.

2 Thess 2:11

That's an incredible statement. If I had made that up, no one would believe me. But it's in the Bible. God sends the delusion--the working of Satan (according to verse nine)--in order that they may believe the lie. What kind of God are we dealing with here?

In order that everyone might be judged, who has not believed the truth but has delighted in unrighteousness.

2 Thess 2:12

The word "judged" here is often translated "condemned." The purpose of the end-time deception (from God's perspective) is to clarify where everyone stands in relation to the truth about God. To be specific, there are three classes of people on earth today. One group is made up of people who love the truth, and these people will not be deceived no matter what. The second class of people is made up of those who hate the truth. These two groups are in the minority in today's world. Most people belong to the third class, those who neither love nor hate the truth; they prefer to avoid commitment, to sit on the fence.

This helps us understand why God takes responsibility for the end-time deception, even

though it has Satan's fingerprints all over it. God's purpose is to say, "It is time to get off the fence. It is time to commit yourself one way or the other." The great end-time deception forces a decision. To stay neutral is not an option any more. Everybody ends up on one side or the other. When the End comes everyone on earth will have made a firm decision to either love the truth or to love unrighteousness.

Ellen White describes this End-time deception in *The Great Controversy*:

As the crowning act in the great drama of deception, Satan himself will personate Christ. The church has long professed to look to the Saviour's advent as the consummation of her hopes. Now the great deceiver will make it appear that Christ has come. In different parts of the earth, Satan will manifest himself among men as a majestic being of dazzling brightness, resembling the description of the Son of God given by John in the Revelation. Revelation 1:13-15.

GC 624

Only those who have been diligent students of the Scriptures and ***who have received the love of the truth*** will be shielded from the ***powerful delusion*** that takes the world captive.

GC 625

If we took Paul, John, and Matthew seriously regarding the great deception at the end, would it make any difference in the way we live today? I believe it would. For one thing, we would study the Bible as we've never studied it before. Our busy and fragmented lives often prevent us from knowing the Book the way we could. We would also stop being satisfied with what we have been taught, we would feel an increasing need to understand the Bible for ourselves. When the deception comes it will not be enough to have read this book, you will need to know the Bible for yourself.

Those who take the Bible's picture of the End seriously will also combine Bible study

with prayer as they've never done before. In a time of deception I have to be very careful about trusting my own perceptions, even when I'm studying the Bible. It is possible to put Bible texts together to prove almost anything one wants. When we study, we need to pray for a spirit of self-distrust, so that we will not be too quick to think that our personal perception is THE way to read a particular text. The great deceptions that lie ahead should lead us to be cautious about any "truth" that sounds a whole lot like the way we normally think.

Fortunately, there is good news in the midst of the Bible's description of the end-time deception. Verse ten tells us that the lost are destroyed because "they did not receive the love of the truth, in order that they might be saved." I think that's good news. If I were to say, "You had better learn to love the truth, or you will be deceived," it would leave you awfully discouraged. You might think you had to work up a love for the truth. But what if it took two weeks, or two months, or two years before you could work up even a little love for the truth? What if you never succeeded?

But that is not what 2 Thess 2:10 says. It says that those who are deceived at the end refuse to **receive** the love of the truth. The love of the truth is something you can receive as a gift. If you want the love of the truth right now you can have it, it's free, right now. And that's good news. You can be ready for the end now; you don't need to know "when" because you can have a love for the truth now. You can pray a prayer like this: "Lord, give me a love for the truth no matter what the cost."

That's a difficult prayer because if you pray that prayer, you will not only receive a love

for the truth but you will also pay the cost. Love for the truth can cost you your job, your family, your reputation, even your life. I don't know what that cost might be in your life but it's not a prayer to be prayed lightly. But if you pray that kind of prayer, you will receive what you have asked for, because God will not let such a prayer go by without attention. And when you receive God's gift of love for the truth, when you have a whole-hearted desire to know God and to do His will, you can know that the deception at the End will have no power over you. In the words of Ellen White, once more:

Only those who have been diligent students of the Scriptures and ***who have received the love of the truth*** will be shielded from the ***powerful delusion*** that takes the world captive.

GC 625

The time is at hand when Satan will work miracles to confirm minds in the belief that he is God. All the people of God are now to stand on the platform of truth as it has been given in the third angel's message. All the pleasant pictures, all the miracles wrought, will be presented in order that, if possible, the very elect shall be deceived. The only hope for anyone is to hold fast the evidences that have confirmed the truth in righteousness.

RH, August 9, 1906

These severe words are encouraging to me. If I invite God to build a love for the truth into my life, I need not fear the deceptions of the end. If I make the Scriptures my foundation, if I stand on the platform of truth that God has revealed to His people, I will not be deceived by the "evidence" of my senses in the final crisis. The experience will be challenging, but the path of safety is clear and it is sure.

But is this what the Battle of Armageddon is really about? Isn't that about planes and tanks and fighter aircraft? How do we reconcile these images of spiritual conflict with the

popular picture of a great war (like the war on terror) that centers on the Middle East? The Book of Revelation has much more to say about the Battle of Armageddon.