

End Times Prophecy

02.23.22.

The Final False Prophet ([Revelation 13:11-18](#))

The major weapon in Satan's arsenal is deception. Satan, Jesus declared, is "a liar and the father of lies" ([John 8:44](#)), who "disguises himself as an angel of light" ([2 Cor. 11:14](#)) to deceive people. From his first appearance on earth in the Garden of Eden ([Gen. 3:2-6](#)) until his final appearance at the end of the Millennium ([Rev. 20:7-8](#)), Satan is a liar and a deceiver. He constantly seeks to confuse people, "blind[ing] the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God" ([2 Cor. 4:4](#)).

Since Satan is a deceiver, it follows that his agents (both human and demonic) are also deceivers. The apostle Paul warned that "[Satan's] servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness" ([2 Cor. 11:15](#)), though they are purveyors of wickedness, lies, and deceit. The devil uses them to spread his damning "doctrines of demons" ([1 Tim. 4:1](#)).

The Bible repeatedly warns of the danger of false prophets. Moses paused in the midst of giving God's law to Israel to warn of those who would lead people astray from it:

"If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder comes true, concerning which he spoke to you, saying, "Let us go after other gods (whom you have not known) and let us serve them," you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams; for the Lord your God is testing you to find out if you love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul. You shall follow the Lord your God and fear Him; and you shall keep His commandments, listen to His voice, serve Him, and cling to Him. But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he has counseled rebellion against the Lord your God who brought you from the land of Egypt and redeemed you from the house of slavery, to seduce you from the way in which the Lord your God commanded you to walk. So you shall purge the evil from among you." ([Deut. 13:1-5](#))

Jeremiah also warned Israel not to listen to false prophets: Thus says the Lord of hosts, "Do not listen to the words of the prophets who are prophesying to you. They are leading you into futility; They speak a vision of their own imagination, Not from the mouth of the Lord." ([Jer. 23:16](#))

"I did not send these prophets, But they ran. I did not speak to them, But they prophesied. But if they had stood in My council, Then they would have announced My words to My people, And would have turned them back from their evil way And from the evil of their deeds." ([Jer. 23:21-22](#))

"I have heard what the prophets have said who prophesy falsely in My name, saying, 'I had a dream, I had a dream!' How long? Is there anything in the hearts of the prophets who prophesy falsehood, even these prophets of the deception of their own heart, who intend to

make My people forget My name by their dreams which they relate to one another, just as their fathers forgot My name because of Baal? The prophet who has a dream may relate his dream, but let him who has My word speak My word in truth. What does straw have in common with grain?" declares the Lord. "Is not My word like fire?" declares the Lord, "and like a hammer which shatters a rock? Therefore behold, I am against the prophets," declares the Lord, "who steal My words from each other. Behold, I am against the prophets," declares the Lord, "who use their tongues and declare, 'The Lord declares.' Behold, I am against those who have prophesied false dreams," declares the Lord, "and related them and led My people astray by their falsehoods and reckless boasting; yet I did not send them or command them, nor do they furnish this people the slightest benefit," declares the Lord. ([Jer. 23:25-32](#))

"For thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, 'Do not let your prophets who are in your midst and your diviners deceive you, and do not listen to the dreams which they dream. For they prophesy falsely to you in My name; I have not sent them,' declares the Lord." ([Jer. 29:8-9](#))

As He concluded the Sermon on the Mount, the Lord Jesus Christ solemnly declared, "Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves" ([Matt. 7:15](#)). In his second epistle, Peter wrote, "But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves" ([2 Pet. 2:1](#)). The apostle John cautioned, "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world" ([1 John 4:1](#)).

Scripture also records numerous examples of false prophets; some named, some anonymous. Isaiah mentioned unnamed false prophets who were active in his day ([Isa. 9:15](#)), as did Jeremiah ([Jer. 14:13-15](#); [Lam. 2:14](#)). [Jeremiah 28](#) records Jeremiah's encounter with the false prophet Hananiah, while the next chapter mentions the false prophets Ahab and Zedekiah ([Jer. 29:21-23](#)). The Old Testament also names another Zedekiah as a false prophet ([1 Kings 22:10-28](#)), as well as two false prophets named Shemaiah ([Neh. 6:10-12](#); [Jer. 29:24-32](#)). [Ezekiel 13:17](#) mentions false prophetesses, and Nehemiah encountered the false prophetess Noadiah ([Neh. 6:14](#)). The most notorious false prophet in the Old Testament was Balaam, who led Israel into idolatry and sin ([Num. 22-24](#); [Josh. 13:22](#); [24:9-10](#); [Neh. 13:1-2](#); [2 Pet. 2:15-16](#); [Jude 11](#); [Rev. 2:14](#)). The New Testament records the apostle Paul's encounter on the island of Cyprus with the false prophet Bar-Jesus ([Acts 13:6-12](#)).

Several vices characterize false prophets, apart from the obvious one of teaching lies. Scripture denounces them as wicked ([Jer. 23:11](#)), adulterers ([Jer. 23:14](#)), greedy ([Ezek. 22:25](#); [Mic. 3:11](#); [2 Pet. 2:15](#)), self-deceived ([Ezek. 13:2-3](#)), and idolaters ([Jer. 2:8](#); [23:13](#)). Not surprisingly, God will judge them severely. [Deuteronomy 18:20](#) pronounces the death sentence on them: "The prophet who speaks a word presumptuously in My name which I have not commanded him to speak, or which he speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die" (cf. [Num. 31:8](#); [Jer. 23:15](#); [29:21-22](#)). Peter spoke the judgment of God on all false teachers when he wrote that they "will utterly perish in their own corruption, and will

receive the wages of unrighteousness... for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever" ([2 Pet. 2:12-13](#), [17](#) nkjv).

False prophets have plagued God's people from the beginning of history. But they will proliferate even more as the return of Christ to establish His kingdom approaches. Speaking of that time Jesus said, "Many false prophets will arise and will mislead many" ([Matt. 24:11](#)). So persuasive will their efforts be that they "will show signs and wonders, in order to lead astray, if possible, the elect" ([Mark 13:22](#)). Those false prophets will be energized by some of Satan's demon hosts. The devil will intensify his efforts to deceive the world as his own doom approaches.

Just as the false christs who have plagued mankind will culminate in the final Antichrist, so also will the false prophets culminate in a final false prophet (cf. [16:13](#); [19:20](#); [20:10](#)). He will be Satan's last and most powerful lying deceiver. Along with Satan, the counterfeit of the Father, and Antichrist, the counterfeit of Jesus Christ, the false prophet will form the satanic false trinity. He will be the counterfeit of the Holy Spirit. The false prophet will be Antichrist's partner in Satan's massive final deception of the world. While Antichrist will be primarily a political and military ruler, he will also claim to be God. The false prophet will be his high priest, the religious leader who will lead people into the satanic religion of worshiping Antichrist. The false prophet will deify Antichrist and convince unbelievers that he is the only hope for the world's salvation.

The false prophet will be able to deceive the unbelieving world because the power of religion over men's minds is so great. People are incurable worshipers; everyone worships someone, whether the true God, false gods, or themselves. There is in the heart of man the longing for someone transcendent, someone beyond himself that can deliver him from his troubling circumstances. The terrifying, unparalleled events of the Tribulation will intensify that longing for a supernatural deliverer. The false prophet will convince the unbelieving world that Antichrist is the solution to the world's pressing problems. He may well be the most eloquent, powerful, convincing speaker in human history, and his lofty oratory will persuade the world to worship Antichrist. John Phillips speculated:

The dynamic appeal of the false prophet will lie in his skill in combining political expediency with religious passion... His arguments will be subtle, convincing, and appealing. His oratory will be hypnotic, for he will be able to move the masses to tears or whip them into a frenzy. He will control the communication media of the world and will skillfully organize mass publicity to promote his ends. He will manage the truth with guile beyond words, bending it, twisting it, and distorting it... He will mold world thought and shape human opinion like so much potter's clay. (*Exploring Revelation*, rev. ed. [Chicago: Moody, 1987; reprint, Neptune, N.J.: Loizeaux, 1991], 171)

The partnership between political and religious power exhibited by Antichrist and the false prophet will not be new. Jannes and Jambres, two false religious leaders, assisted Pharaoh in his confrontations with Moses and Aaron ([2 Tim. 3:8](#)). Balak, king of Moab, sought the false prophet Balaam's help to destroy Israel ([Num. 22-24](#)). Ahab and Jezebel used the idolatrous priests of Baal to help them accomplish their evil purposes in Israel ([1 Kings 18:17ff.](#)).

The Roman Empire united political and religious power by demanding that its subjects worship the state (personified as the goddess Roma) and the emperor. In modern times, communism, though officially scorning religion as the "opium of the people," has in effect been a substitute religion for its adherents.

The worldwide joining of political and religious power in the end times is detailed in [Revelation 17](#). For a time, the two powers will coexist ([17:1-9](#)). Eventually, however, Antichrist will destroy the false religious system and institute the worship of himself ([17:15-17](#)). That will happen at the midpoint of the Tribulation, when Antichrist sets up the abomination of desolation ([Dan. 9:27](#); [11:31](#); [12:11](#); [Matt. 24:15](#); [2 Thess. 2:3-4](#)). Having reached the pinnacle of his power, Antichrist will destroy all other religions. The worship of Antichrist, fomented by the false prophet, will become the only religion tolerated (cf. [14:9](#), [11](#); [15:2](#); [16:2](#); [19:20](#); [20:4](#)).

John's vision of the false prophet reveals three key elements: his person, power, and program.

His Person

Then I saw another beast coming up out of the earth; and he had two horns like a lamb and he spoke as a dragon. ([13:11](#))

Having seen the terrifying vision of the first beast (Antichrist) in [13:1-10](#), John then **saw another beast**. Some view this second **beast** as an institution, a form of government, or an ideology. But the use of *allos* (**another** of the same kind) indicates that he, like the first beast, will be a person. Further proof of that comes from [19:20](#): "And the beast was seized, and with him the false prophet who performed the signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image; these two were thrown alive into the lake of fire which burns with brimstone." Obviously, it is people, not ideologies, institutions, or governments, that God will cast into hell.

In contrast to the first beast, who will come up out of the sea ([13:1](#)), the second **beast** will come **up out of the earth**. Like Antichrist, the false prophet will be indwelt by a demon out of the abyss (see the comments on [13:1](#) in [chapter 4](#) of this volume), which is pictured here as the flaming depths **of the earth**. In the ancient world, the **earth** was less mysterious and foreboding than the sea. That the false prophet arises from the earth suggests that he will be subtler, gentler, less overpowering and terrifying than the Antichrist. He will be winsome and persuasive, the epitome of the wolves in sheep's clothing Jesus warned of ([Matt. 7:15](#)).

The description of the first beast, with its ten horns, seven heads, ten crowns, and seven blasphemous names ([13:1](#)), was grotesque and frightening. In contrast, the second **beast** merely **had two horns**. That indicates that he is not characterized by the same massive might as Antichrist. And unlike the savage, ferocious, fierce, and deadly Antichrist, who is likened to a leopard, bear, and lion ([13:2](#)), the false prophet seems as harmless as **a lamb**. He does not come as a conquering dictator, but on the surface appears as a subtle deceiver, with meekness and gentleness, though not without great authority.

Despite his deceptively mild appearance, the false prophet is no less a child of hell than the Antichrist. That is evident because **he spoke as a dragon**—a strange voice indeed for a lamb. The false prophet, like Antichrist ([13:2](#), [5](#)), will be the **dragon** Satan's mouthpiece, speaking his words. But he will not echo the blasphemous tirades against God that will pour from the lips of Antichrist ([Dan. 11:36](#)). Instead, he will speak winsome, deceiving words of praise about the Antichrist, luring the world to worship that vile, satanic dictator.

False prophets often appear meek, mild, and harmless. They offer hope and solutions to the problems troubling men and women. Yet they are ever the voices of hell, and when they open their mouths, Satan speaks. So it will be amid the unspeakable horrors of the Tribulation. The false prophet will come like a lamb, speaking false, deceptive words of comfort. He will promise the suffering, tormented people of the world that all will be well if only they will worship Antichrist. But those who fall for his subtle lies will face the terrifying judgment of God (cf. [14:9-11](#); [16:2](#)).

His Power

He exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence. And he makes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast, whose fatal wound was healed. He performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down out of heaven to the earth in the presence of men. And he deceives those who dwell on the earth because of the signs which it was given him to perform in the presence of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who had the wound of the sword and has come to life. ([13:12-14](#))

Though primarily a subtle deceiver, the false prophet will not be impotent. John notes that **he exercises all the authority of the first beast** (Antichrist). Some believe that the false prophet will replace Antichrist and rule alone during the Great Tribulation. That is impossible, however, since the text explicitly says that the false prophet **exercises** his **authority** in the **presence** of Antichrist (cf. [v. 14](#); [19:20](#)). Further, both the false prophet and Antichrist will be alive when Christ returns ([19:20](#)).

What is being said here is that the false prophet will exercise the same kind of demonic power and authority as the Antichrist does, since both are empowered by the same hellish source. That he **exercises** his **authority** in Antichrist's **presence** implies that Antichrist will have delegated that **authority** to him. The false prophet's mission will be to use all the means available to him from the Antichrist to cause **the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast**. He will lead the worldwide cult of Antichrist worship.

The false prophet's efforts to promote the worship of the Antichrist will receive a tremendous boost from a startling, spectacular event: the apparent healing of the first beast's (Antichrist's) **fatal wound** (cf. [v. 3](#); [17:8](#)). As noted in the discussion of [13:3](#) in the [previous chapter](#) of this volume, that phrase refers to Antichrist's supposed resurrection from the dead. That is a satanic imitation not only of Christ's resurrection, but also that of the two witnesses ([11:11](#)). It is most likely that Antichrist's death will be staged, and hence his "resurrection" is a ruse. It is less likely that God, for His own sovereign purposes, may permit Antichrist to genuinely rise from the dead. In either case, the world will accept Antichrist's resurrection as genuine, thus greatly enhancing both his prestige and that of the false prophet.

Besides his involvement in Antichrist's "resurrection," the false prophet will **perform great signs** of his own. Those signs mimic not only the miracles performed by Jesus Christ (cf. [John 2:11, 23; 6:2](#)), but also those of the two witnesses ([11:5-6](#)). These satanic "false wonders... with all the deception of wickedness" will be extremely persuasive "for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved" ([2 Thess. 2:9-10](#)). Those who reject the saving gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ will eagerly accept the damning false gospel preached by the false prophet—a gospel seemingly verified by spectacular supernatural signs.

That Satan can fabricate supernatural signs is clear from Scripture. Jannes and Jambres, the magicians in Pharaoh's court ([2 Tim. 3:8-9](#)), imitated some of the miracles God did through Moses and Aaron ([Ex. 7:11-12, 22](#)). [Acts 8:9-11](#) describes "a man named Simon, who formerly was practicing magic in the city and astonishing the people of Samaria, claiming to be someone great; and they all, from smallest to greatest, were giving attention to him, saying, 'This man is what is called the Great Power of God.' And they were giving him attention because he had for a long time astonished them with his magic arts." The signs performed by the false prophet will far exceed those of a small-time magician like Simon.

Amazingly, the false prophet, imitating the two witnesses ([11:5](#)), **even makes fire come down out of heaven to the earth**. The present tense of *poieō* (**makes**) suggests that he will repeatedly perform this supernatural act **in the presence of men** to impress them with his power. God has often demonstrated His supernatural power by sending fire from heaven (cf. [11:5; Gen. 19:24; Lev. 10:1-2; 1 Kings 18:38; 2 Kings 1:9-12; 1 Chron. 21:26; 2 Chron. 7:1](#)).

Satan's henchman will perform a similar sign, but his will be one of the "false wonders" ([2 Thess. 2:9](#)) that will lure unbelievers to their doom.

The false prophet will succeed dramatically in his efforts to **deceive those who dwell on the earth**—exactly as Jesus predicted (cf. [Matt. 24:5, 11, 24; Mark 13:6](#)). **Deceives** is from *planaō*, and means "to wander." It forms the root of the English word *planet*, since the planets appear to wander through the heavens. The world will be utterly vulnerable to his deception during the Tribulation. There will be unparalleled disasters and unimaginable horrors, leaving people desperate for answers. Having rejected the true gospel and blasphemed the true God (cf. [16:9, 11](#)), the unbelieving world will be eager to believe the deceiving lies propagated by the false prophet.

John defines the people who will be deceived as **those who dwell on the earth**—a technical phrase used throughout Revelation to refer to unbelievers ([vv. 8, 12; 3:10; 6:10; 8:13; 11:10; 17:2, 8](#)). Though sorely tested and persecuted, God's elect cannot be deceived ([Mark 13:22](#)). Because believers know the truth and are protected by their God (cf. [John 10:3-5, 14, 27-30](#)), they will recognize the false prophet's teaching as lies and will not be swayed **because of the signs which it was given him to perform in the presence of the beast**. That the unbelieving world will be deceived is due not only to the wicked deception of Satan, the demons, Antichrist, and the false prophet, but also comes as God's judgment. The false prophet's preaching will succeed in part because it will arrive "with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved" ([2 Thess. 2:10](#)). But it will also succeed because "God will send upon them a

deluding influence so that they will believe what is false, in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness" ([vv. 11-12](#)).

As the power of Antichrist and the persuasiveness of the false prophet grow, Satan will escalate the false world religion of Antichrist worship. Humanity will eventually come to be so completely under the influence of the false prophet that people will obey his command **to make an image to the beast**. The world will engage in the most shocking, blatant idolatry ever seen. Like Nebuchadnezzar before him ([Dan. 3](#)), but on a global scale, Antichrist, aided by the false prophet, will set up a statue of himself as a symbol of his deity and worldwide worship. This blasphemous image will probably be set up on the temple grounds in Jerusalem (cf. [2 Thess. 2:4](#)) and will be connected with the abomination of desolation ([Dan. 9:27](#); [11:31](#); [12:11](#); [Matt. 24:15](#)). It will be a tribute to the awesome power of Antichrist, **who had the wound of the sword and has come to life** (cf. [vv. 3, 12](#)), to seemingly conquer death.

His Program

And it was given to him to give breath to the image of the beast, so that the image of the beast would even speak and cause as many as do not worship the image of the beast to be killed. And he causes all, the small and the great, and the rich and the poor, and the free men and the slaves, to be given a mark on their right hand or on their forehead, and he provides that no one will be able to buy or to sell, except the one who has the mark, either the name of the beast or the number of his name. Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for the number is that of a man; and his number is six hundred and sixty-six. ([13:15-18](#))

The idolatrous image of the Antichrist will be different from any other idol in human history. The Bible scornfully denounces idols as having mouths, yet being unable to speak ([Pss. 115:5](#); [135:15-17](#); [Isa. 46:7](#); [Jer. 10:5](#); [Hab. 2:18-19](#)). But in another display of his power to deceive, the false prophet will **give breath to the image of the beast, so that the image of the beast would even speak**. **Breath** translates *pneuma*, not *zōē* or *bios*, the Greek words normally translated *life*. The false prophet will animate the image of Antichrist so that it gives the appearance of being alive. With today's amazing special effects technology and robotics, that is not out of the realm of possibility. Add to that the world's desperate need, amid the carnage of the Tribulation, to believe in a death conqueror, and the ruse becomes very believable.

After his immense worldwide success and after dropping his facade of gentleness, the false prophet will **cause as many as do not worship the image of the beast to be killed**. As in the case of Nebuchadnezzar's image ([Dan. 3:6](#)), the death sentence will be decreed for those who refuse to worship the image of Antichrist. Many of the martyrs mentioned earlier in Revelation (cf. [6:9-11](#); [7:13-14](#)) are those who will be killed during this terrible time of persecution. But though the death sentence may be decreed on all, not all believers will be killed. Some will survive until Christ returns and will enter His millennial kingdom as living people (cf. [Isa. 65:20-23](#); [Matt. 25:31-40](#)). Nor will Antichrist and his henchmen kill all the Jews (cf. [12:6-7, 14](#)); two-thirds of them will perish, but the rest will be protected ([Zech. 13:8-9](#)).

As part of his plan to enforce the worship of Antichrist, the false prophet will require **all** categories of unbelievers, summarized as **the small and the great, and the rich and the poor, and the free men and the slaves, to be given a mark on their right hand or on their forehead.** **Mark** (*charagma*; from *charassō*, "I engrave") was the term for images or names of the emperor on Roman coins. In the ancient world, such marks (tattoos or brands) were commonly given to slaves, soldiers, and devotees of religious cults (cf. [Gal. 6:17](#)). God sealed, with a mark on the forehead, the 144,000 to preserve them from His wrath against the unbelieving world ([7:2-3](#)); the false prophet marks the unsaved to preserve them from Antichrist's wrath against God's people. The mark will signify that the person bearing it is a worshiper and loyal follower of the Antichrist. In much the same way, the Roman emperors required their subjects to prove their loyalty by offering sacrifices to Caesar. Those who refused, like those who refuse to take the Antichrist's mark, were subject to execution.

Besides the constant threat of death, refusing to take the mark of the beast will have dire practical consequences in daily living: **no one will be able to buy or to sell, except the one who has the mark.** Antichrist's empire will maintain strict economic control over the world. Food, clothing, medical supplies, and the other necessities of life potentially in demand in the devastated earth, which has felt the judgment of God ([6:5-6](#)), will be unobtainable for those without the **mark**. Currency will probably vanish, to be replaced by controlled credit. Instead of a credit card, which can be lost, people will have a **mark** (possibly a bar code) in their forehead or hand. Scanning people's foreheads or hands would identify them to a central computer system. Life under totalitarian governments in our time provides a faint glimpse of what is to come. A man who had lived under Bulgaria's communist regime remarked:

You cannot understand and you cannot know that the most terrible instrument of persecution ever devised is an innocent ration card. You cannot buy and you cannot sell except according to that little, innocent card. If they please, you can be starved to death, and if they please, you can be dispossessed of everything you have; for you cannot trade, and you cannot buy and you cannot sell, without permission. (Cited in W. A. Criswell, *Expository Sermons on Revelation* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1969], 4:120-21)

The pressure to give in to the worship of Antichrist will be far worse than anything ever experienced in human history. Life will be virtually unlivable, so the people are forced to bow to the demonized king, not prompted merely by religious deception, but also by economic necessity.

Further describing the mark, John notes that it will consist of **either the name of the beast or the number of his name.** Antichrist will have a universal designation, his name within a numbering system. The exact identification of that phrase is unclear. What is clear is that everyone will be required to have the identifying **mark** or suffer the consequences.

The exclamation **here is wisdom** is a warning to those alive at that time to be wise and discerning. They will need to recognize what is happening and understand the significance of the number connected with Antichrist's name. Those with **understanding** will be able to **calculate the number of the beast, for the number is that of a man; and his number is six hundred and sixty-six.** Perhaps no detail in Revelation has intrigued people more than this **number**. There has been no end to the speculation as to its significance and how to

calculate it. In Greek, Hebrew, and Latin, letters had numerical equivalents, and a myriad of schemes to associate the names of historical individuals with the number 666 have been put forth. Nero, Caligula, Domitian, Napoleon, Hitler, Mussolini, Stalin, and a host of others have been proposed, based on some sort of convoluted mathematical rendering of the letters in their name. All such speculation is futile; since the Antichrist is still to come, the number 666 cannot be associated with any historical individual. The church father Irenaeus cautioned against speculating about the identity of the person associated with the number 666 until that person arrives on the scene (Alan F. Johnson, *Revelation, The Expositor's Bible Commentary* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996], 137). Robert L. Thomas gives a very reasonable perspective:

The better part of wisdom is to be content that the identification is not yet available, but will be when the future false Christ ascends to his throne. The person to whom 666 applies must have been future to John's time, because John clearly meant the number to be recognizable to someone. If it was not discernible to his generation and those immediately following him—and it was not—the generation to whom it will be discernible must have lain (and still lies) in the future. Past generations have provided many illustrations of this future personage, but all past candidates have proven inadequate as fulfillments. Christians from generation to generation may manifest the same curiosity as the prophets of old regarding their own prophecies (cf. [1 Pet. 1:10-11](#)), but their curiosity will remain unsatisfied until the time of fulfillment arrives. (Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 8-22: An Exegetical Commentary* [Chicago: Moody, 1995], 185)

The precise significance of the number 666 awaits the future time of the Antichrist, but it is noteworthy that **the number is that of a man**. Seven, the number of perfection, is God's number. Since man falls short of perfection, his number is six. Man was created on the sixth day ([Gen. 1:26-31](#)); slaves were freed after six years of service ([Ex. 21:2](#)); fields were to be sown for only six consecutive years ([Lev. 25:3](#)). Repeating the number three times emphasizes that this is man's number, just as the thrice-repeated statement "holy, holy, holy" stresses God's absolute holiness ([4:8](#); [Isa. 6:3](#)).

A false religion on a scale never before seen is coming, led by the most notorious of all false prophets. Most people will follow the seemingly safe and prudent course, worshiping the Antichrist, and receiving his mark. But that is a tragic mistake with disastrous consequences, for those who persist in worshiping the beast will face the wrath of God. In a sobering passage, Revelation warns of their fate:

Then another angel, a third one, followed them, saying with a loud voice, "If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, he also will drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger; and he will be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever; they have no rest day and night, those who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name." ([14:9-11](#))

And what of the false prophet, who will usher uncounted millions on to the broadest and most dangerous of all the roads leading to destruction? He will suffer an equally appalling and

terrifying fate: "And the beast was seized, and with him the false prophet who performed the signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image; these two were thrown alive into the lake of fire which burns with brimstone" ([Rev. 19:20](#); cf. [20:10](#)).

This sobering passage is not intended to be the source of fruitless speculation about its details. Rather, it stands as a warning to the unbelieving world. It also challenges believers to lead careful, watchful, godly lives (cf. [1 Pet. 4:7](#); [2 Pet. 3:11](#)), and to evangelize a hopelessly lost world, headed for destruction. Believers are to faithfully proclaim the saving gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, and thereby rescue the souls of men and women from the disaster that looms just over the horizon.

MacArthur New Testament Commentary, The - Revelation 12-22.