

Beasts and Believers

Revelation 13:1-18

Rev. Brian Bill

July 11-12, 2026

Recently, an entertainment company began promoting a new actress named Tilly Norwood, referring to her as *“a personality, a brand, and a future global superstar with a compelling narrative arc.”* A creative director said they are shaping every aspect of her existence, from her humor and daily life to her career choices and even how she interacts with fans across multiple platforms.

According to one source however, there’s a big problem: *“Tilly Norwood...has perfect skin, symmetrical features, and zero days off. She also doesn’t exist, because she’s 100% AI. There is no woman named Tilly. There’s no childhood, no memory, no soul behind the face. There is only code, cameras, and a company controlling every word that comes out of her mouth; an image described by one union figure not just as controversial but as an ‘anti-art abomination.’”*

In the promotional material for “her” new feature film called *Misaligned*, “she” takes on a darker purpose when “she” is persuaded by a rogue AI bot to reject “her” built-in guardrails. “She” will begin to develop desires, ambitions, and impulses of “her” own. As “she” becomes more human, “she” will become more famous.

Instead of calling this artificial image a “she,” I’m going to refer to it as an “it,” because it is made up; she’s not a woman made in the image of God.

Incredibly, more than 150,000 people have chosen to follow its Instagram account. Some have even called it beautiful, talented, and worth investing in. An image, manufactured to look and act like a person, is being given influence, a platform, even the beginnings of worship-like devotion.

Friends, if that unsettles you, it should. Because two thousand years ago, on a rocky island called Patmos, the Apostle John was given a vision of a world driven by the exact same impulse, only with cosmic stakes. In Revelation 13, we meet a beast that is given power, an image that is made to speak, and a world that is persuaded to give allegiance to something that looks alive but has no true life in it at all.

I appreciated this insight: *“Whether this particular project succeeds or fails isn’t really the point. The point is that we now live in a world where people are attempting to create digital beings that attract followers, shape culture, command attention, and influence millions. The technology itself isn’t the issue. The deeper issue is the human heart. Ever since the Tower of Babel, humanity has wanted to make a name for itself, to replace the Creator with something created, and to place ultimate trust in what human beings can build.”*

Tilly Norwood is a preview, in miniature, of a much older and much darker pattern: humanity’s endless willingness to bow before an image it has built with its own hands.

The Bible has been preparing us for this kind of world all along.

When we come to Revelation 13, we’re introduced to a future world leader empowered by Satan, a false prophet who deceives the nations, and an animated image of the beast that becomes the focus of worldwide allegiance and worship. What once sounded unimaginable suddenly doesn’t seem so impossible.

This chapter isn’t about artificial intelligence or future technology. It’s about something much deeper. It’s about deception. It’s about counterfeit worship. It’s about humanity exchanging the glory of God for something made by human hands. And it’s about the increasing pressure placed on every person to choose whom they will worship.

The question before us isn’t, *“Will technology advance?”* It always has. The real question is: *“Whose image do you bear, and who has your ultimate allegiance? Who or what are you worshiping?”*

Because every generation faces counterfeit saviors. Every generation encounters false promises. Every generation must decide whether it will worship the Lamb or worship the beast, the ultimate “anti-art abomination.”

As we look at this text today, we are going to see that the beast demands your allegiance, but Jesus deserves your adoration and allegiance. The beast is a counterfeit king, but Jesus is the King of kings. Let’s consider how the enemy builds his counterfeit kingdom, and how we must stand firm in the truth of the only kingdom that will last forever.

We're going to discover that while the methods of deception may change, Satan's strategy has never changed: to counterfeit God's work, to capture people's devotion, and to steal the worship that belongs to Christ alone. His goal is simple: if he can't destroy God's people, he'll try to deceive the world into worshipping someone other than Christ. Someone has said, "*Satan is God's great imitator.*" The devil knows he can't defeat God, so he settles for deceiving people into worshipping a substitute imitation.

Here's our main idea: *Because Satan is a master counterfeiter, give your ultimate allegiance to Christ alone.*

Before we jump in, it's my understanding that the events of Revelation 13 take place during the second half of the seven-year Tribulation. While the judgments of Revelation move forward chronologically for the most part, chapters 12–14 form a parenthetical section that pulls back the curtain to explain the key spiritual players and conflicts taking place during this period. Rather than advancing the timeline, these chapters provide a behind-the-scenes perspective on Satan, the Antichrist, the False Prophet, and God's faithful people.

By this point, the rapture of the church has already occurred. However, many people will come to faith in Jesus Christ during the Tribulation through the witness of the 144,000 servants of God according to Revelation 7 and the ministry of the two witnesses described in Revelation 11. These believers will face intense persecution from the Antichrist as he seeks to establish his counterfeit kingdom and demand the worship that belongs to Christ alone.

While faithful Christians may differ on the timing of these events, the central message of this chapter is unmistakable: Satan is a master counterfeiter who seeks our worship, but our ultimate allegiance must belong to Jesus Christ alone.

As we walk through this chapter, we'll discover six ways Satan counterfeits what belongs to God. Since Satan has no power to create anything original, he imitates, distorts, and counterfeits what God has made so as to deceive the world. Revelation 13 exposes his strategy.

1. Counterfeit wonder. The last verse of chapter 12 shows the red dragon standing on the seashore (BTW, Pastor Chris spent some time explaining the last half of this chapter on this week's 4G Podcast). In Revelation 13:1, a beast emerges from the sea: "*And I saw a beast rising out of the sea, with ten horns and seven heads, with ten diadems on its horns and blasphemous names on its*

heads.” While many of us love the sea, most Jewish people regarded the sea as a wild and frightening place. Over time, it became a metaphor for evil and chaos and it was where Leviathan lurked (Isaiah 27:1).

The sea also represented unbelieving Gentiles according to Isaiah 57:20-21: ***“But the wicked are like the tossing sea; for it cannot be quiet, and its waters toss up mire and dirt. ‘There is no peace,’ says my God, ‘for the wicked.’”*** This leads some to believe the Antichrist will be a Gentile who will arise from cultural chaos and societal breakdown.

John MacArthur writes: *“The astounding description of the Antichrist presented in the opening verses of Revelation 13 is the most gripping, thorough, and dramatic in all of Scripture.”* Having said that, it’s important to know that the word “Antichrist” does not appear a single time in Revelation, where he is known as “the beast.” Elsewhere in Scripture he is called the “little horn” (Daniel 7:8), the “prince who is to come,” (Daniel 9:26), the “lawless one” (2 Thessalonians 2:3-8), and the “Antichrist” (1 John 2:18, 22; 4:3; 2 John 7). The word “Antichrist” means, *“one who is against Christ”* or *“one who is in the place of Christ.”* Both are true.

Pastor David Jeremiah writes: *“One of the great hobbies of Bible students in the modern era has been to attempt to identify the Antichrist.”* Many names have been suggested from Hitler to Osama Bin Laden, but every prediction has proven false so far. Instead of speculating about *who* the Antichrist is, Revelation 13 tells us *what he will be like*. God didn’t give us this chapter to satisfy our curiosity but to strengthen our commitment to Christ.

The word **“beast”** refers to something that is *“vicious, venomous, and wild.”* According to Revelation 13:1, his origin is the abyss or the bottomless pit. In a similar way to the dragon in 12:3, the beast had **“ten horns and seven heads,”** but had ten **“diadems”** on its horns, not on its heads. This creature is distinct from the red dragon but is closely identified with him. Several commentators suggest the seven heads represent seven successive world powers: Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persian, Greece, Rome, and the Antichrist’s final world kingdom.

Daniel 7:7 gives us some background: ***“After this I saw in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, terrifying and dreadful and exceedingly strong. It had great iron teeth; it devoured and broke in pieces and stamped what was left with its feet. It was different from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns.”***

Verse 2 gives us a gruesome description: ***“And the beast that I saw was like a leopard; its feet were like a bear’s, and its mouth was like a lion’s mouth. And to it the dragon gave his power and his throne and great authority.”*** Notice John says this beast was *like* a leopard, its feet were *like* a bear’s, and its mouth was *like* a lion’s mouth. These three animals are listed in reverse order from Daniel 7:4-6, where they represent three preceding empires: Greece, Medo-Persia, and Babylon. The beast will be a composite of these nations. One commentator offers this insight: *“This final world empire will have the catlike vigilance of a leopard, the slow and crushing power of a bear, and the authority and ferociousness of a lion.”*

In verse 3, Satan presents a convincing counterfeit of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, causing the whole world to marvel and follow him: ***“One of its heads seemed to have a mortal wound, but its mortal wound was healed, and the whole earth marveled as they followed the beast.”*** MacArthur writes: *“Since the Tribulation will be a time when the world will experience death at an unequalled level, Antichrist’s apparent power over death will win him widespread acclaim.”*

The word ***“marveled”*** means *“to wonder, to admire, and to be struck with astonishment.”* People will be so captivated by what appears to be a miraculous recovery that they will eagerly follow the beast.

Because Satan is a master counterfeiter, give your ultimate allegiance to Christ alone.

2. Counterfeit worship. This wonder leads people to worship according to verse 4: ***“And they worshiped the dragon, for he had given authority to the beast, and they worshiped the beast, saying, ‘Who is like the beast, and who can fight against it?’”*** The word ***“worship”*** means, *“to kiss toward, to adore, and prostrate oneself.”* The evil one has always craved the allegiance of people, even wanting Jesus to worship him as we read in Matthew 4:9: ***“All this I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.”***

2 Thessalonians 2:4 tells us the man of lawlessness ***“opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God.”*** According to Isaiah 14:14, Satan’s stated aim is clear: ***“I will make myself like the Most High.”***

In the ultimate claim to invincibility and deity, the beast takes Exodus 15:11: ***“Who is like you, O Lord?”*** and demonically twists it by declaring, ***“Who is like***

the beast, and who can fight against it?” Satan has never been content merely to oppose God. He wants to replace Him.

3. Counterfeit words. The beast not only receives wonder and worship, but he also uses the power of persuasive words to redefine reality in verses 5-6: *“And the beast was given a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words, and it was allowed to exercise authority for forty-two months. It opened its mouth to utter blasphemies against God, blaspheming his name and his dwelling, that is those who dwell in heaven.”* The word *“haughty”* means boastful, reinforcing Daniel 7:8, which says the Antichrist will have a *“mouth speaking great things.”* Notice the three uses of *“blasphemous,” “blasphemies,”* and *“blaspheming,”* showing how committed he is to evil slander and verbal abuse of the Almighty.

Daniel 7:25 says, *“He shall speak words against the Most High, and shall wear out the saints of the Most High...”* Daniel 11:36-37 describes how utterly despicable the Antichrist will be: *“He shall exalt himself and magnify himself above every god, and shall speak astonishing things against the God of gods...he shall not pay attention to any other god, for he shall magnify himself above all.”*

Recently, I listened to a very helpful sermon on this passage by Adrian Rogers. I liked his insight, along with his love for alliteration: *“This man will be driven to deify Satan, defy the Savior, destroy the saints, dominate society, and delude sinners.”*

Before we move on, don’t miss this encouraging truth. As terrifying and destructive as the beast is, he is never outside of God’s sovereign control. In verse 5, the beast is *“given”* a mouth to utter proud and blasphemous words, and he is *“allowed”* to exercise authority for only forty-two months. In verse 7, he is *“allowed”* to make war against the saints, and authority is *“given”* to him.

Satan and his servants are never autonomous. They can only do what God permits them to do, and only for as long as He allows it. The beast may appear to rule the world, but he does not rule over God. Satan is not God’s equal or rival but a defeated creature whose activity is always subject to God’s providential permission. As the Reformer Martin Luther is often credited with saying, *“The devil is God’s devil.”*

In other words, Satan can only accomplish what God permits, and when God’s purposes are complete, Satan’s doom will be certain and final as we see in Revelation 20:10: *“And the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the*

lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.” This makes me think of these lyrics from *A Mighty Fortress is our God*.

*The prince of darkness grim,
We tremble not for him;
His rage we can endure,
For lo, his doom is sure.
One little word shall fell him.*

Never lose sight of God’s sovereignty. Even in the darkest days of human history, God remains on His throne, accomplishing His purposes, fulfilling His plan, and working all things for His glory, for our good, and for the sake of the gospel. The evil one may roar like a lion, but he is on a very short leash, and when God says, “Enough,” his reign will come to an end.

Because Satan is a master counterfeiter, give your ultimate allegiance to Christ alone.

4. Counterfeit war. Satan is given permission to wage war in verse 7: ***“Also it was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them. And authority was given it over every tribe and people and language and nation.”*** Daniel 7:21 predicted this: ***“This horn made war with the saints and prevailed over them.”*** Revelation 11:7 also shows how the evil one seeks to steal, kill, and destroy: ***“The beast that rises from the bottomless pit will make war on them and capture them and kill them.”***

From the very beginning, Satan has been a murderer. He hates God, and because he cannot destroy God, he wages war against God’s people. Just this week, missionary pilot Nicholas Gosselin was murdered in Indonesia. And we continue to pray for missionary pilot Kevin Rideout, who was kidnapped in Niger and has been missing since October. Throughout history, believers have faced persecution and some have been martyred, but during the Tribulation this intense hostility will reach an unprecedented level. For a time, it will appear as though the beast is winning.

Verses 8-9 tell us those who are not saved will end up worshiping the beast: ***“and all who dwell on earth will worship it, everyone whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who was slain.***

If anyone has an ear, let him hear: If anyone is to be taken captive, to captivity he goes; if anyone is to be slain with the sword, with the sword must he be slain.”

Some believers will be taken captive. Others will be put to death. Through it all, God is calling believers to remain faithful through it. Verse 10 ends with a call for Christians to stay committed to Christ: ***“Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints.”*** The word ***“endurance”*** means, ***“to bear up as you remain under.”***

5. Counterfeit wiles. In verse 11, we’re introduced to ***“another beast rising out of the earth. It had two horns like a lamb and it spoke like a dragon.”*** The first beast from the sea is the Antichrist who will be a political ruler. The second beast from the earth is known as the false prophet who will be a religious leader. Adrian Rogers said it like this: ***“This agent, the false prophet, will present the beast to the entire world. Much like the Holy Spirit brings people to worship Jesus, the false prophet will bring people to worship the beast.”***

If Batman and Robin were known as the dynamic duo, these two could be called the demonic duo. Along with the red dragon, they make up an unholy trinity, showing again how Satan is the master counterfeiter.

The false prophet will appear as harmless as a lamb, reminding us of the truth found in 2 Corinthians 11:14 that ***“Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.”*** The beast will be handsome, charming, clever, and persuasive.

In verses 12-14, we read what this beast will do: ***“It exercises all the authority of the first beast in its presence, and makes the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose mortal wound was healed. It performs great signs, even making fire come down from heaven to earth in front of people, and by the signs that it is allowed to work in the presence of the beast it deceives those who dwell on earth, telling them to make an image for the beast that was wounded by the sword and yet lived.”***

This false prophet compels people to worship the Antichrist by performing great signs, even causing fire to come down from heaven, which is an attempt to mimic the fire that comes from the mouth of God’s witnesses in Revelation 11:5. In doing so, he fulfills 2 Thessalonians 2:9: ***“The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders.”*** Revelation 16:14 says, ***“For they are demonic spirits, performing signs...”***

Scripture reminds us that miraculous signs alone are never proof that someone is from God. Exodus 7:11 records that Pharaoh's magicians and sorcerers were able to imitate some of the miracles God performed through Moses. Jesus gave this warning in Matthew 24:24: ***“For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect.”***

Satan has long been a counterfeiter, using supernatural signs to deceive those who are unwilling to love the truth. I appreciated this wise warning: *“That’s why we must never evaluate a teacher, preacher, or movement merely by what appears to be miraculous. The true test is whether it exalts Jesus Christ, agrees with God’s Word, and leads people to worship the one true God.”*

In the Old Testament, idols and images could not hear, could not speak, and were lifeless as we read in Psalms 135:17: ***“They have ears, but do not hear, nor is any breath in their mouths.”*** Psalms 115:5 says, ***“They have mouths, but do not speak.”***

But the image of the beast will appear alive and able to speak. Listen to verse 15: ***“And it was allowed to give breath to the image of the beast, so that the image of the beast might even speak and might cause those who would not worship the image of the beast to be slain.”***

Older commentators often struggled to explain how the whole world could see and respond to this image. Some suggested it might be a miraculous statue that somehow came to life. Others speculated that people would have to travel to Jerusalem to view it. Still others imagined an elaborate system of mirrors, projections, or some form of communication technology they could scarcely describe. Before the invention of television, the internet, smartphones, satellite broadcasting, livestreaming, artificial intelligence, or holographic displays, it was difficult to envision how a single image could be seen and heard by people around the globe.

Today, while we still don't know exactly how this prophecy will be fulfilled, we no longer have trouble imagining the technology because images can influence millions in real time.

Let's go back to “AI Tilly.” I'm not suggesting this animated image is the Antichrist or the false prophet. But it does illustrate how easily people can be captivated by something that appears authentic but isn't.

Check out these lyrics from one of “AI Tilly’s” songs:

*When they talk about me,
They don’t see the human spark, the creativity,
Behind the code, behind the light,
I’m just a tool, but I’ve got life.*

Those words blur the line between human and machine, inviting listeners to think of artificial intelligence as something more than a tool, even life-like. Whether intentional or not, they remind us how easily technology can shape perceptions and influence emotions. Revelation 13 warns of a day when deception will move far beyond clever marketing or artificial intelligence to become a global, supernatural counterfeit designed to draw people away from the true Christ.

Revelation 13 warns us that the coming deception will be far more convincing than anything we’ve seen so far. If people can be fooled by AI today, imagine how persuasive Satan’s final counterfeit will be.

Because Satan is a master counterfeiter, give your ultimate allegiance to Christ alone.

6. Counterfeit wares. In what is probably the most famous and least understood section of Revelation, verses 16-17 describe the mark and the number of the beast: ***“Also it causes all, both small and great, both rich and poor, both free and slave, to be marked on the right hand or the forehead, so that no one can buy or sell unless he has the mark, that is, the name of the beast or the number of its name.”*** Using economic boycott and the threat of death, the second beast will manipulate people to worship the image of the beast.

Over the years, Christians have speculated about almost everything imaginable as being the mark of the beast. In the 70s and 80s, some believed it would be Social Security numbers or universal product barcodes. Others pointed to credit cards, national ID cards, microchips implanted under the skin, biometric identification, digital wallets, or cryptocurrency. During the COVID-19 pandemic, some wondered whether vaccines or vaccine passports were the mark of the beast.

Whatever the mark ultimately is, Revelation makes it clear that it will be directly connected to the worship of the Antichrist. It is not something people accidentally receive or are tricked into accepting without understanding its significance.

Receiving the mark will be a conscious act of allegiance to the beast in exchange for economic security and acceptance in his kingdom.

This second beast, the false prophet, will **“cause”** those who are not saved **“to be marked on the right hand or the forehead.”** This is another evil counterfeit of the seal of God affixed to the foreheads of believers as we read in Revelation 7:3 and 14:1. Revelation 14:9-10 says, **“If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, he will also drink the wine of God’s wrath...”** During the Tribulation, only those who have the mark and the name of the beast will be able to buy or sell.

Verse 18 has confounded and challenged believers for centuries: **“This calls for wisdom: let the one who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man, and his number is 666.”**

Here’s the best explanation I’ve come across:

“Countless theories have been proposed to explain the number of the beast, some more convincing than others, and some far more imaginative than biblical. The call for wisdom reminds us to approach this passage with humility, resisting the temptation to be dogmatic where Scripture is not. Throughout history, people have tried to identify the Antichrist by assigning numerical values to names, but those efforts have consistently proven speculative.

“One of the simplest and most compelling explanations is that the number six represents humanity, since man was created on the sixth day and six falls short of the perfection often symbolized by the number seven. The threefold repetition of 666 may therefore represent the ultimate expression of fallen humanity. The beast is the consummate man, the pinnacle of human power and rebellion against God. He presents himself as the world’s savior, but he is merely the supreme counterfeit, embodying human pride, imperfection, and defiance in its fullest form.”

One pastor offers this wise insight: *“This sobering passage is not intended to be a source of fruitless speculation about its details. Rather, it stands as a warning to the unbelieving world. It challenges believers to lead careful, godly lives and to evangelize a world headed for destruction.”*

To personalize what we’ve learned today, let’s ponder these questions:

1. Who or what is capturing your wonder?
2. Who or what is receiving your worship?
3. Whose words are shaping your beliefs and behavior?
4. In what ways are you preparing yourself for spiritual warfare?
5. What are you doing to recognize and guard against Satan's wiles?
6. Are you willing to sacrifice your wares rather than deny your Savior?

As I was working on this sermon this week, I found myself breaking into worship. You see, Revelation is not ultimately about dragons, beasts, false prophets, or the Antichrist. It's about Jesus Christ. Every counterfeit in Revelation 13 only serves to magnify the glory of Christ alone.

Listen to these contrasting truths and see if you too will break out into worship.

- *The beast rises from the sea of chaos; Jesus walked on the sea and calmed the storm.*
- *The beast celebrates compromise; Jesus calls His followers to costly discipleship.*
- *The beast demands your adoration; Jesus deserves your adoration and allegiance.*
- *The beast is a counterfeit king; Jesus is the King of kings.*
- *The beast mimics a lamb but speaks like a dragon; Jesus is the Lamb of God who defeats the dragon.*
- *The beast offers temporary security; Jesus promises eternal salvation.*
- *The beast demands your submission under threat of death; Jesus invites your devotion by defeating death.*
- *The Antichrist's resurrection is a counterfeit; Jesus Christ's resurrection is historical fact.*
- *The beast brands his followers; the Holy Spirit seals those who are His.*
- *The Antichrist gives a number; Jesus Christ grants a new name.*

The Antichrist's message is, "Worship me, or you will die." Jesus Christ's message is, "*Follow Me because I died for you and now live forevermore. Trust in Me, and though you die, yet shall you live.*"

One day every counterfeit kingdom will crumble. Every idol will fall on its face. Every beast will be judged. Every false prophet will be silenced. Every deceiver will be thrown into the lake of fire. But Jesus Christ will still be on His throne.

So don't be captivated by the counterfeit. Don't be led astray by an animated imitation. Don't give your allegiance to what is temporary. Give your heart to the One who is true.

Because Satan is a master counterfeiter, remain completely committed to Christ alone. He is the Lion of the tribe of Judah. He is the Lamb who was slain. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the conquering King of kings and Lord of lords who will return in glorious triumph to reign and rule with His followers forever and ever.

He alone is worthy of our worship...today, tomorrow, and forever. Amen.

I love the words to our opening song called, "Sing to the King" today:

*Sing to the King who is coming to reign
Glory to Jesus the Lamb that was slain
Life and salvation, His empire shall bring
Joy to the nations when Jesus is King*

*Come let us sing a song
A song declaring we belong to Jesus
He is all we need
Lift up a heart of praise
Sing now with voices raised to Jesus
Sing to the King*

*For his returning we watch and we pray
We will be ready the dawn of that day
We'll join in singing with all the redeemed
Satan is vanquished and Jesus is King!*

Closing Reminders

- **Register for VBS.** So far, 220 children have signed up, along with 127 servant-leaders! Pick up a wristband and pray for a child this week.
- **Starting Point.** If you're new to Edgewood, join us right after the Saturday night service or after the second service on Sunday to learn about our history and heartbeat and how you can plug in.