

Beasts and a Dragon
Revelation 13
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The anger of the dragon in his failure to kill the child or to overthrow the woman in the time period of chapter 12, sets the back drop for the events of chapters 13-14. Satan is aware of the shortness of his time and moves forward in one final, all out assault against the things of God. Literarily, the chapters are a continuation of the interlude between the sounding of the seventh trumpet and the emptying of the seven bowls representing God's complete wrath. The book of Revelation gives us insight into the behind the scenes operations of both the divine and the demonic. Chapters 11-14 give us a glimpse into the demonic.

The final words of chapter 12 stand as a warning of Satan's continuing activity. Having experienced defeat resulting in his enragement against the woman, he is said to have gone off to make war against the rest of her children. Chapter thirteen opens with Satan standing on the seashore apparently calling a beast from the sea to join in the fray. The appearance of the beast serves to introduce the Antichrist and put the reader on notice of an intense effort on the part of the demonic forces worldwide. It is important to remember that Satan is defeated and Christ is reigning. Just as in military skirmishes, we find that battles continue even after a declaration of victory has been declared. While Satan is seeking to resist the rule of Christ, his power is fading even in the midst of the display of his limitations through powerful events.

The Beast from the Sea

The beast first appeared in 11:7 as one who ascended from the abyss to make war on the two witnesses. Here the beast appears with seven heads and ten horns correlating directly to the same features of Satan previously described. Old Testament images have established the association of the sea with evil such as the satanic sea monsters of the dragon, Leviathan, and Rahab (Job 26:12-13, Ps. 74:13-14, 87:4, 89:10, Isa. 27:1; 51:9).

Dispensationalists have often correlated the ten horns to a ten nation confederacy. Their interpretation sees this ten nation confederacy being led by this beast identified as Antichrist. This confederacy will emerge from the old Roman Empire and is thought to be coming together in Europe. Lindsey is a leader in this theory and sees the European Common Market as the forerunner. Certainly the development of the common monetary system utilizing one currency, the Euro, has contributed to this speculation. He also sees the economic confederation becoming a great power in the world even as the economic power of the US subsides. The wound of the beast described in verse 13 could indicate that this Antichrist political leader somehow lost the ruling position in his own nation yet rose to rule over all ten in a position common to the rising empire.

Perhaps there is much more for us to glean from this passage than a mere look at coming events in the final days of history. If we are seeing the forces of evil as ever present in history, the present and the future, we can get a different view of the same revealed vision. Seeing this beast

as the personification of evil, first century Christians would have immediately made associations with historical events of their generation and the generation previous. Not to take away from the coming of a literal Antichrist, he has his forerunners in Roman history in men such as Julius Caesar, Augustus, Vespasian, and Titus. Johnson contends that this beast may manifest himself as a political power, an economic power, a religious power, or a heresy. During the days of John, these Roman rulers made open claims to deity and Domitian was even addressed by the title, Dominus et Deus, Lord and God.

Regardless of the identity of all this beast represents, the key to understanding is the source of his power. According to verse two, his power comes from the dragon. Satan no doubt works his deception through many avenues. This imagery reminds believers of the vicious methods of Satan against the work of the living God. This protruded attack against the woman and her offspring is indicative of Satan's continuing work through the systems of this world against the things of God. When this beast finally appears in full manifestation, wonder will capture the world. The wonder is rooted in the healing of his wound. He will appear to be the ultimate in power and he will cause the world to worship the dragon. It is of worthy note that the world rejected Christ and refused to worship Him at his coming. Satan's deception through the beast will result in a harvest of worship.

Newport notes that the description of the beast from the sea does not describe a mere political entity. In his view, it describes in archetypal language the hideous, Satan-backed system of deception and idolatry that may, at any time, express itself in human systems of various kinds. He further suggests John is describing a time when these systems become more intense and the manifestations are real. The wound on the beast can be seen as the wrath of God reminding people of all ages that even though evil appears to be triumphant, it is a defeated foe and the sovereignty of God continues and He is the ultimate victor.

Weirsbe shows there has been wonder, there has been worship, and in verses 5-10 there is war. The war is against the saints, and its source, is Satan who is empowering the beast. Antichrist begins his attack in the world of words and rhetoric. His orations are blasphemous meaning against God. This outrage in speech will serve to divide men into one of two camps, those in Christ and those not in Christ. Anyone who is seeking to navigate some kind of middle road will ultimately disclose their allegiance. This division would have made sense to 1st century believers in the Roman world because they were regularly faced with the issue of confessing Caesar as Lord and then suffering consequences upon their refusal.

From a 21st century perspective, it may be difficult to understand how so many could so quickly fall into the deception of this one beast. History is a good teacher. Dictators of past eras have almost always used powerful oration to control their subjects. Men such as Adolf Hitler have been able to mesmerize huge crowds with his speeches convincing thousands to give their lives for a twisted evil cause. The thought of someone such as Antichrist convincing the world to bow down to him is not beyond the realm of human comprehension.

Dispensationalists see this as an outward change in the language and activities of the beast known as Antichrist. They believe he has made an alliance with the Jews which resulted in the rebuilding of the temple and restoration of worship. The current time under study is the breaking

of the covenant and the beginning of the desolation of Jewish worship and finally the temple. This will be a necessary act for Antichrist to gain the support of the whole world. He is a deceiver and will deceive the world into following. The world would not bow down to Christ but will worship Antichrist. Verse 8 serves to clarify the world. It is those whose names have not been written in the book of life who will worship the beast.

The Beast from the Earth

In addition to introductions to the woman, the male child, Michael the archangel, the red dragon, and the beast from the sea, John now relates his vision of a beast from the earth. This beast is commonly thought of as the false prophet. The dragon, also known as Satan, the beast from the sea, also known as Antichrist, and the beast from the earth, also known as the false prophet, make up an unholy trinity. This is an evil counter to the Holy Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Verse 11 records the appearance of this beast from the earth. He has two horns and speaks as the dragon but he has no crowns or multiple heads. He possesses great power to do great signs such as calling down fire out of heaven. These seemingly supernatural powers give him an audience allowing him to bring great deception. When he has the attention of the people, he convinces the people to make an image of the beast for the purpose of worship. Once the image of the beast has been completed, the false prophet gives it life. Any who refuses to worship the image of the beast will be killed. This forced worship of the beast accounts for the apostasy which precedes the millennial reign of Christ. Some have called the false prophet the minister of propaganda for the beast of the sea.

First century saints would have no doubt thought of the Roman emperor Caligula. Death prevented him from erecting a statue of himself in the Jewish temple demanding worship from the Jewish population. Simon Magus was also said to have been able to bring life to statues. It is likely that this image is a bust of the beast of the sea and may be reproduced in cities around the world. Isa. 4:11 says the Antichrist will set up his image in every city.

A part of this worship involves receiving the mark of the beast. Anyone who refuses to receive the mark will not be allowed to buy or sell thereby being cut off from the necessities of life. Verse 16 is careful to include all peoples in this endeavor when it identifies the small and great, the rich and poor, as well as the free men and slaves. Everyone will be faced with a decision concerning the mark. Religious tattooing was prominent in the ancient world. Slaves were also branded during this period. Some have speculated this means having the image of the emperor on coinage. Without exception, Bible scholars see this as the answer to Saints being sealed by the Lord in the previous interlude. Those sealed in the Lord will refuse to be sealed or marked by Satan's beasts.

Much time, thought, and ink have been given to identifying the man described in verse 18. This man is no doubt Antichrist and the reference is to the beast of the sea. John uses the term calculate the number of the beast. It was a common practice in the ancient world to associate letters of the alphabet with numbers. John continually uses the number seven to represent completeness. The number of man is six which falls short of completeness. The number of a man

666 could merely communicate man's continual failure to measure up hence "666" versus "777". Throughout history Bible students have sought to identify this man. As early as the time of Irenaeus, attempts have been made of connecting someone to this number. The Scripture seems to invite such activity when it says "Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast..." Irenaeus identified possibilities as Euanthas, Lateinos, and Teitans. With enough mathematical work, the number can be attached to just about any name in history. In the last few decades connections have been made to Mussolini, Hitler, Henry Kissinger, Anwar Sadat, and surely Osama Bin Laden. One of the most popular identifications has been the parallel with Nero.

As this chapter comes to a close, it is important to remember John is describing the activity of the enemy. Christ is continuing to rule and in a later chapter John will describe the same events from the perspective of seeing the Lord at work. In actuality, God will be using the unholy trinity to facilitate the end and usher in His millennial reign.