

Love Community Baptist Church

Wednesday Night Virtual Bible Study

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Revelation – Chapter 13

THE TWO BEASTS

The beast rising from the sea.

(Revelation 13:1) John's vision of a beast rising from the sea.

Then I stood on the sand of the sea. And I saw a beast rising up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and on his horns ten crowns, and on his heads a blasphemous name.

In Revelation 12, John's vision mainly had heaven in view. Now the scene of his vision shifted to the earth, and in his vision he stood on the sand of the sea.

- Many people today love the sea, but as a whole the Jewish people in Biblical times regarded the sea as a wild, untamed, frightening place. While ancient Israel under Solomon had a navy, Hiram the King of Tyre supplied the sailors (1 Kings 9:26-27).
- Because ancient Israel was wary of the sea, it was a figure of evil and chaos that seemed to resist God, though the resistance was unsuccessful: (Psalm 74:12-13) - (Psalm 89:8-9) - (Isaiah 57:20)

From the place identified with evil and chaos and resisting God, a beast comes forth. The ancient Greek word translated beast here has the idea of a wild, dangerous animal. Because John calls him a beast and not a dragon (as in Revelation 12:3), this creature represents someone distinct from Satan who was represented by the dragon (Revelation 12:9).

Though this beast is distinct from the dragon of Revelation 12, he is still closely identified with him. He is not the dragon, but he is like him, because the dragon also had seven heads and ten horns (Revelation 11:3).

- This likeness to Satan is just one of the things that identifies this beast with the one popularly known as the Antichrist. The word Antichrist only appears in the Bible five times in four verses (1 John 2:18, 2:22, 4:3, and 2 John 7). 1 John 2:18 is a good example: Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming. With this, John referred to an individual who has captured the imagination of many people, some who don't even know the Bible. But many are ignorant about this person called the Antichrist, except what they have learned from movies like The Omen.
- We can begin by understanding what the title Antichrist means. The prefix anti may mean "the opposite of" or "instead of." The Antichrist is the "opposite Jesus"; he is the "instead of" Jesus. Most people have focused on the idea of the "opposite Jesus." This has made them think that the Antichrist will appear as a supremely evil person, that as much as Jesus went around doing good, he will go around doing bad. As much as Jesus' character and personality was beautiful and attractive, the Antichrist's character and personality will be ugly and repulsive. As much as Jesus spoke only truth, the Antichrist will speak only lies. This emphasizes the idea of the "opposite Jesus" too much. The Antichrist will instead be more of an "instead of Jesus." He will look wonderful, be charming and successful. He will be the ultimate winner, and appear as an angel of

light. In this sense the Antichrist will be a satanic messiah, instead of the true Messiah Jesus Christ.

- In 1 John 2:18, John also spoke of the Antichrist and many antichrists. There is a “spirit” of antichrist, and this “spirit” of antichrist will one day find its ultimate fulfillment in the Antichrist, who will lead humanity in an end-times rebellion against God. In other words, though the world still waits to see the ultimate revelation of the Antichrist, there are little “previews” of this man and his mission to come. These are the antichrists with a little “a.”

Though we commonly call this coming world leader the Antichrist, the Bible gives him many names or titles. He is known as:

- The little horn of Daniel 7:8.
- The king of fierce countenance of Daniel 8:23.
- The Prince that shall come of Daniel 9:26.
- The willful king of Daniel 11:36-45.
- The one who comes in his own name of John 5:43, whom Israel will receive as a messiah.
- The son of perdition, the man of sin, the lawless one of 2 Thessalonians 2:3.

And on his horns ten crowns: This is something different about the beast compared to the dragon of Revelation 12:3, who had seven diadems on his heads. The seven crowns of the dragon expressed his strength and power, because seven is a number associated with strength and completeness. The ten crowns of the beast express his rule over a group of ten nations.

- Most commentators think that the ten horns are distributed among the seven heads, but David Hocking sees all ten horns upon one of the heads. The figure of ten horns also associates this beast with the beast of Daniel 7:7, which represent the final world empire of the Antichrist, which the Messiah will ultimately conquer: After this I saw in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, dreadful and terrible, exceedingly strong. It had huge iron teeth; it was devouring, breaking in pieces, and trampling the residue with its feet. It was different from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns. (Daniel 7:7)

In Daniel’s vision, the ten horns specifically represented ten kingdoms that this final world dictator has authority over (Daniel 7:24). In John’s vision the ten crowns on the ten horns emphasize this idea.

The visions of Daniel 7 and Daniel 2 also connect the governments represented by the ten crowns with the ancient Roman Empire. In those visions, Daniel saw three successive world empires, each succeeded by a fourth — which in the context of the visions is plainly the Roman Empire. In the days of that fourth empire the Messiah will come, destroy all earthly rule and reign over the earth. Since we do not see the reign of Jesus on earth in the way Daniel prophesied, we can see that the Roman Empire will “resume” in some way, expressed by this collection of ten crowns.

And on his heads a blasphemous name: The seven heads of the beast each advertise blasphemy against God. This speaks of more than the beast’s message; it speaks of his character. He is a blasphemer, who speaks against God (as in Daniel 7:25).

(Revelation 13:2) The description of the beast of the sea again connects it to images from Daniel 7.

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

In this vision, God used images from Daniel’s vision of Daniel 7 to communicate the identity and nature of this beast to John. Daniel 7 used four animals (beasts) to describe the course of human government from Daniel’s time until the ultimate reign of Jesus on this earth.

The first three animals are a lion (in Daniel, a picture of the Babylonian Empire), a bear (a picture of Medo-Persian Empire), and a leopard (a picture of the Greek Empire). The fourth animal was a dreadful, indescribable beast which shared the most terrifying characteristics of the previous beasts, yet represents the final world empire under the leadership of a Satanic dictator (Daniel 7:7-8).

John presents this beast as the extension of the fourth beast of Daniel 7, connecting his empire with the characteristics of the great empires of the past. 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.

Now the beast which I saw: All the indications in Revelation 13 are that the beast is a man, though he is closely identified with his world-dominating government.

The dragon gave him his power, his throne, and great authority: This world leader is really empowered and supported by Satan. Through this man, Satan will express his own desire and authority. In this, the beast takes the offer that Jesus refused (Matthew 4:8-10).

It may be that Satan himself takes possession of this man, and this is what makes him exceptional. This was the case with Judas, who was possessed by Satan (John 13:27).

(Revelation 13:3) The beast and his wound.

And I saw one of his heads as if it had been mortally wounded, and his deadly wound was healed. And all the world marveled and followed the beast.

This is a head wound, a mortal wound, not a superficial injury. Perhaps it is the result of God's judgment against the beast.

And his deadly wound was healed: The recovery of the beast increases his fame and authority (all the world marveled and followed the beast). Twice later (Revelation 13:12 and 13:14) this recovery is mentioned in connection to the world's worship and devotion to the beast.

- Some who see the beast not as a man but as a government see this as the revival of the Roman Empire, fulfilling Daniel 7. In this perspective, the Roman Empire has been dead but will again be revived, and the world will marvel. Yet the most natural way to understand John's words in Revelation 13 make us believe that he speaks of a man who will be mortally wounded and then healed. The man will lead a revived Roman Empire, and his personality will dominate it — yet he and the empire are not exactly the same.

Wounded... healed: This is truly an Antichrist, who even imitates Jesus in His death and resurrection. The world will believe this, and it will add tremendously to his fame and power.

(Revelation 13:4) The authority and popularity of the beast.

So they worshiped the dragon who gave authority to the beast; and they worshiped the beast, saying, "Who is like the beast? Who is able to make war with him?"

As people worship this beast and bow down before his government, it may be that they do not know they are bowing down to Satan himself; but it is worship of Satan none the less. They clearly worship both the beast and the dragon, but their worship of the dragon may be unknowing.

- Though Satan worship becomes more and more popular each year, it is still only a tiny fraction of people who openly worship Satan. But this is because more people expect Satan to appear with ugliness and horror. This is wrong, for Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works. (2 Corinthians 11:14-15)

Who is like the beast? Who is able to make war with him? The world will be amazed at the power of the beast, and will believe he is so mighty that he cannot be conquered. For a time, the beast will look like a tremendous winner. When he blasphemes Jesus and persecutes God's people, they will appear to be complete losers — for a short time.

(Revelation 13:5-6) The beast's blasphemies.

And he was given a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies, and he was given authority to continue for forty-two months. Then he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme His name, His tabernacle, and those who dwell in heaven.

"Blasphemer" may be a more accurate title than "Antichrist" for this end-times dictator. This beast is a man who speaks against God and everything God stands for (His name, His tabernacle, and those who dwell in heaven).

The beast continues without restraint by God for a period of forty-two months — the familiar three and one-half years. The duration of the period shows that the beast has full reign for the first half of the final seven years, and that during the whole time he is still under God's authority.

Why does the beast blaspheme... those who dwell in heaven? This means he speaks against those who were taken in the rapture, and are therefore out of his reach.

(Revelation 13:7-8) The beast makes war against the saints.

It was granted to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them. And authority was given him over every tribe, tongue, and nation. All who dwell on the earth will worship him, whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.

Revelation 12 described the broad phenomenon of Satanic persecution during the tribulation period. Here, the main instrument of that persecution is revealed: the government of the beast will persecute and kill all those who do not bow in worship to the beast.

To overcome them: Overcome does not mean that the beast can overcome the faith of the saints, but that he can destroy their physical lives, and by all appearances defeat the cause of God's people on this earth.

- Who are these saints who are overcome by the beast? Various views of the timing of the rapture will determine who these persecuted ones are. Those who believe in a pre-tribulation rapture believe that these saints are God's people who come to Christ after the church has been raptured. Those who believe in a post-tribulation rapture believe that these saints are God's people who are on the earth before the final rapture, including what we think of today as the "church."

Jesus said of the church, that the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it (Matthew 16:18). If this group of saints (a term not exclusively applied to the New Testament church) is overcome by Satan, perhaps they are not the same New Testament church that Jesus spoke of.

This final world dictator will demand and receive worship from the whole earth. But those who worship him pay the price: they are whose names have not been written in the Book of Life.

How will all who dwell on the earth... worship him? It will probably be after the pattern of the worship demanded by the Roman Emperors in the days of the early church. There were times in the early church

when all residents in the empire were required to burn a pinch of incense before a statue of Caesar and say, Caesar is Lord. Christians refused to do this and were persecuted because of it. The Romans saw it as an act of political allegiance, but the Christians rightly saw it as an act of religious worship. After the great and terrible totalitarian rulers of the 20th Century (Lenin, Stalin, Hitler, Mao), it isn't hard to imagine a dominating world leader demanding such a declaration of allegiance, tantamount to worship.

The Book of Life contains the names of all God's redeemed (Revelation 20:15). The idea is that worshipping the beast and having your name in the Book of Life are mutually exclusive.

The Lamb slain from the foundation of the world: This deeply meaningful title for Jesus reminds us that God's plan of redemption was set in place before He even created the beings who would be redeemed. God wasn't "surprised" by the fall of Adam or any other evidence of the fallen nature of man. God isn't making it up as He goes along. It is all going according to plan.

- God the Son had a relationship of love and fellowship with God the Father before the foundation of the world (John 17:24).
- The work of Jesus was ordained before the foundation of the world (1 Peter 1:20).
- God chose His redeemed before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4).
- Names are written in the Book of Life before the foundation of the world (Revelation 17:8).
- The kingdom of heaven was prepared for the redeemed before the foundation of the world (Matthew 25:34).

(Revelation 13:9-10) A warning to all.

If anyone has an ear, let him hear. He who leads into captivity shall go into captivity; he who kills with the sword must be killed with the sword. Here is the patience and the faith of the saints.

This introduces a solemn word of warning, meant to capture the attention of all who hear.

He who leads into captivity shall go into captivity: This means that the functionaries of the beast are not without guilt. Though these things are prophesied and part of God's predetermined plan, it does not lessen in the slightest way man's personal responsibility. If you work for the beast and lead others into captivity, you certainly shall go into captivity yourself. *God will measure unto you what you have measured to others.*

This may have a secondary or additional meaning: there is no hope in fighting against the Antichrist. The only way of victory is steadfast faith and endurance in Jesus.

Though they are viciously attacked by the Antichrist and his followers, the saints of God must keep steadfast faith in the ultimate justice of God. He will reward their persecutors with persecution of His own.

The beast rising from the land.

(Revelation 13:11) John's initial description of this second beast.

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

This creature represents someone like the beast rising from the sea, because the same word beast is used to describe them both. At the same time, this beast is different.

- They are different in origin, because one comes out of the sea, the other out of the earth.
- They are different in rank, because the second is subordinate to the first (causes the earth... to worship the first beast, Revelation 13:12).

- They are different in appearance, because the second has a mild, “lamb-like” appearance.

And he had two horns like a lamb: The two horns may express the fact that this beast has authority in two realms, such as religious and political authority. Or, he may have two horns simply because that’s how many horns lambs have (two horns like a lamb).

Despite his lamb-like appearance, the message of the second beast is the same as the message of the first beast.

- This second beast is called the false prophet (Revelation 16:13, 19:20, 20:10), as someone distinct from the first beast (the Antichrist) and the dragon (Satan).
- With the dragon, the beast rising from the sea, and the beast rising from the land we have an unholy trinity. The dragon is the anti-Father, the beast rising from the sea is the anti-Christ, and the beast rising from the land is the anti-Holy Spirit.

(Revelation 13:12-15) The second beast’s “job description.”

And he exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence, and causes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed. He performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men. And he deceives those who dwell on the earth — by those signs which he was granted to do in the sight of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who was wounded by the sword and lived. He was granted power to give breath to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak and cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed.

The beast rising from the earth is essentially a Satanic prophet, who leads the world to worship the beast and the dragon.

It may seem fantastic to some that the world will be led into worship of a man and of the devil. But by nature, men have an undeniable religious impulse, and they also have an undeniable rebellion against God. What men want most is not the elimination of religion, but their own religion. They say they want the kingdom, but they don’t want God in it.

The beast rising from the sea has the “signs and wonders” to back up his false teaching. A specific miracle of the false prophet is described: he makes fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men. It is important that John highlights this miracle. In the eyes of the deceived world, it answers the miracle of the two witnesses, who minister during this period and are persecuted by the Antichrist and his false prophet (Revelation 11:5). To the deceived world, this also puts this false prophet in the class of Elijah (1 Kings 18). We can imagine the false prophet as saying, “Let the true God answer with fire” and then performing his deceptive wonder.

- In the days of the Exodus, Aaron performed miracles, and up to a point was matched miracle-for-miracle by the magicians of Egypt (Exodus 7-9).
- In Deuteronomy 13:1-5, God assumes there will be supernatural works on behalf of false prophets and idols, and He warns His people to judge a worker of miracles by their message, not only by their works.
- Jesus said that some who worked miracles — even in His name — were false followers and would perish in hell (Matthew 7:22-23).
- Jesus said that in the end times, false prophets would emerge and show great signs and wonders to deceive (Matthew 24:24).
- Paul said that the Antichrist will come with all power, signs, and lying wonders (2 Thessalonians 2:9).

- Knowing all this, the emphasis on signs and wonders among some Christians is frightening. Some Christians say or think, “You can really know where God is and where His power is by signs and wonders.” Thinking this way is to leave yourself wide open to deception.

The beast rising from the earth will use a deceptive, animated image as the focus point of the worship of the beast.

- It may seem strange to us to have the whole world give this kind of worship to the image of a man, but the personality cults of totalitarian governments in the twentieth century are a good example of this kind of worship.
- The image of the beast is animated in some way, in that it has breath and can speak. Whether the image is animated supernaturally or technologically, the result will be impressive. The Psalmist mocked idol worshippers because the idols of the heathen are silver and gold, the work of men’s hands. They have mouths, but they speak not; eyes have they, but they see not (Psalm 135:15-16). This image of the Antichrist will be a different kind of idol, because the image of the beast should both speak and cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed.
- This idolatrous image is what Jesus, Daniel, and Paul spoke of as the abomination of desolation (Daniel 9:27, Matthew 24:15, and 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4). It is an idolatrous image set up in the holy place of a rebuilt temple; it is an abomination in the sense of being supreme idolatry, and it is desolation in the sense that it will bring the judgment described by the seals, trumpets, and bowls.

This is the summation of the power of the Antichrist, whose authority ends after forty-two months (Revelation 13:5). This marks the halfway point of the final seven years of man’s rule of this planet. The Antichrist’s power ends as soon as it peaks.

(Revelation 13:16-17) The economic strategy of the first beast and the second beast.

He causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads, and that no one may buy or sell except one who has the mark or the name of the beast, or the number of his name.

Under the government of the beast and his associate, all will be given a mark. Without the mark, one will not be able to participate in the economy (no one may buy or sell except one who has the mark of his name).

Since the ancient Greek word for mark (charagma) isn’t generally applied to people, some have taken this as a symbolic mark. But a literal mark needed to buy or sell is certainly conceivable and practical.

The technology to give people a mark that enables them to buy and sell in the electronic economy is available. There are many different ways it could happen, and such programs are proposed and tested constantly.

Satan is not a creative being, all he can do is imitate God. We are not surprised to find that this too is a Satanic parody of something God will do; it imitates God’s mark upon his people (Revelation 7:3-4).

The number of his name: This was a common concept in the ancient world. In Greek (and Hebrew as well), letters were assigned a numerical value, such as “A” equaling 1, “B” equaling 2, and so forth. For example, graffiti in the ruins of Pompeii reads “I love her whose number is 545.”

(Revelation 13:18) The number of the beast.

Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man: His number is 666.

His number is 666: Does this tell us who the beast is, by figuring out the numerical value of a name and seeing if it adds up to 666? Using this method, many candidates for Antichrist have been suggested, such as the Pope or the Papacy, John Knox, Martin Luther, Napoleon, Hitler, Mussolini, Stalin, and so forth. But the schemes for unlocking the number of the beast are as confusing as they are endless.

Somehow, the number 666 is a clue to the identity of the beast. Revelation 13 also mentions the “mark of the beast” (verses 16–17), and popular thought often links 666 with the mark; however, the mark of the beast and 666 appear to be two different things. The mark of the beast is something people must receive in order to buy and sell. The number 666 is somehow associated with the beast/Antichrist as “his” number.

Six hundred, sixty-six will somehow identify the beast, but precisely how 666 is connected to the beast is not the main point of Revelation 13:18. The Bible often uses the number 7 to refer to God and His perfection. Traditionally, 6 is thought to be the number of man, created on the sixth day and always “falling short” of God. The beast/Antichrist will strive to be like God. He will likely even claim to be God. But, just as the number 6 falls short of the number 7, so will the beast/Antichrist, with his “trinity” of 6’s, ultimately fail in his effort to defeat God.

Christians need not fear the number 666 in a superstitious way; but it is interesting to see the way the world has an attachment to this number — even with things like “666” brand cough syrup.

Imitations work precisely because they are similar; if they were so obviously different, it would be easy to tell the difference. We must beware and be familiar with the genuine.

Instead of obsessing with fear and interest about the imitation — the Antichrist — how much more appropriate is it for Christians to be interested in the genuine: Jesus Christ.