

Study 15: Revelation Chapter 13

Introduction

“...The Roman Caesar was like an immovable mountain – no, he wasn’t, he was like a beast! Combine the ferocity of a leopard with the power of a bear; mix that with the terror of a lion and invest the resulting horror with the evil of a dragon, and there you have it...”

Body of the Study

Introduction

The Beast from the Sea

The Beast from the Land

The Mark of the Beast

Homework and preparation for next week:

Re-read chapter 13

Read the notes as a review of the study

Read chapter 14 in preparation for the next study

What are the similarities between the beast that John describes, and “the man of sin” that Paul describes in 2 Thess 2:1-2?

Notes for study 15: Revelation Chapter 13

“...The Roman Caesar was like an immovable mountain – no, he wasn’t, he was like a beast! Combine the ferocity of a leopard with the power of a bear; mix that with the terror of a lion and invest the resulting horror with the evil of a dragon, and there you have it¹...”

Introduction

Satan was cast down to earth where he was given power to bring trouble to man. In this chapter, we see him engage two helpers – one from the sea (representing Roman Civil Administration), and the second from land (representing Roman Religious Administration).

The Beast from the Sea

The beast appears from the sea. *“...And the dragon stood on the shore of the sea. And I saw a beast coming out of the sea. He had ten horns and seven heads, with ten crowns on his horns, and on each head a blasphemous name...”* (13:1 NIV) [The KJV / NKJV translation is generally not preferred. It was the dragon (chapter 12) who stood on the seashore and commissioned his helpers, rather than John who stood there to observe.] There are strong similarities, but some differences, between the beast and the dragon. Hailey notes²:

The similarity of the two indicates that this beast is thoroughly satanic – he possesses the characteristics and qualities of the devil.

The beast comes up out of the sea. Hailey’s comments are useful in understanding the significance of this, and he points back to the vision of Daniel³:

Daniel 7 is probably the most helpful passage in interpreting John’s use of “the sea,” and the one upon which his vision rests; it shall be appealed to repeatedly in the interpretation of the sea and the beast of chapter 13. In his vision, Daniel saw the four winds of heaven as they broke forth “upon the great sea. And four great beasts came up from the sea, diverse one from another” (7:2f.). From the prophet’s use of the word, it seems clear that the sea symbolizes the human societies or nations with their stormy upheavals, out of which the empires of earth arise. These four beasts were four great kingdoms which emerged from such upheavals.

There is an illusion here as to who, or what, is the beast. The NIV Bible Commentary adds:

Two basic problems confront the reader, which have led students of the book to different understandings of this chapter: (1) The identification of the beast and his associate--are they personal or some other entity? (2) The time of the beast's rule--is it past, continuous, or still future? In seeking some satisfactory answers to these questions, it may be helpful to first set forth the facts about the beast. He (1) rises from the sea (v. 1); (2) resembles the dragon (v. 1); (3) has composite animal features (v. 2); (4) is empowered by the dragon (v. 2); (5) has one head wounded to death but healed (vv. 3-4, 7b-8); (6) blasphemes God and God's people for forty-two months (vv. 5-6); (7) makes war against the saints and kills them (vv. 7 a, 15); and (8) gives to those who follow him his "mark," which is either his name or his number, 666 (vv. 16-18). (NIVBC).

John describes the beast *“...The beast I saw resembled a leopard, but had feet like those of a bear and a mouth like that of a lion. The dragon gave the beast his power and his throne and great authority...”* (13:2 NIV). The beast is in fact a combination of the beasts of Daniel’s vision. Some

¹ Bewes, p. 93

² Hailey, p. 284

³ Hailey, p. 283

characteristics of the previous kingdoms passed over into the next – for example much of the Greek culture continued under Roman rule even though the Romans had overthrown the Greek rule. Hailey adds further⁴:

The belief that John's beast is this fourth of Daniel's vision, therefore the Roman Empire, is further confirmed by Daniel's description, that "it had ten horns," as does the beast in John's vision. Here is a plain introduction of the Roman Empire as an instrument of Satan's diabolical and blasphemous power, cruelty, and opposition to God's kingdom.

The description of the beast continues, and we notice that he has had a significant injury "...*One of the heads of the beast seemed to have had a fatal wound, but the fatal wound had been healed. The whole world was astonished and followed the beast...*" (13:3 NIV). The wound had been significant, and one would have thought to be fatal. However, with six other heads, the beast was able to recover! If the beast is the Roman Empire, then what was the fatal wound to the head? Hailey comments⁵:

Only three views seem worthy of serious consideration: (1) The deathstroke administered to one of the heads was the resurrection, ascension, and coronation of Christ, which stunned the beast until the church had gained a sound foothold in the world; (2) the seven heads are seven heathen or anti-God powers which had arose and would arise in opposition to God and His people; (3) the deathstroke is the death of Nero, the first emperor to persecute the church, whose policy of persecution was revived by Domitian, in whom "the death-stroke was healed."

The latter view is generally preferred, and is supported by some early writers⁶:

One of its heads was mortally wounded, but its moral wound was healed. He is referring here to Nero...

We also note that the influence of the beast was so great that it was followed by all of the world. Again this is consistent with the Roman Empire being the world power of the time. It offered wealth and prosperity for its citizens, but it was morally corrupt and decadent. Support by the empire meant giving homage to its rulers, including emperor worship. *All of the world* followed down this track "...*Men worshiped the dragon because he had given authority to the beast, and they also worshiped the beast and asked, "Who is like the beast? Who can make war against him?"...*" (13:4 NIV). Emperor (the beast) worship meant worship of Satan (the dragon) who had put him into power. Hailey notes⁷:

In rendering homage to the emperor the world was worshipping him who had given his authority to the Roman power. This worship is the counterpoint to the worship of God, for in worshipping Christ to whom God gave His authority, the Christians worship God who sent the Christ and provided all blessings through Him.

God sets boundaries for Satan, and in this case, "...*The beast was given a mouth to utter proud words and blasphemies and to exercise his authority for forty-two months...*" (13:5 NIV). It is interesting to postulate as to why God allows Satan to rule? And within the answer must lie the fact that man has free-choice. We are free to choose to follow God or to choose to follow Satan. With that choice comes consequences – eternal consequences – and we must choose carefully! To have that choice, we must have knowledge of Satan (as Christians, our knowledge ought to cause us to stay away!!!). Satan has been given limited power, and God has limited the damage that he can do. Satan has been allowed to rule for the same period of 3 ½ years, the same period that the

⁴ Hailey, p. 285

⁵ Hailey, p. 286

⁶ Victorinus of Petovium, (died AD 304), Quoted from Weinrich, p. 200

⁷ Hailey, p. 287

two witnesses would prophesy and the woman (God's people) would be protected in the "wilderness". Hailey notes⁸:

The duration of these four parallel periods is the same as that of the beast's authority and blasphemies ... These six equivalent periods point to the period of Roman persecution, a period of oppression and trial for the saints. ... These would make war with the saints and prevail over them for forty-two months, the total period of Roman persecution, which would end with a judgement from God.

The beast attacks God. He not only wears blasphemous names on his head (13:1), but also sets out to slander and profane God's name. "...*He opened his mouth to blaspheme God, and to slander his name and his dwelling place and those who live in heaven...*" (13:6 NIV). Attacking God also means attacking His people "...*He was given power to make war against the saints and to conquer them. And he was given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation...*" (13:7 NIV). This occurred through the physical persecution of the saints, and ended with the declaration of peace by Constantine around AD 312.

As elsewhere in the Apocalypse, to "make war" does not mean to wage a military campaign but refers to hostility against and destruction of God's people in whatever manner and through whatever means the beast may choose (see 2:16; 11:7; 12:7, 17; 16:14; 17:14; 19:11, 19; 20:8; 2Co 10:4). "To conquer" them refers not to the subversion of their faith but to the destruction of their physical lives (cf. Mt 10:28). Their apparent defeat by the beast and his victory turn out in reality to be the victory of the saints and the defeat of the beast (15:2). Messiah-like universal dominion was given the beast by the dragon (Lk 4:4-7; 1Jn 5:19). (NIVBC)

The power and status of the beast was such that he was revered everywhere "...*All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast--all whose names have not been written in the book of life belonging to the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world...*" (13:8 NIV). Those who worshipped the beast – a clear reference to the emperor worship under the aggressive Roman rule – were those who were not Christians. Their names were not written in the Lamb's book of life. There is a clear distinction in the actions between those whose names are in the book of life (and don't worship the beast) and those who do!

The *Lamb slain from the creation of the world* is of course, the Christ. Even although the slaying did not occur until AD 33, the *intent* to slay the Lamb occurred before the creation. God knew that man was going to sin, and that sin would require a perfect sacrifice. That perfect sacrifice could only come from Jesus. Before the world was made, the events of the cross, and the events of the Old Testament leading up to the cross were put into place. This is the mystery that in other ages was not revealed to man (Eph 3:3-5), but is now openly revealed in the gospel.

John repeats the warning that he gave to the churches (chapters 2 & 3) "...*He who has an ear, let him hear...*" (13:9 NIV).

He follows this with a warning "...*If anyone is to go into captivity, into captivity he will go. If anyone is to be killed with the sword, with the sword he will be killed. This calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of the saints...*" (13:10 NIV). When faced with the aggression of the Romans demanding emperor worship, and the subsequent persecution, many of the Christians might be tempted to retaliate. John's warning is that such physical retaliation will result in further aggression by *the beast*. He had earlier warned against such action (2:10; 3:10), and the instruction here is that if captivity comes, then let it come, and even if we are killed with the sword, it is better to die for the Lord than to betray Him. The final comment makes this clear: *This calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of the saints.*

⁸ Hailey, p. 288

The Beast from the Land

The second beast has similar characteristics to the first – he was also the messenger and agent of Satan. “...Then I saw another beast, coming out of the earth. He had two horns like a lamb, but he spoke like a dragon...” (13:11 NIV). This land beast is later referred to as the false prophet (16:13; 19:20; 20:10), and so his spiritual nature is emphasised. This land beast had the appearance of a lamb – gentle and docile – but he was a wolf in sheep’s clothing, and *he spoke like a dragon*. The beast was deceptive, like all false religion and false teachers, they set out to deceive others and lead them astray. (Mt 7:15).

The land beast appears to be subservient to the sea beast “...He exercised all the authority of the first beast on his behalf, and made the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose fatal wound had been healed...” (13:12 NIV). Hailey and others suggest that the two beasts were two arms of the Roman Empire – civil administration and religious administration, with the latter revealed in the emperor worship. Hailey notes⁹:

Emperor worship was enforced by the imperial power of the sea-beast, supported or regulated in Asia by a delegated commune. ... Both proconsul and commune acted by the authority of Rome and spoke with the force of the dragon.

The land beast was capable of bringing much delusion “...And he performed great and miraculous signs, even causing fire to come down from heaven to earth in full view of men...” (13:13 NIV). In the first century, miracles were used by God to confirm that the message spoken by the prophets and by the apostles did indeed come from God – ie they confirmed the word (Mk 16:20; Acts 8:6; Heb 2:2-3). God would be inconsistent if He allowed Satan to work genuine miracles – for we would be unable to determine by the signs that followed whether the message was from God or Satan! The delusions that Satan brought about must have been more like those of Simon the Sorcerer “...who previously practiced sorcery in the city and astonished the people of Samaria, claiming that he was someone great, to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, “This man is the great power of God.” And they heeded him because he had astonished them with his sorceries for a long time...” (Acts 8:9-11 NKJV). But when Simon came up against the genuine power of God with real miracles, there was no contest!

Satan brought these deceptions about through the land beast “...Because of the signs he was given power to do on behalf of the first beast, he deceived the inhabitants of the earth. He ordered them to set up an image in honour of the beast who was wounded by the sword and yet lived...” (13:14 NIV). The *beast who was wounded by the sword and yet lived* seems to be a reference to the sea beast and the mortal wound to one of his heads (13:3). Many of the Roman emperors described themselves as deity, and the description here is consistent with emperor worship. The inter-support of the two arms of the Roman empire is shown in the next verse “...He was given power to give breath to the image of the first beast, so that it could speak and cause all who refused to worship the image to be killed...” (13:15 NIV). The Christians were given a choice – of confessing Christ as Lord and facing immediate death, or Caesar as Lord, and living for a while longer, but facing eternal spiritual death.

The Mark of the Beast

The mark of the beast has been the subject of widespread speculation, even from early days [It was discussed by Irenaeus (AD 120-202) – Against Heresies v.30.3]. The speculation seems to continue with those who espouse “conspiracy theories” and suggest that Satan is using organisations such as the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund, the European Union, and other such organisations, and that these organisations are *the beast* that is referred to. Some have suggested that in order to have an inventory of every person in the world, we would need three groups of six numbers, and that these could be tattooed on either the forearm or the

⁹ Hailey, p. 293

forehead! In response to the conspiracy theorists, in my experience as a senior manager of a company with over 600 employees, we found it quite impossible to have effective control of the operation – organisations need to exercise control and direction by aligning the priorities of the workers with those of the organisation. In our case, we were going through quite dramatic organisational change and restructure, and some (many?) of the workers were not aligned to the company’s direction. In fact, there were philosophical differences between the union leaders and where management wanted to take the company. Control over workers who were engaging in subterfuge was impossible – and this was in a company of only 600 people.

Back to the beast! “...*He also forced everyone, small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on his right hand or on his forehead...*” (13:16 NIV). There is a direct contrast between the mark of the beast, and the mark of Christ. We are sealed in our hearts with the Holy Spirit (Eph 4:30; 2 Cor 1:22), whilst Satan has sealed his people with *the mark of the beast*. Hailey notes¹⁰:

Here is another counterpart to divine action: as God had sealed His people unto Himself by impressing His own name and the name of the Lamb upon their foreheads (7:3; 9:4; 14:1), and has promised to write His name upon the foreheads of the victors (3:12; 22:4), so the beast imitates this by requiring all to indicate their allegiance to Him by a mark upon their right hand or upon their forehead. ... However, as the seal which God caused to be placed on the foreheads of His subjects was not physical but a spiritual recognition of devotion to Him, it is best to think of the mark of the beast as the stamp of paganism impressed upon the character and conduct of idolaters.

Bewes adds¹¹:

We do not have to look for literal ‘marks’ on right hand or forehead to identify followers of the beast. It is when people’s *actions* (the right hand) and *thinking* (the forehead) are controlled by a philosophy alien to Christ, that you could say the beast has stamped himself upon their lives.

The action of the beast was very practical in the first century, and those who did not worship the emperor were prevented from working (as in Thyatira; 6:6) “...*so that no one could buy or sell unless he had the mark, which is the name of the beast or the number of his name...*” (13:17 NIV). Christians who refused to identify with the beast, (and adopt his mark) would be prevented from earning their living, and suffer hunger and starvation as a result.

John again calls for the exercise of wisdom and understanding “...*This calls for wisdom. If anyone has insight, let him calculate the number of the beast, for it is man's number. His number is 666...*” (13:18 NIV). Whilst this might be *difficult* to understand, it is not impossible – and John calls for the readers to exercise such understanding. The key to the number of the beast is in two things:

1. *let him calculate the number of the beast, for it is man's number* John omits the definite article here – it is not a *man's number*, but “*man's number*”. These things did not originate from God, but from man. This is exactly the case with the Roman religion of emperor worship. This did not come from God, but man – it is a man-made religion. All man-made religions are false, and in future places John refers to this one as false.
2. Numbers hold a special place in Revelation. The number “seven” is the number for perfection or completion. The number six falls short, and can never reach perfection. The Jews regarded six as a symbol of dread and doom. Triple six represents complete failure. It can never succeed and can never reach completeness or perfection. Hailey notes¹²:

¹⁰ Hailey, p. 295

¹¹ Bewes, p. 98

¹² Hailey, p. 299

It is now concluded that the number of the beast, six-six-six, stands for the complete and total failure of all human systems and efforts antagonistic to God and His Christ – all are doomed to ultimate and complete defeat and failure.

One last word on 666. Many have looked at John’s comment to *let him calculate the number of the beast* and used a system of numerology to reduce the letters of the Roman Emperor’s name. There are several possibilities, the most popular being Nero Caesar, which in the Greek is translated *Neron Kaiser*. This is translated into Hebrew and can then be reduced to the number 666. However, this would require a knowledge on the part of the christians in Asia Minor of both Greek (in which Revelation was written) and Hebrew (which they may or may not have had), as well as an understanding of the appropriate numerical codes.

Whilst translating Nero Caesar to arrive at 666 is relatively straight forward, starting with 666 and translating that into a name – which is what John told the readers to do, if you take a literal reading – is not such a straight forward exercise. Try the exercise in English and see what you get. [Give a number for each letter in a name, and if the numbers are greater than 9, then add them together until they are reduced to a single digit]. Now start with the same number, and work out what letters you end up with!!!

Here’s what happens with my name:										
G	R	A	E	M	E	O	F	F	E	R
7	18	1	5	13	5	15	6	6	5	18
7	9	1	5	4	5	6	6	6	5	9
31						32				
4						5				
So, we end up with a number of “45”. But what do we get if we try to expand it?										
D						E				
But we could also get:										
13 (or 22)						23 (or 14)				
M (or V)						W (or P)				
But, 13 could be 10+3 (J & C), or 11+2(K & B), 12+1 (L & A), or 9+4 (I & D), or 8+5 (H & E), or 7+6 (G & F)										
and 22 could be 21+1 (U & A), or 19+2 (S & B), or 18+3 (R & C), or 17+4 (Q & D), or 16+5 (P & E), or 15+6 (O & F), or 14+7 (N & G), 13+8 (M & H), 12+9 (L & I), 11+10 (K & J).										
None of these are my first name, and you can easily see the difficulty, as you have to break down the numbers into <u>all</u> of their possibilities (and I have only done a few of them!!!)										