

THE BEASTS FROM SEA AND LAND

Revelation 13

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Revelation 13:1-18 (NIV)

“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. 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.

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. 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?’

The beast was given a mouth to utter proud words and blasphemies and to exercise his authority for forty-two months. He opened his mouth to blaspheme God, and to slander his name and his dwelling place and those who live in heaven. 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.

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.

He who has an ear, let him hear. 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.

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

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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. And he performed great and miraculous signs, even causing fire to come down from heaven to earth in full view of men. 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 honor of the beast who was wounded by the sword and yet lived. 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. 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, 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.

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."

I. Last week we noted how Revelation keeps bringing us to the end.

It's as though Revelation were as a number of television cameras recording a football play. Each camera records the play from a different angle. Revelation 12–14 taking us to the end is showing us the dramatic encounter of the dragon with the woman and the manchild. The woman is spiritual Israel destined to give birth to the Christ. If this were a play, Act 1 would be chapter 12 where we see that the dragon missed the snatch. The babe has been caught up into heaven. Act 2 is chapter 13. The dragon lands on earth and is joined by two beasts, the beast from the sea and a beast from the earth forming a satanic trinity. Act 3 comes up in chapter 14 next week with the Lamb standing on the mountain. This is a complex passage of Scripture subject, I think, to various interpretations, but as well to a timeless sort of meaning.

There have been many predictive guesses over the twenty centuries of the church as to who the two beasts were. I think we all have an interest in prediction. When we look at Revelation 13, since it is a very highly interpretative passage, it's not surprising to find over the course of many years people have looked at this and understood different things from it.

II. I thought I would just isolate in on two predictive guesses that have been made, one of the most popular interpretations that is in vogue today and then to look at the first century and to perhaps understand how first-century Christians would have interpreted this Scripture in light of their political and economic context.

A. Today's most popular interpretation suggests that the beast from the sea arises from the revived Roman Empire. The imagery seems to be based upon Daniel 2 and 7. The ten horses are suggestive of the ten nations of the common market. The Antichrist who is to emerge will restore the Holy Roman Empire and he will be in league with the confederacy with ten persons, ten nations. He will ultimately displace three of them, making only seven left of which he would have been the eighth. So you would have the differential of the seven heads and the ten horns. The beast from the land, which comes beginning in verse 11, is in this viewpoint a Christless organized religion which is drumming up support for the beast. It causes the beast to be worshipped. I think you're familiar with this position.

There have been with this particular interpretation of Revelation 13 over the last forty years some very specific guesses as to who the beast from the sea might be. It was popular during the 1930s to project that Mussolini was the beast since he was Italian and would be the logical claimer to the Holy Roman Empire. Part of that conjecture may have been based on this phrase that could be seen in Italy during the 30s and on into World War II "*Viva il duce!*" The Latin, as you recognize the letters of the alphabet, stand for numbers. In English we operate by the Arabic

alphabet so our letters don't mean anything in mathematical equivalency. But Latin, Greek and Hebrew all operated with the letters of the alphabet that also can have numerical significance. So "*Viva il duce*" means "Long live Mussolini." In order to get 666 out of this, in the Latin numerical system you must leave out the "e" in Duce and change the "u" in Duce to a "v". Then you get the 666. Who knows?

There are those in World War II who came along and said Mussolini is not the person. Hitler is the person. His number also is 666 using the English language and establishing an arbitrary equivalency. More recently there have been those who've said Henry Kissinger is a candidate. The guesses are still there. You could almost take any figure, and, if you want to work long enough with the spelling and the extrapolation, you can force it into your theory. Someday somebody is going to be right. Someday the mathematical formula is going to equate. But there is along history of interpretation to this passage. You can go back to the eighteenth century in England and spread reams of material on who the guesses of the English theologians were in the eighteenth century.

B. In the first-century view, from the province of Asia, you might see Revelation 13 much differently if you could see things from their political and economical and historical context. The beast from the sea might be Rome. Every year the Roman proconsul arrived by sea. Remember John is writing from the Asia Minor context, from the western side of Turkey. The beast being embodied in the power of Rome shows that it is more dreaded than the kingdoms which have come before it. The imagery of Daniel 7 show the dreaded roar of the lion, the figure of Babylon, the slow crunching tread of the bear which was Medo-Persia, the fierce and swift cruelty of the leopard which would be Greece. All of these qualities are combined in the fourth beast too dreadful to describe. So that a person with this viewpoint in the first century, a Christian might

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have said for John, the Roman empire was so satanic and terrible that in itself it included all the evil terrors of the evil empires which had gone on before it. It was as it were the sum of all evil. The seven heads might stand for the seven emperors from Augustus to Domitian. The ten horns might represent the seven emperors plus the three who had contended for the emperorships following the suicide of Nero in 68–69. They never actually reigned as emperor, but they claimed the position. One head was mortally wounded. The Roman Empire was almost ended with Nero because when he committed suicide the senate for a while thought that they might be able to regain power. But then along came another emperor to establish power. The beast not being a person but a political entity would be that viewpoint.

The early Christian would have a great deal of cause for perhaps saying this of Rome. The emperors were being proclaimed gods by the senate of Rome. On the coinage of the day instead of “In God we trust” appeared simply the picture of the emperor and in Latin the word “*deus*” which means “divine,” or in Greek “*theos*” which means God. Nero called himself the savior of the world. Domitian, the emperor probably at the time Revelation was written, insisted he be called “lord” and “god.” He rejected all correspondence that was not addressed to him as lord and god. He took his divinity seriously. Here was Rome coming in demanding that at least annually every Christian burn a piece of incense on the altar to Caesar to acknowledge the divinity of Caesar—kind of a unifying incident in the kingdoms of Rome.

It may well have been that the Christian from the first century may have understood that the beast from the land as representing the commune of Asia. The leading citizens gathered to sort of do the administration of Rome. It was this group which was most active in promoting Caesar worship. Priests in the day were known for magic and deception and perhaps the first-century Christian simply said that if the certificate of worship which one was given when he burned the

pinch of incense to Caesar is something which can be very easily duplicated or made bogus so get ready something is going to be stamped on our hand or on our forehead.

I don't think the early Christians exhausted the meaning of this passage. Certainly from their historical perspective they could have interpreted these things of the passage. I don't think we've exhausted the meaning today. If I were to evaluate these predictive guesses of Revelation 13, I would say that there are two important things that this chapter is teaching us in regard to predictions. This chapter is always keeping us alert to the times. It is causing us to look and to see where is history going. We're conscious as Christians that history is in God's hands but before it concludes there is to be a climatic revolt against God. We're aware of those antichrist personages who stand in our day. We're sensitive to what the spirit of the world is doing. A Christian becomes extremely sensitive because of Revelation 13 to the possibility that always lurking on the horizon is the beast from the sea.

III. The dragon, representing Satan, I think, always has a candidate ready to fill the role.

That's why so many people seemingly have fit. Almost every piece has fit certain key individuals. But never in one have all the pieces come together. Since Satan can't possibly know the future it's almost as though from tyrant to tyrant he keeps his man in waiting, ready for him to possess the role. I think with any predictive guess we must take a wait-and-see attitude. But it shouldn't produce in us the kind of skepticism toward the end time itself but rather a sensitivity to say the time is coming.

I think the main value for us right now is the timeless meaning of Revelation 13. I must think of John's counsel to the believers in 1 John. The same author that writes Revelation is giving some counsel to believers who are evidently involved in predictive guesses about the who the Antichrist is and when he is coming. This same John writing the Early Church says "Children,

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this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour...Every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world” (1 John 2:18, 4:3, NIV). John is saying if you look for him, antichrist is not just some person coming at the end of the age. It is already a spiritual force that is in the world and it has identifiable characteristics from Revelation 13.

We look at the beast from the sea and try to apply a timeless meaning to it. We see that the sea is not a representation of physical water. In fact, Revelation 17:15 specifically defines who the sea is—the waters, John is told, which you saw where the harlot is seated are people and multitudes and nations and tongues. The sea is the stream of humanity that Isaiah called the wicked, like the tossing sea which cannot rest. Its waters toss up mire and dirt. There is no peace, says God, for the wicked. The turbulence within humanity is always the matrix, the context out of which the spirit of antichrist arises. As the spirit of antichrist arises in the world we may understand that he continues to assume different forms. These forms are represented in the fact of his seven heads. In some parts of the world, the spirit of antichrist, today, may arise in the head of a beast whose eyes and face are religion. Another head may be Marxist or capitalist or rightist or a leftist. Here the head of a beast as it is raised in American society maybe a hedonist or a pleasure lover or a materialist. The beast may have the head of Idi Amin, the head of Hugh Hefner, the head of Jim Jones, or the head of Sid Vicious. He is capable of assuming different forms. In some countries he may assume the head of an Islamic leader. In some countries he may assume the head of a Buddhist leader, or a Marxist leader, or a nominal Christian leader.

To Christians, on an individual level, the beast as the antichrist that seeks to reign in life may be the almighty dollar. The beast, which stares at life and seeks to deny Christ in us, may be a

picture of sexual fantasy or immorality. The beast may for some be a religious tradition they are so steeped in that it keeps them from recognizing the true claims of Jesus Christ. The beast for others may be simply the sufficiency of reason which says, "Let's be logical about life." What need do we have for revelation or for God. The beast may be any number of things. The heads may be any number of things, all related to the beast. The beast is the spirit of antichrist that is loose in the world and attempting to deny that Jesus is God. Anything that rears its head in society and says Jesus is not God is but another way of saying the beast has many faces, many fronts. It has indeed many constant and different forms.

IV. The beast as he materializes in our world today has immense strengths.

A. This is pictured in the figure of the ten horns, horns being a symbol of power and ten being a kind of complete power. Coupled with the power of his horns is the agility of a leopard, the crush of a bear, and the mouth of a lion. The beast is a great propaganda machine. He has strength. If you don't believe that he has strength we just have to open our eyes politically in the world today. I think about what's happening in Iran. For centuries the Christian church has had very, very little impact upon the Muslim world. Iran has been one of the few Muslim countries in which there has been the possibility of a Christian witness. There are Christians that I know personally and in many Muslim countries it would not be possible to have that kind of presence. There are Iranian Christians today. The beast is rearing his head. I don't think the beast cares if the ruler of Iran is the Shah or a Muslim leader. The point is the beast has immense strength and is ready to pounce on those believers in Iran. He's ready to pounce on believers everywhere. If you don't believe the beast has immense strength in Costa Mesa, you really haven't understood what is going on just in our own town. You haven't understood the fact that the great and

overwhelming majority within this city with its strong Christian presence is still not worshipping the Christ.

What is being said in this text is when you encounter the beast, the satanic representation in the world, you'll find him with immense strength. You'll also find this text is saying the deadly wounds of this beast from the sea heal.

Notice that it's not the beast that is mortally wounded, it's one of his heads that is mortally wounded. The beast himself is not put out of existence but only one of its manifestations. I think this not only refers to, perhaps, an assassination attempt on the literal figure of the antichrist from which he recovers and comes back to life, but this has deep spiritual meaning to tell us something about the reviving power of the spirit of antichrist to recover from the mortal wounds which it has been dealt.

In 1945 the western world rejoiced because the latest manifestation of the antichrist—Hitler—had been taken down. His campaign, the enemy's campaign of violence in the world, had suffered a mortal blow. But quickly the mortal wound recovered and the world was armed for war again.

When revivals broke out England it was a mortal wound on Satan's kingdom but quickly it recovered.

The Great Awakening in America came. It was a mortal wound but quickly recovered.

So it is sometimes even the effect of revival upon an individual's Christian life that there has been a mortal wound to Satan. But he tries to come back. He suffered a mortal wound just recently in the conversion of Eldridge Clever, but did the Black Panthers disband? Has there been a great turning to God? It's as though the enemy with a mouth of propaganda is able to turn Eldridge Clever's conversion around to make it look like some act of an eccentric.

We're justified in reflecting on the fact that there is an evil, which ultimately comes from the dragon which is found in the human heart and the communities of man, which cannot be slain.

The liberal part of the Protestant church attempted to think that by the good efforts of people working together to promote better social welfare and better education that the twentieth century would be an era of great progress. In fact, the magazine of Christian liberalism was called the *Christian Century* and it projected their viewpoint that in this century there would be no war; there would be racial justice; and there would be economic equity among all. They thought that through this process of bringing the kingdom of God through good social effort that the beast would be mortally wounded. He tossed it off with a laugh. He's been worse this century than ever before.

For all the havoc of the beast, he is still popular. Verse 4 tells us that. Men worshipped the dragon for he's given his authority to the beast and they worshipped the beast saying "Who is like the beast and who can fight against it." He is opposed to God and he wars upon God's people continually. In all of his forms and all of his existence, the spirit of antichrist hates the people of God. In his hatred of the people of God, Scripture just gives one counsel. That is, here is a call for the endurance and the faith of the saints. It's striking, by the way, to compare this with the imagery in Revelation 12. In Revelation 12, we're told that the woman was kept in the wilderness where she had a place of safety. But here in Revelation 13, the individual persons are coming in under the impact of the spirit of antichrist and many lay down their lives and the saints are simply called to endure and to have faith. It's kind of a striking way of saying as the woman is the spiritual community of God so God will always ensure that there is a people who bear his name on earth till he comes. But, as for the individual people in that collective experience of the woman, there is going to be great trouble. The Antichrist is powerful against them and will

oppose them. Endurance is that call to remain true to Jesus Christ no matter what, even if it's a call to experience death.

B. The beast from the sea, however, as we look at these passages of Scripture is limited.

His work is destructive only. His days are numbered. God allows the beast from the sea and the beast from the earth but their days are numbered. They've got forty-two months is a way of scripturely comparing it to the time of the Lamb: one thousand years. Three and a half years beside one thousand doesn't seem all that big. So the beast cannot work that long.

There's this saying, too, that's going on in Revelation: The beast will never receive the worship of the citizens of God whose names are in the registry of heaven. In the ancient world many times cities kept a registry of citizens. When a person died they removed their name from the registry. John is reminding us as the spirit counsels him to write, reminding the believers that there is a registry in heaven. In fact John is so bold to say that that registry was written before the foundation of the world. I don't know what to do with that particular passage. I think one intriguing explanation that I suggested earlier in Revelation was that God writes every person's name who is ever born into his book of life. And you take the name out by your own action. There is certainly the security of the people of God when they're fighting the beast in all of its power to recognize that their existence is not just dependent upon their own strength but is dependent on the keeping and caring power of God.

An anvil wears out many a hammer in the blacksmith's illustration. The hammer must be continually replaced. In Revelation 13 it's as though the church is God's anvil and the hammer is the repeated attack of the enemy against the church, the people of God. But the hammer wears out because the anvil is stronger.

C. The beast from the earth is the false prophet who gives support to the antichrist. We know several things about him: He looks like a lamb and talks like a dragon. Here is a person who looks like Christ and talks and acts like the devil. False prophets. Jesus said there would be many who come to him on that day saying, “Did I not do such and such in your name?” (see Matthew 7:22). They look like him but they were not from Him.

The credentials, which this beast from earth presents, are magical and powerful credentials. False signs, lying signs and wonders as Jesus calls them. He exerts great control in Revelation 13:16-17. He is controlling the economic system. I would submit that in our experience in the world today that our experience with false prophets has largely been simply that often they look like Christ but you can tell what they are by what they’re saying. False prophets we’ve experienced have not been able to present a whole lot of credentials of a powerful spiritual kind nor have they been able to control the economic system. Which makes the false prophet at the end of the age as he’s called in Revelation 17 all that much more intriguing because he’s not just able to look like Christ and talk like the devil but he’s able to back up his false prophesying with spiritual supernatural powers and with strong economic sanctions.

The number of the beast in verse 18 is one that has led as I’ve indicated earlier to a great deal of interpretation. His number is 666, the number of a man. Rather than trying to specifically identify this with a concrete individual, perhaps what is being meant here is something of spiritual significance. Throughout scripture the number 6 is the number of man, who was created on the sixth day. Seven is the number of perfection or of God. Whenever man tries to exert universal rule and control he’s going to fall short of God’s standard. The number of Jesus in the Greek, his name made into its Greek equivalent numbers is 888. Jesus is always one step past perfection and the antichrist is always one step short of perfection. You can recognize that

whatever the antichrist puts his stamp on is not holy and is not of God. It comes short. Whatever the mark of the beast is it represents man's futile attempts to govern.

V. How does all this dig in to where I'm at today?

How does this relate to Christmas? What are you doing in Revelation 13 at Christmas time?

There are three questions that I think this passage of Scripture is forcing upon us.

A. Do you have any relationship which is going to last longer than this life? Revelation 13 is saying, whether you agree with it or not, whether you particularly like it or not, you are forced into an eternal relationship with someone. You may as a mortal human being think that all your relationships are time bound. Your relationship with your parents. How does that extend beyond this life? If you're a non-Christian you can say, "When I come to an end, when they come to the end, that relationship comes to an end."

You're in a family, you're married, you're a husband or wife. How long is that relationship going to last? It's going to last as long as both of you live, until one of you dies. How long is your relationship with your children going to last? Again, death is the end of the relationship.

Revelation 13 is forcing us outside of time saying we are meant for eternal relationships. We do have a relationship eternally; it's simply a matter of where we choose to place the relationship: with the lamb as we'll see in Revelation 14 on Mount Zion, or with the dragon and the beast.

I think that perhaps every Scripture in Revelation forces us into an eternal way of thinking. We recognize that there's this kind of timeless quality about God's Word, which asks us, "Do you really have a relationship? Are you confident in the relationship? Can you say, "I have one relationship that is going to exist past life. I know it for sure. It's my relationship with God through Christ Jesus"?"

If that relationship is there all the power of hell cannot break it. That's the great teaching of Revelation 13.

B. I think another important question rising from Revelation 13 is this: "Are you as close to Jesus right now as you have ever been in your life?" If I were to ask you, "Look over your life and when was the time when you were closest to the Lord and you knew it? Can you identify that time?" Is that closeness to the Lord anywhere in the immediate hours or days? Or is it several years ago? Or perhaps it stretches over a number of years: ten, twenty years. If you cannot from the heart answer the question that the closest you've been to Jesus Christ is right now I think this Scripture is kind of staring at us. It is looking at us. It is probing us. It is talking about persons whose loyalty to Jesus Christ is so strong it will go unto death. It calls them to endurance and to faith. I must therefore see my own life and my own devotion to Jesus Christ in light of the call that God places on the lives of those who do lay down their life for Him. Am I laying down my life for the Lord?

What has happened in my life if it has been many years since I have felt that my high point of experience with God was then? If I were to graft my life on a spiritual line and sort of arc it and begin with my conversion how would the line run? Would it show at some point in the past a great acceleration then a sharp drop that has continued even to the present? Or would it show something I would call a steady incline? Maybe with some drops but we are today closer to Jesus and more in tight than we've ever been in our lives.

If we feel that we cannot answer that question "yes," "Are you as close to Jesus as you've ever been in your life?" Recognize in Revelation 3 that the true God is never going to force us to worship Him. He's never going to force us to return to that moment of closeness with Him. It's only the antichrist, which forces worship.

As we go away from the Lord we increasingly pick up the tendency to act like a beast, instead of a lamb. We become that object that lashes out and snarls and is difficult to control and handle.

In your life to Jesus Christ, are you difficult to control, difficult to handle? Does He really get His will done in our lives? I'm assuming that a great many of you here are saying "Yes, He really does. There has never been a time in my life where I have been as close to Jesus Christ as I am right now." Praise God for that. But if you can't say that, the Lord is saying to you through this Scripture and at this Christmas season, "Come back!" It takes us a lot longer to drift away from the Lord in our closeness than it does to get back. He brings us through His grace a lot quicker to himself than it's taken us to actually run from His presence. "A journey of a thousand miles," the Chinese proverb says, "begins with the first step." If you say I was at one point closer to Jesus than I am right now, here is a call for endurance and faith. Here is call to change. Here is a call to come to Jesus and put it right.

C. One last question and I think this especially ties in to the Christmas season as well: "In your relationship to others are you acting like the lamb or the beast? In your relationship to others are you motivated by what you can give or what you can get?" The lamb gives. Second Corinthians 8:9 says "You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ although he was rich yet for your sake he became poor that you through his poverty might come rich."

The beast clutches and grabs. The beast exercises his way with people through naked power. He must exert himself and rule and have dominion. But the lamb is content to work with the law of love and not with the law of power.

In your relationships with others what is the governing principle by which you relate? Do you relate from a standpoint of love or from power?

Whenever I relate from the standpoint of power I'm acting the beast. When I react and relate from the standpoint of love I am acting like the lamb.

Closing Prayer

We recognize that there is coming in the future of the world the ruler who is the beast. Who acts with savagery and power. We've already seen the indications of his presence in the personal battles we fight in life. We have not only fought the dragon, the presence of Satan in our lives, but we have fought his influence in the personality of others who have stood against You. We've even fought the heads of the beasts as they have risen in our own lives, the beast which sought to control us through an idealized fantasy, through a drug, or a habit, or a bond. We know what it is like to struggle not against flesh and blood but against powers and rulers of this spiritual world. We thank You, Lord Jesus, that You have overcome by Your blood. We overcome, too, by that blood and by the power of our own testimony in You. We just want to take these moments, Lord Jesus, to really put to heart our relationships. I ask if there are those here today who are without a relationship that is going to last past this life that Your Spirit would be obeyed in this moment as Your Spirit comes to them and says, "You've only got one life to live and you're facing an eternal choice and destiny. For whom will you decide?" Lord, you also speak to those of us who cannot honestly say from our hearts that we are as close to you right now as we have ever been in our lives. You have brought persons here today lord specifically to remind them of Your unfailing love for them. And how You have felt loss within. Because when You have wanted to commune with that one whom You love that one has not been there to answer or to respond. That the hot affection and fire or a previous commitment to You has dimmed and that endurance has been lacking and faith has fallen short. You're saying to the gentle care of Your Spirit today, "Stir up the gift of God, which is within you. Come back and renew your vows to Me. Make new

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your relationship. Behold I give you a new heart and new spirit within you.” You also call us to examine our relationships with others, that we might in our caring for others not seek to control through dominance and power and manipulation. But to act and serve in love, the love of Christ our Lord who rather than contend about who was the greatest would wash another’s feet. Give us Lord the disciplined power of You as Lamb rather than the demanding insistent claims of the beast who requires adoration and support rather than giving love and care. We pray this and ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.