

UNDERSTANDING THAT WEIRD BOOK OF REVELATION - Part fifteen

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THE BEAST AND THE FALSE PROPHET

Revelation 13:11-18 - "Then I saw another beast rising out of the earth. It had two horns like a lamb and it spoke like a dragon. [12] 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. [13] It performs great signs, even making fire come down from heaven to earth in front of people, [14] 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. [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. [16] 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, [17] 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. [18] 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."

If you can think back to our last study, I said we were embarking on a detailed examination of the **great antagonists** of the church of Jesus Christ. We are still studying this **interlude** between the seven trumpets and the seven bowls. In chapter twelve we examined John's vision of the great power behind all the evil in this world - the "**serpent of old**" - the "**great dragon**" - the "**Devil and Satan**" (12:9). We've been studying his activity all along, through much of the book of Revelation. But now John **unmasks** him and reveals his **motive** and his **anger against the people of God**:

Revelation 12:10-12 - "And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. [11] And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death. [12] Therefore, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!"

Satan knows he's already been defeated by the birth and death of the **male child** (12:5). He knows salvation has been accomplished. This infuriates Satan against Christ and also the church, because the church worships Christ and obeys Christ and honors Christ and represents Christ on earth. The church is the earthly **embodiment** and **reminder** of Satan's ultimate doom.

But the Devil doesn't do most of his work **openly**. He works primarily through **agents**. John introduces us to **four agencies** through whom the Devil works:

First, there is the **beast coming out of the sea** (13:1-10). We studied the power and role of the antichrist in our last study in this series. If you can think back, we looked at great length at the apostle John's statements about the antichrist in his epistles. The antichrist represents all the evil of this world's empires (remember Daniel's prophetic description of the coming four empires in **Daniel 7** - a lion, a bear, a leopard, and finally a beast with ten horns). Then, when John describes the beast in Revelation chapter 13, we see the antichrist combines all of these traits in his own person. All of these world powers and all of the mockers and detractors of Christ will one day find their fulfillment in a person - **the** antichrist.

The early church would have read all of these descriptions of the beast and thought immediately of Nero and Rome. Nero was responsible for the **first holocaust of Christians**. There will come again a **Nero-like power**. John says that just when people think that could never happen again - when it looks like that type of power is dead and gone from the earth - **it will come back to life in the last days**.

My own feeling is that this interpretation fits in well with the very **Rome-like** description John himself gives to the antichrist in **Revelation 17:7-9** - "But the angel said to me, "Why do you marvel? I will tell you the mystery of the woman, and of the beast with seven heads and ten horns that carries her. [8] The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to rise from the bottomless pit and go to destruction. And the dwellers on earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world will marvel to see the beast, because it was and is not and is to come. [9] This calls for a mind with wisdom: the seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman is seated...."

Then John saw a **second antagonist** - a "**beast rising out of the earth**" (13:11). This is the beast we will be studying

today.

The **third antagonist** is not going to be considered in detail until **chapter 17**. This power is described with the symbolic name, "**Babylon**." It is also pictured as a great "**harlot**." It represents, not the **persecution** of the church (as do the two beasts in **Revelation 13**) but the **seduction** of the church by the charms and pleasures of this world, held increasingly in the sway of the wicked one.

The **fourth antagonist** used by the Devil is one we've already seen, but not really lined up with its proper ally (the Devil). This is the "**people of the beast**," or the "**people of the earth**." As these people become more and more aligned with the beast, in fact, as they **worship** the beast and **bear his mark**, they will increasingly come to see Christians as the enemy of all that they value as good in the world. That's why they will actually **rejoice** at the persecution and suffering of the church at the hands of the beast:

Revelation 11:7-10 - "And when they have finished their testimony, the beast that rises from the bottomless pit will make war on them and conquer them and kill them, [8] and their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city that symbolically is called Sodom and Egypt, where their Lord was crucified. [9] For three and a half days some from the peoples and tribes and languages and nations will gaze at their dead bodies and refuse to let them be placed in a tomb, [10] and those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them and make merry and exchange presents, because these two prophets had been a torment to those who dwell on the earth."

We are witnessing the fulfillment of that kind of attitude right now as never before. Christians are increasingly being pictured as the **intolerant bigots** of this world. We are increasingly being painted as the **cause** of this world's troubles, rather than as the **bearers of the good news this world so badly needs**. John saw that this would only get worse.

So those are the four antagonists John saw Satan using in his visions. Now we go back to study the **second antagonist** - the "**beast rising out of the earth**" (13:1):

1) THE MOST SIGNIFICANT FEATURE OF THIS SECOND BEAST IS HIS RELIGIOUS DESCRIPTION

In fact, it's almost surprising to see how little space John gives to actually describing this second beast. It is almost as if there is only **one** significant thing to notice about him: **Revelation 13:11** - "Then I saw another beast rising out of the earth. It had two horns like a lamb and it spoke like a dragon."

There it is. He looks like a **lamb** but speaks like a **dragon**. Now, those two images are given such prominent place in the book of Revelation there is simply no doubting John's intent here. This beast comes across like **Jesus** but speaks like the **Devil**.

In other words, just as the **first** beast represents the **political** aspect of the persecution against the people of God, this **second** beast represents the **religious** aspect of the Devil's end-time work.

This religious fervency is picked up even more clearly in the next two verses:

Revelation 13:12-13 - "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. [13] It performs great signs, even making fire come down from heaven to earth in front of people...."

Notice again the role of this second beast to **acquire the worship** of the people for the antichrist (the first beast). He stirs up the devotion and passion of the people. And it shouldn't be hard for us to imagine this happening with great ease in this fallen world. Modern day examples are so rampant. The media spinners and fashion producers can stir up the devotion of the masses around the most insane, ridiculous morons you can imagine. **We follow exactly as we're told to follow**. This world is being trained 24/7 **not** to think for itself. It's being trained 24/7 **not** to think through its own values. It's being trained 24/7 **not** to judge the way anyone else thinks or acts.

In other words, without anyone else even noticing or thinking about what's going on, there is this huge stage being built for the antichrist. And there's a whole generation coming up, right in the church, that won't even see him coming.

This deception will be made more compelling by the **supernatural manifestations** that this second beast will perform: **Revelation 13:13-14** - "It performs great signs, even making fire come down from heaven to earth in front of people, [14] 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.”

Notice that the signs (that’s the very same word used to describe the miracles of Jesus in John’s gospel) are signs he is **“allowed to work”** (14). This is another clear indication from John that this second beast doesn’t have this power in himself. He received his power from another.

Again, the important point here is his ministry will seem **divinely compelling**. People will think this is **God** at work. That is why this second beast is repeatedly coined in **prophetic terms**. He is called the **“false prophet”** (16:13, 19:20, 20:10). People who don’t follow this second beast will be accused of “quenching the spirit,” or “rejecting God’s new work,” or any number of other things.

2) **THIS SECOND BEAST IS THE HENCHMAN FOR THE ANTICHRIST AGAINST THE TRUE PEOPLE OF GOD**

Over and over again, John sees the world boiling itself down into two, and only two crowds:

Revelation 13:15-17 - “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. [16] 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, [17] 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.”

This is a prophetic theme John simply refuses to let us overlook or forget. Who the antichrist is isn’t important. Seeing the process of separation in the last days is crucially important. This is the reason for the strong warning of **verse 9** - “If anyone has an ear, let him hear.”

All through the book of Revelation (remember the letters to the churches?) this is John’s way of calling the church **not to miss something that she might miss if she hears it carelessly**. The false prophet may **look** like the Messiah, but he isn’t. There is no blessing in his empty words. He reveals his true colors in two distinct forms of persecution:

A) **FIRST, THERE WILL BE PHYSICAL VIOLENCE AGAINST THE CHURCH.** THE PEOPLE OF THE EARTH (JOHN’S LANGUAGE FOR THOSE WHO DON’T FOLLOW CHRIST) WILL ONLY SEE THIS AS RIDDING THE WORLD OF THE CAUSE OF ITS MISERY. THEY WILL REJOICE. FOR ALL THEIR TALK OF LOVE AND PEACE AND TOLERANCE, THERE WILL COME NO HELP FROM THEM FOR CHRISTIANS.

ON THE SURFACE OF THINGS IT WILL LOOK HOPELESS FOR THE CHURCH. BUT IT’S VERY IMPORTANT FOR US TO REMEMBER SOME OF THE THINGS WE’VE ALREADY SEEN IN JOHN’S VISIONS. WE MUST KEEP THE WHOLE PICTURE IN MIND.

SATAN’S VICTORY IS ONLY **APPARENT**, NOT **ACTUAL**. IN OTHER WORDS, **REVELATION 13:15-16** MUST BE READ WITH THE BACKGROUND OF **REVELATION 12:10-11** IN MIND: “AND I HEARD A LOUD VOICE IN HEAVEN, SAYING, “NOW THE SALVATION AND THE POWER AND THE KINGDOM OF OUR GOD AND THE AUTHORITY OF HIS CHRIST HAVE COME, FOR THE ACCUSER OF OUR BROTHERS HAS BEEN THROWN DOWN, WHO ACCUSES THEM DAY AND NIGHT BEFORE OUR GOD. [11] AND **THEY** HAVE CONQUERED **HIM** BY THE BLOOD OF THE LAMB AND BY THE WORD OF THEIR TESTIMONY, FOR THEY LOVED NOT THEIR LIVES EVEN UNTO DEATH.

B) **SECOND, THERE WILL BE A HUGE ECONOMIC PRICE TO PAY FOR FOLLOWING CHRIST.** **Revelation 13:16-17** - “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, [17] 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.”

This is the false prophet’s tool to apply pressure to worship the beast. In other words, the approach isn’t just to come up to Christians and wack them over the head with a sword. There will be a system that will be perceived as being able to solve the world’s economic problems.

This is a key point to understand. This is why the world will tolerate the execution of Christians. The world, under the propaganda of the false prophet (and don’t forget, this false prophet will perform mighty miracles), will come to see Christians as **messing up their only hope for economic survival**. Christians will be seen

as not ***caring*** about the prosperity of the world and its needy people.

This economic upheaval will pave the way for the world to embrace the only ***final solution*** left. We've actually seen this kind of thing before.

3) **THE NUMBER OF THE BEAST**

This is the most talked about verse in the whole book of Revelation: **Revelation 13:18** - **"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 are my thoughts. I don't think anyone knows for certain what this number means. All I know for sure is I don't plan on receiving it. I believe it ties in with the truth that antichrist will appear as an ***individual*** in the last days. True, there have been many antichrists (as John said), and true, antichrist has been revealed in the empires of this world, like Rome, that have strutted their power against Christ and His church, but there is still this ***"number of a man"*** (18) who is to come. We are cautioned not to be naive. All is not as innocent as it looks.

I believe all of this is consistent with Paul's exhortation to the church to be on the look-out specifically for the end time ***"man of sin:"*** **2 Thessalonians 2:8-10** - **"And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming. [9] The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, [10] and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved."**

But there is another mark - another sealing - that I'm much more interested in. John describes it in the very next verse: **Revelation 14:1** - **"Then I looked, and behold, on Mount Zion stood the Lamb, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads."**