

Session 15 The Two Beasts – The Servants of the Dragon Revelation 13

In this vision John sees **two hideous monsters** emerge, one from the sea and the other from the land. They serve the purposes of the dragon and are empowered by him – but we know from Revelation that all power is ultimately given by God. The dragon and his agents, while following their own agenda, must ultimately serve the purposes of God, 13:5.

Satan can only counterfeit – he is never original, for he is a creature trying to be God and his method is to infect other creatures with the same perverse ambition. This is the very essence of sin.

Here we have an unholy trinity – the dragon, the antichrist, and the false prophet.

John receives a brief introductory vision introducing the two beasts. This is characteristic of Revelation. The information is **designed to explain how the enraged dragon conducts his war with the offspring of the woman**, 12:17 c.f. 13:7. There is much more to come in subsequent chapters, culminating in the defeat and destruction of the dragon and the beasts.

The beast from the sea, v1-10. It is not clear whether it is the dragon or John standing on the sea shore, v1.

He rises up from the sea so that John sees him gradually emerge in all his **grotesque horror**.

The sea is the place of chaos, danger, and destruction, the abode of spirits and pagan gods. The scene evokes Daniel 7:2-8, 17, 23-25. The beast of Rev. 13 is a composite of the four separate beasts in Daniel 7, with emphasis on the 4th one with 10 horns.

The one in John's vision is even more hideous, having seven heads as well.

The beasts in Daniel 7 represent two things – human rulers (kings), 7:17, c.f. 2:36-38, and empires (kingdoms, government) 7:23. The same is true in Revelation and is reflected in human history; a powerful state is usually under the control of a powerful man. Other Scriptures emphasize the personal aspect, Dan. 7:24-25, and 8:25 (Antiochus Epiphanes), 2Thess. 2:3-12, 1John 2:18, 22, 4:3, and 2John 7. The expectation of an antichrist figure developed in the inter testament period and is found in the Qumran documents

The wild animals – leopard, bear, and lion – suggest aggressive, ravenous nature and evoke the almost absolute power wielded by the ancient empires of Babylon, Persia, and Greece.

The dragon conferred on them his power, his throne, and his great authority, v2. His authority was ultimately from God – there is no other source in the Universe.

- The **ten horns** represent overwhelming **power**, like the 4th beast in Daniel 7 – Rome, still the dominant power in John's day.
- The **ten crowns** represent **royal majesty**, seen in successive rulers – the Caesars of ancient Rome.
- The **seven heads** represent the **authority** with which they ruled. There is a name of blasphemy on each head, c.f. titles for Caesar (lord, son of god/our lord and god).

Who/ what is this beast?

He/it is both the continuation and the climax of the ongoing pattern of human history described in Daniel 2 and 7.

The state demands absolute loyalty, obedience, and allegiance from those under its control and uses any necessary means to enforce conformity. **The state takes the place of God** in determining human belief and behaviour.

In John's case it was Rome. The details of his vision fit with the physical geography of Rome, 17:9.

The leader becomes the focus of this loyalty, **assuming a god-like status** and expecting to be honoured as such.

There are many other examples in recent and contemporary situations.

There will be a final manifestation of the beast – more terrible and more universal than the previous ones, v7-8. The Lamb will destroy it forever, 19:20-21

The beast is worshipped, v4. People are impressed by his personality and power and achievements.

He has the **aura of greatness and invincibility**, v3. There is a parody of the resurrection.

There is universal worship except for those whose names are written in the Book of Life of the Lamb, v8, Dan.12:10.

There is a false adulation

- **Who is like the beast? This is a challenge to the unique holiness of God**, Exodus 15:11, 18, Isaiah 40:12-14, 18-26.
- **Who is able to make war with him?** Exodus 15:1-5, Rev. 19:11.

Worshipping the beast is actually worshipping the dragon, 1Cor.10:19-20.

The beast may be entirely unaware of the existence of the dragon and think of himself as the sole object of worship.

Humans who play at “being god” are self-deluded and believe their own propaganda.

Blasphemy is one of the chief characteristics of the beast, corporate and individual.

- **A blasphemous name on his heads**, v1. This is a parody of the Lamb, 19:12, 16.
- **Blasphemies from his mouth**, v5-6. Antiochus E. Is the prototype, Daniel 7:24-25 – 42 months, v5, Dan. 11:36.
Blasphemy against God is directed against His Name, His Tabernacle, and His people.
It displays arrogance/distain for the holiness of God, c.f. Isaiah 36:13, 18-20, 37:3-6, 22-29, 33-38, Dan 11:36-38.
The mouth he used to blaspheme was “given to him” – a creature with creaturely attributes used in a perverse way.

He is given universal authority, v5b, 7b – but for a limited time. This authority embraces all in a physical sense but the “earth dwellers” are totally affected - in body, soul, and spirit. Eternal life is being traded for temporary security; there is a call for people (anyone) to listen to the warning and respond, v9 – c.f. the letters to the seven churches.

He is granted (permission) to make war on the saints, and to overcome them, v7, and c.f. 11:7.

There will be a time of great persecution when the people of God will appear to be physically unprotected. There will be many martyrs and the church will appear to be completely overwhelmed.

How are the saints to behave in this dire situation?

Physically they are under the authority of the beast and in that sense he can overcome them and kill them. (Remember that chapter 13 is an expansion of chapter 12).

They overcome the dragon and, therefore, his servant the beast by “not loving their lives to the death”.

This is the paradox of the situation.

The grammar of verse 10 is difficult to interpret; in the context the best reading is probably “if anyone is for captivity, to captivity they are going; if anyone is to be killed by the sword, by the sword they must be killed”.

The saints are to respond with patient endurance and faith/faithfulness, see 2:2-3, 10, 19, 3:10. This is what distinguishes them from the earth dwellers who worship the dragon and the beast. Their names are written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, v8. **They believe in Him and remain true to Him even if they also are slain.**

Everything is happening within the providence of God.

They do not resist with force and leave the outcome to God, believing that He will vindicate them, 6:9-11.

The beast from the earth (Land), v11-18

He is subsequently referred to as **the false prophet**, 16:13, 19:20, making up the unholy trinity that parodies the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It is suggested that the first beast from the sea is from the Gentile nations and the

second beast may be Jewish (from the Land). He is **the religious beast who works hand in hand with the political beast**.

He is a counterfeit lamb with the voice of the dragon – true sheep should not be fooled, John 10:1-5, 16, but we need to be careful, Matt. 24:4-5, 11, 24, 2Thess. 2:9-12, 1John 4:1-4.

His authority is derived from the first beast and his purpose is to exalt the first beast, v12b, 14, so that people will give him their allegiance and worship. **Religion serves the state and the state enforces uniformity of worship.**

He functions in a way that parodies the two witnesses, 11:.

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Historically this diabolical partnership has often been forged – Pagan cult/ Caesar as god; corrupt Papacy/ Holy Roman Emperor, Marx the prophet of Lenin/Stalin, spiritualists/occult figures and Hitler/the Nazi movement, Fundamentalist/Political

Islam, N. Korea where the deceased president is revered as a god and the state wields absolute power, and parts of India where Hinduism is tightly linked to politics and believers are persecuted.

Even the Jewish religious leaders said “We have no king but Caesar”, John 19:15, Acts 4:27-28.

The religious beast performs miracles that parallel God’s activity, v13 c.f. 11:5, Exodus 7:19-22, Matt 24:24, 2Thess. 2:8-12.

He, like his master, works by deception – concealing the truth by spectacular phenomena. The earth dwellers are deceived, v14.

He persuades the earth dwellers to make an image of the first beast – give tangible worship to the state/ruler as god, v14.

Again there is a parody. God has placed His image on the earth, Gen. 1:26-27, Luke 20:22-25, James 3:9. In His incarnation Jesus was the express image of God on earth, Heb.1:3, Col. 1:15. **When humans make and worship idols they debase themselves. Many political leaders have their symbols/portraits hung in prominent positions.**

God breathed life into His image, Gen 2:7. **The religious beast does the same for his image** – he is given power to do this. Nothing further is explained about the mechanism.

He imposes strict discipline – worship the image or die, Dan. 3:12-18. Similar strictures have happened e.g. deny the Jewish faith (Antiochus E.), offer incense to the Caesar, or convert to Islam etc. It is a stark choice.

The mark of the beast v17-18

He imposes the mark of the beast – a parody of the name/seal on the saints, 3:12, 7:3-4, 22:4. It is a mark of ownership accepted by all classes of society. **Control is universal**. It is to be placed on the right hand or the forehead, in parody of Deut. 6:4-8. It is a reversal of the mark on the foreheads of those who mourned over idolatry, Ezek. 9:4.

Those who lack total loyalty to God, marked with His seal, c.f. 1Tim. 2:19 will find it impossible to resist the pressure to conform, c.f. 1Peter 1:3-8.

It may be a literal mark – tattoo or brand, c.f. 3Macc. 2:28-29 where in 217 BC the Jews in Egypt were branded with the ivy leaf of Dionysus by Philopater 1.

It might be some other device, such as a document or smart card or microchip.

The point is that it is **a mark of ownership and sworn loyalty, amounting to worship**.

It is personal devotion to the head of state, (The antichrist) c.f. Hitler in Nazi Germany, the “Great Leader” in N. Korea – the mark is the number of the beast and is equivalent to his name.

The penalty for non conformity is extreme poverty. Babylon, the world city is a place of wealth and commerce, Rev.18. There will be much economic privation and hardship, Heb. 10:32-38, – c.f. the Jews in Europe in the Middle Ages (carrying the mark, circumcision, of a chosen people). Rev. 15: 2 tells of those who were victorious over his mark and the number of his mane.

The mark is variously called “the number of the beast”, “the number of his name”, or “the number of (a) man”.

“This demands wisdom ... calls for understanding”, v18, c.f. Dan. 12:10, Mark 13:14.

The context of **Daniel** is the end of the age when the wise will understand.

The context of **Mark** is the fall of Jerusalem as a prophecy of the final persecution of the church.

Understanding will be given at the appropriate time to those who are listening to the Spirit of God.

There may have been an initial reference to some contemporary figure in John's day – Nero is the most popular speculation. Attempts to identify a subsequent historical or current figure are futile. We will know when the time comes.

Whatever else it signifies it is, literally, the number of man. It is his essential identity – man and not God.

Man was made on the sixth day. He is also a failed creature, as a consequence of his desire to be like God. Satan, the antichrist, and the false prophet are all creatures.

This **false trinity** also aspires to be God but is a tragic failure, pulling the creation down towards destruction.

So it can be represented by 666, in contrast to the One who is holy, holy, holy, 1:4-5, 4:8.

The numerical value of the Gk. Translation of "Jesus" is 888. He is one more than the perfect number.

The beast always falls short.