
Into Thy Word Bible Study in Revelation

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Revelation 13:11-18: “The Second Beast”

General idea: The second beast appears as he comes out of the earth. He, too, sought to imitate the True Lamb by having two horns but he spoke with the voice of evil; the dragon and his true intentions are now exposed. He was given the authority of the first beast and demanded all people to worship him. The first beast’s mortal wound has been healed, and this second beast starts to mimic Christ by performing miracles, astonishing people, and in turn, greatly deceiving them. He further exasperates believers by demanding a statue of the first beast to be made, equipping it to come to life and speak, and demanding people to worship it. Those who did not were condemned.

This beast not only demands worship, he now marks those who follow him; he requires all people to receive his *mark* or his *number* on their hand or forehead. Thus, only those with a mark may engage in commerce, even just to buy food. The number is 666, the number of a man. John asks us to seek wisdom in our understanding of these things.

Vs. 11-18, Contexts: This passage is about the enforcement of imperial worship and/or totalitarian regimes in John’s time, an even more evil emperor yet to come, and about their forms of deception. (Remember, Revelation is also a letter to the Seven Churches facing current problems then as well as fulfillment of things yet to come.) This theme of allegiance continues today; whom will we serve and trust? Will it be good or evil? The chief ends of the beasts and Satan are to get people to worship them—or anything else besides the One True God. He will counterfeit the claims and ways of Christ by twisting them for evil purposes.

This is more about our battle against evil, Satan, and those who follow who are duped or have the desire to be evil than it is about a singular antichrist personality that may or may not come into existence. There are countless speculations on the *mark* and the number 666. In word meaning, context, and as a metaphor, the *mark* denotes ownership and control. The 666 denotes a parody or cryptic metaphor for Nero or anyone opposing Christ. Most of what is going on in chapter 13 is an explanation about what is going on in his time period. The proverbial 666 has been made into incredible magnitude by movies and sensational pastors who preach by their personality and ignorance and not out of the Scriptures. This makes good movies but not good biblical interpretation.

Basically, symbols in Revelation had specific meanings for a First Century Jew or Greek, like when we might say “it is raining cat and dogs.” These are metaphors not to be taken literally or lightly but should be taken as they meant then, not compared to a modern day newspaper. John was in a totalitarian, evil

regime under Emperor Nero (as was Domitian) who was very much an antichrist (this means one who opposes Christ—not just one person but anyone who oppresses someone away from Him - 1 John 2:18, 22; 4:3; 2 John 1:7). This can also mean Nero and/or someone like a Hitler, a Mussolini, a Saddam Hussein, or someone who is yet to come). We are called, as Christians, to be watchful; however, it is foolish to seek an antichrist, predict one, or come up with some kind of fanatical theory such as a computer chip planted in us. There have been many theories; none of them have come true, and there is still an antichrist to come into fruition. When he does come, there will be no mistake of his identity.

Word and Phrase Meanings:

- *Another beast.* As a word, it means a ravenous animal; as a symbol, an opposing power. In association with *earth*, it represents religious powers or people serving secular authorities. He is acting as a counterfeiter of good, turning it into evil; as a “propagandist” (dispensing deceptive misinformation) for evil, it is the first beast and Dragon—Satan. He seeks to bring glory to himself and that of evil, whereas in contrast, the Holy Spirit brings glory to Christ. This beast is also called the “False Prophet” in Rev. 16:13; 19:20 and 20:10.
- *Coming out of the earth.* This may refer to a locality or regional persecution whereas the beast from the sea is more universal. Romans had local enforcers; various cults also had their representatives, such as the emperor cults and various personalities who waged their ways and evils upon the population (Dan. 7:3, 17; Acts 19:30-31).
- *Two horns like a lamb/horned lamb.* This is a parody and distortion of Christ, perhaps referring to the power of evil governments such as Persia in Daniel. This may mean he starts off as gentle, and then manipulates behind the scenes until he rises to power. Whatever the form may take in the future, this beast seeks to manipulate and deceive people with seemingly miraculous signs and wonders, counterfeiting the work and purpose of the Holy Spirit. This will be very evident prior to the return of Christ (Dan. 8:6; 2 Thess. 2:9; Rev. 5:6).
- *Spoke like a dragon.* His true colors come out, such as Jesus' warning in Matthew 7:15 concerning wolves in sheep's clothing. When this happens, there should be no doubt who he is and what he is up to.
- *Exercised all the authority.* This means under the authority of Satan or working on his behalf. It can be in the form of evil secular authority, corrupt religious figures, or the compromise and apostasy of the Church. Some see this as an evil trinity of Satan/dragon, the antichrist/beast and the false prophet mimicking God's Trinity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

- *Great and miraculous signs.* Wonderworkers were common in this time although most did not have real powers. Like today's magicians, they tricked people. The danger to us today is *relativism*, as Christian values diminish and are replaced by faulty logic and thinking (Duet 13:1-3; Ex. 7:11; Matt. 24:24; 1 Cor. 10:20; 2 Thess. 2:9; Rev 19:20).
- *Fire to come* is a parody of Elijah and of God's marvels and powers, as well as how false prophets worked in the Old Testament. Satan seeks to deceive us while he discredits God (Ex. 7:11, 22; 8:7,18; 2 Kings 18: 24-39; Rev. 11:5).
- *Image... it could speak.* It was a common magician trick used by priests to cause their idols to speak in this time, today we call it "ventriloquism." Such deception was used for propaganda as well as evil personal gain (Deut. 13:1-11; 2 Thess. 2:4).
- *Refused to worship.* The issue was perhaps not worship in the sense of religion, but rather loyalty pledges. This is a clear warning to early Christians to refrain from apostasy, as our loyalty is to Christ and thus, we should never compromise ourselves or His message. This beast can make the pronouncement of apostasy to those who refuse, such as what the faithful faced during the period of the Maccabees 175-134 BC (1 Macc. 1:50-51—Apocrypha; Dan. 3 and 6).
- *Forced everyone.* Many Greek and Roman occupiers of Jerusalem forced the Jews to do this, thus, it was not an unexpected enterprise. Such a mark was, in the past, a tattoo, membership in a guild, code words, and/or an imperial stamp, etc. This is why early Americans reacted so negatively to the British Stamp Act of 1765 that was used to control, subvert, manipulate, and steal from the colonists. There was a tax on anything that had the king's stamp on it. Many Greek people in this time had tattoos for the god and/or guilds to which they bore allegiance.
- *Mark.* Means ownership and control; in this case it also refers to a forgery of the seal and love of God given to Christians (Ezek. 9:4-6; Rev. 7:2-8; 14:1). This "mark of the beast" is about who controls us, Satan or God. This beast forces people to bear the mark as a way to control and also as a counterfeit to the Holy Spirit that "marks" a true believer. This is also a pattern of the stranglehold that has been repeated throughout human history, such as the trade guilds that controlled who could buy or sell in the midst of the church at Thyatira (found in Revelation 2:18-29.) Also, it is the corruption as exhibited in John's time by both Jewish and pagan priests, and especially the emperor cults. It is also represented in countries that are run with totalitarian tactics by corrupt officials and/or dictators. There are countless speculations on this, but it really denotes from the word meaning and the context, that it is a metaphor for *ownership* and *control*, but the means by which this will occur is unknown. All we can do is see how this has played out before and be ready for the

future. Fear mongering over technologies and personalities are beside the point; neither Satan nor God need technology to make this happen, because it has happened before in grand scale without it. However, since we do have it... (Eph.1:13; Rev. 14:9-11; 15:2; 16:2; 19:20 and 20:4).

- *Right hand or on his forehead* refers figuratively to a brand on a slave signifying to whom the person belonged. Not necessarily a literal tattoo or mark on the body, this was more a metaphor for allegiances, either to evil systems or to God. Romans who graduated from a class on emperor worship were given certificates that led to many privileges and opportunities (Is. 44:5; Rev. 3:12; 7:3; 14:1; 15:6; 17:5; 19:12; 22:4).
- *No one could buy or sell.* Refers to commercial discrimination such as the trade guilds at that time, which had an economic boycott against people of faith. But, it will become more strict and cruel.
- *Six hundred and sixty-six/ 666* is a symbol typical of first century Jewish apocalyptic riddles usually known to the audience being written to; John's readers knew who he was talking about. It perhaps referred to Nero, and thus was a warning about making loyalty-oaths to Caesar. It was not a secret code to the hearers, only to those outside of the Church such as Roman officials. This was also a common way to express or warn about godlessness or those opposing Christ (could be attributed to a specific person such as Nero, or to any person in opposition to right and God) while avoiding unnecessary reprisals. Some commentators have said this is "the trinity of evil", referring to the number of the antichrist who seeks to combat God and His people. This is called in the Greek a "triangular number;" it is used as a parody or a word play in the first century, referring to someone or something else. It was also a cryptic code word that referred to Nero, using the Hebrew translation of the Greek numerical values. This type of code is called "gamatria" where each of the letters in the Greek or Hebrew has an equivalent numerical value, such as *alpha* stands for one. This was not secret but common Jewish thinking; Jesus, in the Greek (Ιησους), has a numerical correspondent to 888. Some early Christian thinkers, such as Irenaeus, have attributed this to Euanthas or Lateinos or Teitan; Martin Luther thought it might refer to a Pope Benedict, and to other various evil Popes. In addition, 666, as a number, is diametrically opposed to the perfection of the number *seven* which means fullness and completeness. Thus, the theory of the numerical value is that a future antichrist may have a name equal in numerical value to 666 when it is written in Greek. "Nero Caesar" is 666 in the Greek when transliterated from the Hebrew (Matt. 24:15, 36-51). There is no reason or call to seek to decode this; it is not about the world's population hitting 6,666,666,666 that may have happened in Nov 2006, or some mathematicians' theory or whatever the theory of the day is. The plain meaning, far more important to us than what speculators have come up with, is that we are to be watchful to those who oppose Christ and make sure we are not opposing Christ in thought, word, or deed, taking oaths, or making promises that counter Christ's principals!

Thoughts and Applications:

This beast, Satan, and evil people hate Christ and seek to scandalize Truth and righteousness and proclaim evil as a replacement of the Way! This passage has to do with what contains and controls us; will it be the riches and desires we seek, or the Lord we wish to glorify? The devil will bestow to us gifts and opportunities that seem great, but the strings that are attached will tie us to him and away from Him. This beast also desires to control wealth and in turn restrain people; this is basic economics and politics. Those who wield the power and money will direct and manipulate the people. What is interesting is that people, by nature, seem to worship money and power. Thus, the task of the beast, whether he is a real person who rises up or a metaphor for what seeks to control us, this is about what does control, motivate, and inspire us. Is it seeking to glorify Christ or allowing others to motivate or manipulate our desires so we are devoted to things that are not righteous or pleasing to Him?

Who are the beasts in your life? Once in a sermon, Augustine asked his people if any of them was *antichrist*, as in opposing Christ, in character or unfaithfulness. The 1 John definition of *antichrist*, the only place in Scripture this term appears, simply means anyone who opposes Christ. It isn't about an ominous opposing personality rising up and tricking us; rather, it is about our willingness to be tricked. God gives us a mind and incredible resources of His Spirit and Word; we have no excuse to be disloyal to our Lord. The call here is to heed the warning, not engage in vain speculation; rather, we are to make sure we are lined up to Him, loyal to our LORD! This means that as we lead our lives and run our churches, we have to seek Him and ask, *are we being disloyal to our Lord?* If so, guess what? The antichrist is not a political figure; it is you! We are the ones who are opposing Christ! This aspect is far more important than the speculations, because it all comes down to one thing, loyalty. Are you devoted to Christ or a slave to your will and to the manipulations of others?

This passage could also mean that Christians may think that as long as they are not worshipping in a pagan temple, they are OK; but, to be loyal to evil or compromise God's Word is worshipping something that is not of God! What we can do is trust Christ and be prepared, and that is John's message to us. Stand firm in faith and do not be carried away with trivialities or intense persecution.

The Four Prevailing Views

The Preterist view: There are three prevailing theories in this camp about who or what this second beast is. First, it might be a representation of the emperor worship cult that was estranging Christians economically and socially as they were being forced to worship Caesar and disown Christ; it was an ultimate test of loyalty. Were they willing to lose everything for our Lord's sake? Are you? The second theory is that this is about a religious persecutor either from within the

Church or outside, because of the designation of the *two horns*, such as pagan religions influencing or persecuting the Church or false prophets from within the Church doing so. The third theory is that this beast represents local or geographical persecutions such as governors of local provinces because of the *land/earth* and *under authority* references, Others have said it could be corrupt internal religious leaders or Jews attacking the Church (Matt. 7:15; 23). The *image* of the beast is seen as paying honor and homage to Rome, as Jews did during their occupation. From the Hebrew translation of Greek numerical values, 666 is seen as a cryptogram for Nero. The *mark* and *buying and selling* are seen as a boycott of Christian products and services meant to ruin them economically. Others see it as the corrupt Jewish officials forcing faithful Jews out of business.

The Futurist view: They see this second *beast* not as strong a persecutor of the Church, coming in disguise as a faithful Christian (because of the two horns), and then tricking people into worshipping the beast. This may be a counterfeit Jewish messiah or a slick false preacher who is the “false prophet” mentioned in Rev. 16:13. Others see it as the corruption of the Church. Others see him as the antichrist. The *image* brings all kinds of speculations—from an idol coming to life to a robot. Most believe it is technology that is key and God can’t do anything until the technology is right and ready; this ignores His sovereignty and omnipotence! Some see this as the rebuilt Temple captivating people. The *mark* and *buying and selling* are seen as the world changing to a cashless society, ripe for corruption and control by the antichrist. The *mark* is seen as a computer chip implanted in people. This 666 is seen as a theme for apostasy in the Church or world; others see it as the antichrist and still others see it as a literal number tattooed on people’s foreheads. Others see it as a symbol of man’s defiance of God. Such theories may be possible (a big stretch at least), but usually are ridiculous and miss the main point of the passage.

The Idealist view: They see this beast as a support to the first beast and dragon, unified in strategy and purpose. Most see it as false prophets and teachers in the church or a singular master false teacher. Another view is that it is false theology, paganism, and/or other forms of extreme corruption in the Church. Some see the Church switching its focus from serving God to serving governments and/or current trends and secular thinking. The *image* is seen as conforming to nationalism and being disloyal to Christ and/or actual signs and wonders meant to deceive people. The *mark* and *buying and selling* are seen as one’s life philosophy and choosing loyalty to God or to the world. Others see this as economic boycotts and pressures on the Church. The 666 is seen as a representation of impurity and corruption, or false religions.

The Historicist view: They see this passage as the Church going into apostasy, or those who blaspheme holiness and persecute the faithful. The first beast is the corruption of the Papacy and the second beast is the corruption of the priesthood. The second beast, as with the first, is seen as emphasizing the corrupt priests under the corrupt Catholic Papacy. Others focus on “Charlemagne” and the Holy Roman Empire around 800 AD and/or oppressive

ecclesiastical power, or perhaps the emperors of Rome. *Image* is seen as false or alleged miracles, appearances of Mary and such being used to manipulate people down through the centuries to the corrupt practices of the Church. The 666 is seen by Irenaeus's perspective as a representation of the last of Daniel's Kingdoms and/or the "Lateinios," the Latin reign and language of the Church, keeping God's precepts from the common people as a control mechanism. The *mark* and *buying and selling* are seen as the corruption of worship practices and/or the Papal powers controlling the economics of Europe during the Middle Ages.

The Essential Inductive Questions (for more Inductive questions see Inductive Bible Study):

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?
3. What is God telling me?
4. How am I encouraged and strengthened?
5. Is there sin in my life for which confession and repentance is needed?
6. How can I be changed, so I can learn and grow?
7. What is in the way of these precepts affecting me? What is in the way of my listening to God?
8. How does this apply to me? What will I do about it?
9. What can I model and teach?
10. What does God want me to share with someone?

Additional Questions:

1. If you had to choose a secret identity, what would you choose? What was/is your favorite costume as a youth? Have you ever been a victim of deceptive misinformation? Why would a Christian dispense false or misleading information?
2. Why does the beast try to mimic Christ? For what reason and gain does he perform miracles?
3. Why do these signs and wonders astonish people and, in turn, greatly deceive them? Do you believe people are personally responsible for allowing themselves to be deceived?
4. What do you think this image is? What do you think the purpose is for the statue/image? How would you react to see this image come to life and speak? What would be the motivation for people to worship it?
5. What do you think the *mark* represents? If Jesus asked you *whom do you serve and trust* what would you say? Think this through!

6. What do you think 666 represents? What do you think the chief purpose and plan of the beasts and Satan is? Because most people seem to worship money and power naturally, will the beast's work be hard?
7. What would cause a Christian to worship the beast or anything else besides the One True God? How do you think Satan will counterfeit the claims and ways of Christ, twisting them for evil purposes?
8. What do you see as the danger of the beast to us today, either personally or to the Church? What about relativism, diminishing values as Christians, replacing biblical teaching with faulty trends, and faulty logic and thinking?
9. Why are there countless speculations on the *mark* and the number 666? Why would a pastor desire to preach by his personality and ignorance and not out of the Scriptures?
10. Why do people worship what is evil, ugly, and terrifying? How does the attraction of power remove conviction? Why does sin, in its hideousness, seem to be more alluring to some than being convicted?
11. What does it mean to you, as a Christian, to be watchful and loyal? Do you believe that when the beast does come there will be no mistaking of his identity? Then, how and why will Christians be tricked? What can we do to prevent ourselves from being deceived?
12. What can you do to trust Christ and be prepared? How can you protect yourself from other's faulty control, motivations, or manipulation? How can you inspire others to be loyal to our Lord? What can your church do to inspire its people to glorify Christ and not allow others to motivate or manipulate evil or misplaced desires, so we will be devoted to things that are righteous and pleasing to Him?

Glory be to God, we know the end of the war. The great dragon shall be cast out and for ever destroyed, while Jesus and they who are with him shall receive the crown. Let us sharpen our swords to-night, and pray the Holy Spirit to nerve our arms for the conflict. Never battle so important, never crown so glorious. Every man to his post, ye warriors of the cross, and may the Lord tread Satan under your feet shortly! Spurgeon