The Book of Revelation

Zanesville, OH | Wednesday/Sunday Bible Study

**Chapter 13**

* **13:1-10– The Sea Beast**
  + This chapter and the next presents a contrast between Christ and His adversary and the adversary of His people, the devil/beast. Both are often described using the same terms or descriptions. The devil seeks to portray himself and his allies as an alternative to God by applying similar terms to himself.
  + Some of these include:
    - (1) Christ and the Beast have followers with their names on their foreheads (Rev. 7:3; 13:16-14:1).
    - (2) Both are described as having horns and diadems (Rev. 5:6; 12:3; 13:1, 11; 19:12)
    - (3) Both are described as having power and a throne (Rev. 3:21; 4:2-11; 5:12-13; 7:15-17; 12:5; 13:2; 16:10; 19:4; 20:11; 21:3, 5; 22:1, 3)
    - (4) Both are described as lambs and fierce creatures (Rev. 5:5-6; 13:2, 11)
    - (5) Both are described as causing fire to come down out of heaven (Rev. 8:5, 7; 11:5; 13:13)
    - (6) Both are described with the term “as if slain” (Rev. 5:6; 13:3, 8)
    - (7) Both are resurrected to new life (Rev. 1:17-18; 2:8; 13:12, 14)
    - (8) Both are said to have authority over every tribe, people, tongue and nation (Rev. 5:9; 7:9; 13:7; 17:12, 15)
    - (9) Both receive widespread worship (Rev. 5:8-14; 13:3-4, 8, 12)
    - (10) Both are described as powerful with the question *“Who is like you?”* (Ex. 15:11; Isa. 44:7; Mic. 7:18; Rev. 5:2; 6:17; 12:5; 13:4; 18:18)
  + **Verse 1**– The dragon stands of the seashore presumably to call forth his servants/allies to execute his evil plan against the people of God. The seashore or the sea is synonymous with the abyss (cf. 9:1) from which evil and devastation arose.
  + In the vision, John observes a beast coming out of the sea. Chapter 13 and its imagery is largely derived from Daniel 7:1-7, 19-26. This first part of this verse alludes to Dan. 7:2-3 in which the four beasts Daniel sees all come out of the sea. It was often thought in the ancient world that whatever came from the sea was destructive, foreign and perhaps evil (cf. Job 41:1; Psa. 104:26).
  + Several OT passages indicate this idea of the sea used to describe evil nations or destructive forces (Psa. 65:7; Isa. 17:12; 57:20; Jer. 51:42, 55-56; Ezek. 26:3-5). The Romans were known for their fleet of ships and they would travel by sea to Ephesus among other things.
  + The ten horns, seven heads, ten diadems and blasphemous names as a description of the beast is almost identical to the dragon’s description in 12:3. The only difference here is the ten diadems on the ten horns. The verse points to the fact that the sea beast is ultimately under the influence of the dragon.
  + Like the dragon in 12:3, the numbers here represent a sense of complete oppressive evil power. The blasphemous names (cf. Dan. 7:8) on its head illustrate the beasts’ claim to divine kingship or authority. Beale says, *“The epitome of blasphemy is to attribute deity to someone who is not God”* (Beale, *The Book of Revelation*).
  + **Verse 2**– The sea beast John sees combines aspects from all four beasts in Dan. 7:3-8. The fourth beast is the Roman empire and the three previous beasts are Babylon, Medo-Persia and Greece. The idea is that this beast is extremely powerful and oppressive like its predecessors and its description as having characteristics from each one demonstrates that.
  + This beast is given its power, authority and throne from the dragon and they work hand-in-hand to fight against the people of God (cf. 2 Cor. 11:13-15; Eph. 6:10-16; 1 Jn. 4:6; 5:19). Satan uses political, economic and social powers to influence people to submit to him instead of Christ (cf. Rom. 13:1-6; 1 Pet. 2:13-17).
  + **Verse 3**– There are many different interpretations to this verse, but the best understanding is probably that Christ dealt the death blow to Satan via His death, resurrection and subsequent ascension (Gen. 3:15; Rev. 12:7-12) which is indicate by the phrase: *“I saw one of his heads as if it had been slain.”*
  + Verse 14 shows that the wound came by a sword. Jesus is pictured as coming in judgment against His enemies with a sword (Rev. 1:16; 2:12, 16; 19:15, 21) so He’s probably the source of this mortal wound. That would mean it is His death, resurrection and ascension that delivered the blow and we know from chapter 12 that such a blow defeated the devil.
  + That the phrase *“one of his heads”* is used indicates that Jesus has put an end to any complete, perfect or eternal reign of Satan and his allies. The beast as well as the dragon have seven heads and one being slain leaves a number of six. Six is symbolical for imperfection, defeat and being temporary (cf. Rev. 13:18).
  + The devil has been defeated forever, nevertheless, he continues to manifest his power and influence via his allies which allows him to appear as if he was never defeated. However, Johns audience is well aware that he has been in fact slain due to the events in chapter 12.
  + The NT speaks to the reality that although Satan has been crushed (cf. Col. 2:2), he still exercises power and influence in order to harm God’s people (2 Cor. 11:13-15; Eph. 6:10-18; 1 Pet. 5:8; Rev. 12:12, 17). This power/influence he has is permitted by God until the return of Christ.
  + Rome would eventually fall but the evil, oppressive powers would continue as seen even today. The point is that Satan uses kingdoms and peoples throughout human history to spark opposition to God and persecution of His people (cf. Dan. 7). He is ultimately defeated but the ever so present forces of evil seem to mask his defeat.
  + The earth-dwellers (unbelievers) are convinced that the devil/beast is the winner and the victor and they cast their allegiance to him. They are in awe of its supposed power and authority from a solely physical standpoint.
  + **Verse 4**– This physical superior nature of the beast causes all the earth-dwellers to worship the dragon and the beast. They are amazed because they haven’t seen such power (cf. Dan. 2:40-43; 7:7-8, 19-20, 23). They are enamored by the physical and have no concern for the spiritual.
  + The question *“who is like the beast, and who is able to wage war with him?”* shows their confidence in his power and this question will be answered in chapter 14 and 17 in particular. These earth-dwellers have an extremely inflated sense of pride that manifests itself with confidence in things they don’t understand (cf. Job 38:2; Rev. 6:17; 7:9).
  + **Verse 5**– The beast is said to mouth speaking arrogant words and blasphemies (cf. Dan. 7:6, 8, 11, 20, 25). These words are consistent with OT examples of kings or kingdom who exalted themselves claiming to be God or using their power to stand in opposition against God (cf. Psa. 2:1-3; Isa. 14:12-14; Ezek. 28:1-6; Dan. 4; 8:10-11; 11:32, 36-37).
  + The authority the beast is permitted to have corresponds to the same time period the saints are said to witness and experience persecution in 11:2-3: **forty-two months**. This time period, we have said, encompasses the time from Jesus’ death, resurrection and ascension all the way to His second coming. We know Rome would eventually fall but the evil power of the beast would continue as it has today.
  + **Verse 6**– The beast wastes no time in speaking blasphemies against God and His tabernacle. The tabernacle here is representative of the church, the people of God who *“dwell in Heaven.”* The idea of God’s people dwelling in Heaven or having their identity rooted in Heaven is seen in numerous passages (Dan. 8:10-13; Eph. 2:6, 19, 21; Phil. 3:20; Col. 3:1; Heb. 12:22-23; Rev. 11:1-2; 21:3).
  + **Verse 7**– The beast has the power to make war with the saints and overcome them. This has been talked about or hinted at strongly before (Dan. 7:8, 21, 25; Rev. 11:2-3, 7, 12, 12:13, 15, 17). It is the goal of the devil via this beast to persecute the people of God and overcome them.
  + He has universal authority over all the earth. This is an intentional parody of Christ’s universal authority and sovereignty. It seems as though the beast is really in charge and in control but Christ will prove this to be untrue in chapter 14.
  + **Verse 8**– In another instance of parody, the beast having all authority and power receives “universal worship” (although not quite universal) like the Son of Man who is said to receive universal worship in Dan. 7:14 and later in Rev. 5:11-14. The scene here is reminiscent of Dan. 3, 6 and 7.
  + Those who worship the beast are the earth-dwellers (unbelievers) whose names are not written in the Lamb’s book of life (cf. Dan. 7:10; Rev. 3:5; 17:8; 20:12, 15; 21:27). *“From the foundation of the world”* denotes the extent of God’s plan for salvation from the beginning (cf. Eph. 1:3-14; 1 Pet. 1:19-20). Saints have salvation but the earth-dwellers don’t.
  + **Verse 9**– The phrase that was used repeatedly in the letters to the churches in chs. 2-3 is used here to emphasize the seriousness of the situation at hand. Saints must take note of what is going on and be sure to heed the words of the Spirit to remain steadfast to Christ.
  + **Verse 10**– The exhortation used in v. 9 and throughout the letters in chs. 2-3 is used in reference to the encouraging of the saints not to compromise their faith and to remain faithful despite anticipated suffering and possible death. The same idea is prevalent here in this verse.
  + Those that are to go in captivity and be killed by a sword are God’s people. These speaks to the reality of the severity and cruelty of their persecution at the hand of the dragon and the sea beast. Allusions are drawn from Jer. 15:1-2, 43:11 and Ezek. 14:12-23. They are to suffer if called upon for it is pleasing to God (cf. 1 Pet. 2:19-21; 4:12-19).
  + The verse concludes by showing that the saints receive persecution because of their perseverance. This is well-pleasing in the sight of God and they are to keep up this attitude till the end (cf. Jn. 15:20-21).
* **13:11-18– The Land Beast**
  + **Verse 11**– John sees yet another beast, this time *“coming up put of the earth.”* This beast parodies the Lamb from 5:6 with the difference being he has 2 horns instead of seven. There is a concerted effort here to mimic Jesus/God. The two horns may be intended to recall Dan. 8:3.
  + This second beast is clearly associated with the devil since he speaks *“as a dragon.”* The beast here is also later identified as the false prophet (Matt. 7:15; Rev. 16:13; 19:20; 20:10). This beast deceives the earth-dwellers so as to worship the sea beast and the dragon (cf. Jn. 8:44).
  + This beast is probably best identified with the imperial cult who leads the whole world (as it were) to serve the Roman emperors. This ever-increasing pressure to grant loyalty to the Roman state (sea beast) can be portrayed in various forms including economic, social and religious.
  + **Verse 12**– The second beast exercises similar authority as the first beast since their authority comes from the dragon. This is also seen by the fact that he exercises authority in the presence of the first beast. They share the same goals and same purpose.
  + The land beast has a specific role to cause all the earth-dwellers to worship the sea beast *“whose fatal wound was healed”* (13:3). He puts concerted effort into this role since universal worship is the goal.
  + **Verse 13**– Continuing the idea of a copycat, the land beast performs signs so as to make fire come down out of heaven. This is intended to recall the two witnesses of 11:5 and the power God gives them with respect to the fire proceeding from their mouths.
  + The NT is full of passages that speak of false prophets practicing signs, wonders and supposed miracles with the sole intent of leading people astray from God and His word (Matt. 24:4-5, 11, 23-24; Eph. 4:14; 2 Thess. 2:3-12; 2 Tim. 3:13; 2 Pet. 2:1-3). The false prophet seeks to solidify his word by deceiving people with these signs. These false prophets arise both from outside and inside the church (cf. Acts 20:28)
  + This is also intended to recall a slew of OT passages. Deut. 13:1-5 warned of false prophets who would perform signs to as to lead the people away from God to serve idols and false gods. The fire from heaven scene recalls Elijah’s battle with the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel in 1 Kings. 18:20-40.
  + Additionally, the prophet Moses was granted the power by God to perform signs and wonders to validate the word he was speaking (Ex. 4:17, 30; 10:1-2; 11:10). Pharaoh’s magicians sought to negate the power of God and the word of Moses and Aaron by performing signs and wonders themselves (Ex. 7:11-12; 8:7) but they eventually failed (Ex. 8:18).
  + **Verse 14**– The sea beast and land beast are described with similar traits to OT prophets, apostles and God/Jesus because they are attempting to validate their supposed divine authority (cf. 2 Cor. 11:13-15). Together, they seek to convince the world that they are God and Satan is God.
  + Because of the signs the land beast performs, the earth-dwellers are deceived to the point that they are moved to make an image to the sea beast (idolatry). All of the cities in Asia minor had established temples and statues for emperor worship by the mid 1st century.
  + **Verse 15**– The giving of breath to the image is *“a metaphorical way of affirming that the second beast was persuasive in demonstrating that the image of the first beast (e.g., of Caesar) represented the true deity who stands behind the image and makes decrees”* (Beale, *The Book of Revelation*).
  + Those who do not worship the image are to be killed (cf. Dan. 3). Many Christians suffered and died because they would not pay homage to Caesar or worship in the pagan temples (cf. 2:9-11, 13).
  + **Verses 16-17**– This mark on the right hand or forehead is the counterpart to the seal of God’s servant (7:3; 9:4; 14:1). It is probably a metaphorical way of speaking of their loyalty to Rome, the emperors and their pagan worship/cult practices.
  + It may not be a physical mark or branding since the life of a true Christian and the life of an earth-dweller was so different, it was readily visible who was who to the naked eye. God knows those who are His and the devil/sea beast, likewise, knows those who are his.
  + The mark allows the followers of the beast/dragon to engage in economic practices and trade. Because true Christians do not have the mark of the beast, they suffer economically (2:9; 6:5-6). But what exactly does this number mean?
  + **Verse 18**– A verse that is no stranger to misinterpretations, fanciful ideas and controversy wraps up this chapter. What is meant by the use of the number or term *“666?”* The Book of Revelation, as do all other works of apocalyptic literature, is highly symbolic and that is inclusive of the numbers used. Note that the number is associated with the first beast (vv. 17-18).
  + All numbers in Revelation are used to convey a spiritual reality or symbolic significance. This would include things like the seven churches, seven heads, ten horns, 144,000, 3.5 years, two witnesses etc. We are not to press these numbers for any literal rendering lest we lose the importance of what God is seeking to convey.
  + The same is true for the number 666. Since seven denotes the idea of completeness, wholeness, perfection and purity, 6 would denote imperfection, incompleteness, unholiness and impurity. It is everything that seven is not! It falls short of 7 and is considered to be representative of failure.
  + This is probably why John tells us it is the number of a man. He is telling us that the number is not to be associated with God because God does not fail, He does not fall short, He is not imperfect not unholy. He is utterly pure and complete. Man without God will always be incomplete and unholy (denoted by 6).
  + Beale adds that six *“is also present in the sixth seal, the sixth trumpet, and the sixth bowl, which all depict judgment of the beast’s followers. The seventh in each series depicts the consummated kingdom of Christ. Each series is incomplete without the seventh”* (Beale, *The Book of Revelation*).
  + This fits well with the context at hand and what will unfold in chapter 14. As to why 6 is used three times (666), can be explained as a way of intensifying and emphasizing the failure of the beast/dragon. The number 3 is also symbolically representative of completeness especially with respect to the Godhead (cf. 1:4-5).
  + Satan, in this chapter, has clearly made a great attempt to mimic God, Christ and the Holy Spirit describing himself and his two allies in terms used of God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit. He seeks to portray himself and his allies as God but the number 666 tells us they are worthless, pitiful failures who are ultimately counterfeit.
  + That this is true, can also be seen from passages like 12:7-12 which portray Satan as being ultimately defeated and crushed. He and his allies are representative of evil and unholiness thus denoted by the number 666.
  + The commendation to have wisdom and calculate the number of the beast is a commendation that points to the reality that the saints would be able to comprehend the nature of this number. It is associated with evil and destruction and they should desire no portion of that.
  + But the other aspect is that since Satan has presented himself and his allies so similarly to God, God seeks to convey the spiritual truth that although they may seem in control and in charge, they are ultimately failures destined for destruction and everyone should avoid their schemes and their deceptions because it’s all counterfeit.
  + The wisdom of the world will lead people to fall prey to these counterfeit schemes ultimately leading to destruction. But if one takes advantage of the wisdom from God (cf. Jam. 3:13-18), they can discern the true nature of the devil and his schemes and avoid them altogether; a decision which leads to life.