

Revelation Bible Study #34

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

Revelation 13:11-18

11 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.

Introduction

Before discussing the matter of the “beast from the earth,” one must recognize a theme of “copying” present in St. John's vision. The devil remakes the world, the first beast, in his image as an appropriating act. He attempts to “re-do” the events of creation so as to make himself out to be the god of it and to do the opposite of what the true God actually does. He did the same with an attempted flood to drown out the Church in the twelfth chapter, mimicking the Biblical flood which wiped out the wicked as he tried to wipe out the righteous.

The second beast and its actions are a continuation of this theme. If the devil has attempted to copy both Creation and the Flood, it should come as no surprise that he also appropriates and mimics the Atonement as well, and tries to make his own bastardized version of Israel. In order to do this, someone must be raised up to be a subversive false teacher to point to his false christs. The same way that the devil could not create an entire new world, create a true global flood, or create a new mankind, so too is it impossible for him to create or incarnate a human being for himself to stage an “anti-Atonement;” thus heretics are groomed and symbols are created to fit the role that he designates.

Vs.11-12

11 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.

The second beast is contrasted with the first by its origins in “the earth.” The beast from the sea represents the World, or the second enemy of the Church; it comes from the teeming, chaotic waters of pagan humanity's ebbs and flows. This means that the second beast comes from the Church, where believers are supposed to be standing on the solid ground of God's Word. He *looks* the part of a Christian, having the horns of a lamb so as to appear to be in Christ's flock; but he speaks like a dragon – that is, speaking on behalf of the devil.

The second beast is not a false christ himself. That personage is the wounded head on the first

beast. The beast from the earth is a false religious teacher whose goal is to get Christians to *worship* the false christ, with the help of the world system. It is connected to the warnings that Sts. Peter and Jude wrote concerning false teachers,¹ and St. John himself wrote about them as being among the many antichrists arising from within the Church.²

A false teacher, one who points to or formulates a false Jesus, typologically fulfills the role of the beast from the earth. An example of this phenomenon would be that of valentinian gnosticism. Valentinus and others posited a false Jesus by defining Jesus to be a descendant of the “aeons,” nothing more than a teacher figure representing deities formulated by platonic thought. The aeons were children of a nameless, formless “monad” figure; the gnostic “gospel” featured this false Jesus teaching people to save themselves by disparaging material reality. Valentinus is thus typologically connected to the beast from the earth, pointing people to a false Jesus (formulated by worldly philosophy) while enjoying state protection (he was never persecuted by the Romans the way the Christians were).

Vs.13-15

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.

The fire is not understood here as a physical, miraculous hail of flame (remember, St. John is still seeing *signs* in this vision).³ Instead, by it he means that the false teachers will appear by all accounts to be true “prophets.” In the Old Testament, to call fire down from heaven is Elijah's proof against the prophets of baal,⁴ as well as a king's military detachments.⁵ Since Pentecost, the office of prophecy (that is, proclaiming the Word to God's people) has been taken up by the pastoral office, this means that the types which fulfill the antitype of the beast of the earth will typically either come *out of* the pastorate, inhabit it, or attempt to fulfill its requirements. Arius was a presbyter. Marcion was raised by a bishop, and became an ascetic. In the more modern context, Marshall Applewhite studied in seminary to become a pastor as well.

The false teacher commands that images of his false christ be made, and he gives a voice to these images. This is to say, the engagement of various movements toward the practice of *pseudepigrapha* is predicted here. Pseudepigrapha is writing which proclaims a false authorship, or claims that certain important figures said something that in reality they did not. Various false gospels claims to have been written by an Apostle despite them contradicting the *actual* Word of God, which the Apostles would never do. They also feature “Jesus” saying things He never actually said, giving a voice to the image of the false christ. Even if the heretic does not employ pseudepigrapha, his conception of Christ inevitably ends up being false, constructing a false Jesus by way of saying “Thus Saith the Lord” where God has not spoken.

The persecution of Christians who do not follow this false presentation of Jesus is noted historically. Justin Martyr laments in his *First Apology* about the way in which Simon the Samaritan magician was getting Christians persecuted as a form of collateral damage to his own antics while never being persecuted himself; he says much of the same regarding Marcion.⁶ It may also be that various heretics had Christians put to death by the Romans in order to have their competition wiped

1 In the Epistles of 2 Peter and Jude

2 1 John 2:18-19

3 Revelation 12:1

4 1 Kings 18:36-40

5 2 Kings 1

6 *First Apology*, ch.26. <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0126.htm>

out; for a long time, offering incense to an image of Caesar was a sign of loyalty which bore the punishment of death for refusing. Naturally, this meant Christians (who would not offer the incense) were executed for their loyalty to Christ.

Vs.16-17

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.

Various theories have been posited regarding what exactly the “mark of the beast” is, from writs of selling to tattoos to microchips, the list goes on and on of various theories. Ultimately however the “mark of the beast” is an infernal mirror in reference to the Greatest Commandment, which reads thus with the following admonitions:

5 You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. **6** And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. **7** You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. **8 You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes.** **9** You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.⁷

Just as the devil staged a mockery of creation, the flood, and the Atonement, so too does he gather together a false Israel. The Church is the true Israel, the chosen people of our Lord; nonbelievers become the “chosen people” of the devil. With the directives following the Greatest Commandment, God tells Israel to bind it upon their right hand (that is, all that they do) and upon their forehead (all that they believe and think).

There is a persistent belief that there will be some microchip, tattoo, vaccine pass, and (in the case of seventh day adventists) worshiping on Sunday. But by their nature, these things cannot be that which *damns*, and Scripture attests that the mark of the beast merits damnation. Later one, an angel proclaims “If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, he also will drink the wine of God's wrath, poured full strength into the cup of His anger, and he will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb.”⁸ So the mark is guaranteed to damn anyone who takes it; on the contrary though, anyone who believes in Christ and is Baptized will be saved.⁹ So any interpretation of the mark which undoes the salvific promises our Lord gives cannot be true. If the mark of the beast were a microchip, then it would have to, miraculously, only be given to people who will never believe in Christ. If it were Sunday worship, that interpretation would require the exegete to definitively prove that no one worshiping on Sunday actually believes in Christ.

It is better to understand that the mark is persistent, lifelong disbelief in the Gospel; one is voluntarily under the devil's kingdom, and rejects the Gospel. Such a person will necessarily, instinctively, devote his works to the devil (the right hand) as well as his thoughts (the forehead). That no one may buy or sell unless they conform to this loyalty to the devil is attested at various times in history; it is not absolute. Christians have not always been able to operate openly as Christians; after all, during the first Jewish war Christians had much difficulty with currency. Rome's gods were stamped on coinage outside of Judea, while inside Judea the rebels began coining their own money stamped with the false religion arising out of rejecting Christ.

⁷ Deuteronomy 6:4-9, emphasis added

⁸ Revelation 14:9-10

⁹ Mark 16:16

Vs.18

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.

The devil wanted to be divine, yet cannot despite all of his power. The World came about as an expression of man's desire to be divine, which is constantly frustrated despite mankind's amazing achievements. The sinful flesh of man seeks to be divine, as our own concupiscence acts like a child-king, yet our limitations as fallen humans mean that we fall short; a man can think great thoughts and do magnificent things, but he shall never be divine. Six is one less than seven, which thus far has been used to denote completion of the arc of history; seven seals, seven trumpets, seven bowls, etc. The three enemies of the Church, as well as the three entities St. John describes, *never* terminate in that seventh. These three “not-quites” or “not-enoughs” which are united in their main purpose of destroying the Church both from without and within.

The number “six” is referred to as the number of a man. This is on account of mankind being created on the sixth day of Creation in Genesis 1. Humanity was originally made in the image and likeness of God, making Adam the highest material created being. Man was the closest thing to God in all of material reality – but of course he is *not quite* divine. It is a number suggesting *nearing* completion or perfection, but never getting there. This goes far towards explaining the persecution waged against the Church, for the Church consistently bears witness against the world, the flesh and the devil that they are *not* and *shall not ever be* God.