

Revelation Chapter 13

The Two Beasts

This chapter introduces us to ‘the antichrist’ (the first beast) and ‘the false prophet’ (the second beast), which together with the dragon make up a ‘satanic trinity’. The label ‘antichrist’ appears only five times in the Bible, in John’s letters (e.g. 1 John 2 v 18, 22), but never in Revelation.

“Antichrist” translates the Greek word ἀντίχριστος (*antichristos*), derived from ἀντί (*anti*), meaning either (i) ‘against’, ‘opposed to’; or (ii) ‘instead of’, ‘in place of’ – so we can think of the antichrist as being a person ‘instead of’ Christ, or a ‘pseudo-Christ’.

This coming world ruler is also called ‘a king of bold face’ (Daniel 8 v 23); ‘the prince who is to come’ (Daniel 9 v 26); the one ‘who comes in his own name’ (John 5 v 43); ‘the man of lawlessness’ and ‘the son of destruction’ (2 Thessalonians 2 v 3).

The first beast (Revelation 13 v 1 to 10)

“And I saw a beast rising out of the sea” (v 1) – many people today love the sea, but Jewish people in Biblical times regarded the sea as a wild, untamed, frightening place; it was a figure of evil and chaos that seemed to resist God, albeit unsuccessfully (Psalm 89 v 8, 9).

“With ten horns and seven heads, with ten diadems (= ruling crowns) on its horns” (v 1) – though this beast is distinct from the dragon, he is closely identified with him, because the dragon also had seven heads and ten horns (Revelation 12 v 3). The dragon had ‘seven diadems’ on his heads, the number seven expressing strength and completeness; but the ten crowns of the beast signify his rule over ten nations. The ‘ten horns’ also connect this beast with the vision of Daniel 7 (see v 1 to 8, 19 to 27), which portrays the final world empire of the antichrist, which Christ will ultimately conquer.

Daniel saw three world empires (Babylonian, Medo-Persian, Greek), succeeded by a fourth, the Roman Empire. In the days of that fourth empire the Messiah will come and destroy all earthly rule and reign over the earth. Since we do not yet see the reign of Jesus on earth in this way, we conclude that the Roman Empire will ‘be revived’ in some way. This final world empire will have the catlike vigilance of a leopard, the slow and crushing power of a bear, and the authority and ferociousness of a lion...

- What do we learn about the antichrist’s character, behaviour and agenda?
- Taking the idea of ‘pseudo-Christ’, in what ways does his career seem to imitate the life of Jesus?
- The beast “was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them” (v 7) – but Jesus told Peter that the gates of hell would not prevail against the Church (Matthew 16 v 18), so how can we reconcile these two statements? The clue may be in v 6, which tells us that the beast blasphemes ‘those who dwell in heaven’ – if this is a reference to the post-rapture Church, then who are the ‘saints’ in v 7?

“It was allowed to exercise authority for forty-two months” (v 6) – the beast continues without restraint by God for three and a half years. Some commentators suggest that this ‘three and a half year’ refers to the *first* half of the final seven year period (the seventieth week of Daniel), before the ‘great tribulation proper’ (i.e. the second half of this seven year period) even begins!

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The second beast (Revelation 13 v 11 to 18)

This 'other beast' differs from the first beast:

- (i) in origin ("rising out of the earth" v 11)
 - (ii) in rank (it is subordinate, making the earth worship the first beast, v 12)
 - (iii) in appearance (having "two horns like a lamb" v 11). But despite his lamb-like appearance, he "spoke like a dragon" (v 11). This second beast is called the 'false prophet' (Revelation 16 v 13, 19 v 20, 20 v 10).
- According to v 12 to 15, what is the second beast's 'job description'?
 - Can you see how, with today's technology, it is possible to project a life-like image of the first beast (v 15), and control the entire world's economy by means of 'mark' or number to be worn by every citizen?
 - What happens to those who worship the beast (v 8), and what happens to those who do not (v 15)?

Notice that the 'mark' of the beast (v 16, 17) is an imitation of what God has done on at least two previous occasions:

- (i) the 144,000 servants received a protective 'seal' (or mark) on their foreheads, containing the Father's name (Revelation 14 v 1)
- (ii) in Ezekiel 9 v 4 a seal (mark) was given to the righteous before Jerusalem was judged.

"His number is 666" (v 18) – does this tell us who the beast is, by figuring out the numerical value of a name and seeing if it adds up to 666 (noting that letters in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin have numerical equivalents, called '*gematria*')?

Using this method, many candidates for the antichrist have been suggested, including Napoleon, Hitler, Mussolini and Stalin.

Or '666' may simply be a reference to Solomon's wages: 1 Kings 10 v 14 says that Solomon received 666 talents of gold, perhaps suggesting that the antichrist, like Solomon, becomes corrupted...