
The Two Beasts

Revelation 13

Russ Kennedy

We have seen some fearsome beasts in our study. In the book of Daniel, a new and sobering vision of unfolding history awakens and alarms him in the night. Instead of four deteriorating parts of a magnificent colossus, he sees a parade of filthy beasts. Arising out of the slimy and turbulent sea, four foul and ferocious beasts prowl. No house pets these. Stalking across the Serengeti plains of history, these vicious predators stalk and slaughter and strew the blood and bones of lesser nations in dank dens. Out of the chaos of their origin, driven by a craving hunger for power, they spread cruelty and carnage across time and space.

Remember our context. We have seen the drama of redemption played in the conflict between the woman and her seed and the dragon and his followers. Since the resurrection and his ejection from heaven, Satan has been confined to earth. Now he has unleashed his fury against God's people.

¹⁷ Then the dragon became furious with the woman and went off to make war on the rest of her offspring, on those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus. And he stood on the sand of the sea.

This text will be interpreted in the light of its chiasmic parallel in Revelation 17:6-18. There John saw:

⁶ And I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of the martyrs of Jesus.

When I saw her, I marveled greatly. ⁷ But the angel said to me, "Why do you marvel? I will tell you the mystery of the woman, and of the beast with seven heads and ten horns that carries her. ⁸ The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to rise from the bottomless pit and go to destruction. And the dwellers on earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world will marvel to see the beast, because it was and is not and is to come. ⁹ This calls for a mind with wisdom: the seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman is seated; ¹⁰ they are also seven kings, five of whom have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come, and when he does come he must remain only a little while. ¹¹ As for the beast that was and is not, it is an eighth but it belongs to the seven, and it goes to destruction. ¹² And the ten horns that you saw are ten kings who have not yet received royal power, but they are to receive authority as kings for one hour, together with the beast. ¹³ These are of one mind, and they hand over their power and authority to the beast. ¹⁴ They will make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful."

¹⁵ And the angel said to me, "The waters that you saw, where the prostitute is seated, are peoples and multitudes and nations and languages. ¹⁶ And the ten horns that you saw, they and the beast will hate the prostitute. They will make her desolate and naked, and devour her flesh and burn her up with fire, ¹⁷ for God has put it into their hearts to carry out his purpose by being of one mind and handing over their royal power to the beast, until the words of God are fulfilled. ¹⁸ And the woman that you saw is the great city that has dominion over the kings of the earth."

There he stands on the sand of the sea. Like the angelic messenger who descended from the heavens and stood with one foot on the sea and one on land, he stands, dark red and dreadful, with dooms in his eyes and destruction in his heart. Two beasts rise in cultic imitation of God's two messengers. Out of the long shadows of Daniel 7-9, two persons who are two portrayals ride across the last three years of earth's final days.

The Beast from the Sea

(v.1-8)

The first beast rises from the sea... He is the symbol of all the false kingdoms and the final false ruler. He is the antichrist.

His Description

(v.1-2)

¹ And I saw a beast rising out of the sea, with ten horns and seven heads, with ten diadems on its horns and blasphemous names on its heads. ² And the beast that I saw was like a leopard; its feet were like a bear's, and its mouth was like a lion's mouth. And to it the dragon gave his power and his throne and great authority.

The imagery here is clearly pointing us to the book of Daniel. In a vision, Daniel saw the procession of Gentile world powers as these beastlike predators. The sea in the Bible often portrays the chaos of the fallen world. It also portrays the restless movement of fallen world and the raging of the nations. So the dragon gives to the last of the great Gentile nations great power and authority. He is the power behind the powers.

The beast is a composite of the 4 beasts of Daniel 7:1-7, 20-24. The *ten crowns* on the *ten horns* point to Daniel's fourth beast, whose *ten horns* are interpreted as being *ten kings* (Dan. 7:24). As well, the blasphemous names on the heads are connected with the blaspheming figure of Dan. 7:8-12. That personage is connected with the fourth kingdom both there and in verses 5-6 here.

We have both a wicked kingdom and wicked kings, culminating in a wicked king who will be the embodiment of the dragon. Satan will see to it that this person and nation have the power and authority to carry out his planned destruction of God's people. The original recipients of this book would have rightly associated that nation and king with Rome and the emperor. Daniel predicted that the last empire would continue, but in a different form. We do not yet know in what form this last rule and ruler will exhibit themselves. But he will come in the spirit and power of Satan.

His Death**(v.3)**

³ One of its heads seemed to have a mortal wound, but its mortal wound was healed, and the whole earth marveled as they followed the beast.

This beast appears to have died and come back to life. This is likely both the empire and the ruler with the focus on the ruler. The language is curious. It seems like he had a deadly wound. He had been healed. The implication here is that he came back to life. Here is the Satanic caricature of the death and resurrection of Jesus. But because of the beast's death and resurrection, the whole world is dazzled and deceived so that they follow him.

His Deification**(v.4)**

⁴ And they worshiped the dragon, for he had given his authority to the beast, and they worshiped the beast, saying, "Who is like the beast, and who can fight against it?"

The deceived world worships Satan and the beast. This is not merely adulation of a popular leader; this is the acclamation of deity. The world is dazzled by his power. He appears to be omnipotent. Who can go up against a being so powerful that he can raise the dead? He is being worshipped and served as a god. Now this sounds ancient and pagan and way in the past: however, this deification of the leader has been a common theme in all the world's history.

His Deeds**(v.5-8)**

⁵ And the beast was given a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words, and it was allowed to exercise authority for forty-two months. ⁶ It opened its mouth to utter blasphemies against God, blaspheming his name and his dwelling, that is, those who dwell in heaven. ⁷ Also it was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them. And authority was given it over every tribe and people and language and nation, ⁸ and all who dwell on earth will worship it, everyone whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who was slain.

Once again we are given details designed to connect us to Daniel 7 and 9. We have the blasphemous words of an arrogant leader. He blasphemes God and God's people. He is given half of Daniel's 70th week to prosecute his war against the saints. He is made the ruler of the world and allowed to have authority over all the earth's nations and peoples. While it is subjugation, the nations will worship him as god. This is the Antichrist. There have been many antichrists down through history but they all are shadows, forerunners of this final usurper.

Verse 8 though reminds us that not all will bow. Believers will not bow. All will worship the beast except those whose names were written in the Lamb's book of life. Those names were written there before time began and the world was made. This is said this way to assure us and to comfort us. Assured that we are God's we will refuse to worship the ruler of this world and the dark lord behind the throne.

Many have pointed out that Satan is trying to replicate or counterfeit Christ and His kingdom. Kistemaker calls it a parody.

The dragon gave the beast his power and his throne and great authority (v. 2).

The beast appeared to be mortally wounded and then healed (v. 3).

The whole earth was amazed, and following the beast they worshiped the dragon (v. 3b-4a).

He was given authority over every tribe, people, language, and nation (v. 7).

A second beast comes up out of the earth looking like a lamb and speaking as a dragon (v. 11).

He makes the earth and those dwelling in it to worship the first beast (v. 12).

He led in making an image in honor of the first beast (v. 14).

This chapter also shows how Satan's followers are counterfeits of Jesus' followers. The saints have their names written in the book of life and belong to the Lamb (v. 8, 10). The beast's followers also are caricatures.

They worship the beast (v. 4, 8, 12, 15).

They come from the whole world (v. 3, 7, 8, 14, 16).

They have a distinguishing mark and number (v. 16-18).

The Beast from the Earth

(v.11-18)

The second beast rises from the earth... He is the symbol of the false religions and is the false prophet.

His Description

(v.11)

¹¹ Then I saw another beast rising out of the earth. It had two horns like a lamb and it spoke like a dragon.

Opposite of the truth coming down from heaven, here the false comes up from the earth. Again we are connected to Daniel in chapter 8 verse 3. But even more, this is a caricature of Jesus as the Lamb. Playing on the innocence and harmlessness of a lamb, this one is in fact wolves in sheep's clothing. And he speaks. But instead of the rolling thunder from heaven, here is the hissing sound of the snake. Here is the final chapter that began with the temptation of Eve in Garden.

His Deeds

(v.12-15)

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.

He is the minion and mouthpiece of the first beast. But he wields an enormous power given him by the dragon. He serves to further the antichrist's agenda. He seeks to consolidate his power and authority.

He is a miracle worker of great ability and repute. He is enabled to deceive the world through the miracles he does. He rains down fire from heaven like Elijah and the one of the witnesses in Revelation 11. He uses his signs and wonders to cause the world to worship the false ruler, the antichrist. This is the great magician and false prophet.

He causes the world to make a great image of the first beast, the antichrist. Then he makes it come to life. Again, Kistemaker is so helpful:

The beast out of the earth works behind the scenes without any mention of his identity. It is the beast out of the sea that receives all the attention: everything is done on his behalf and for his benefit, for he is the spirit of the Antichrist. Giving breath to the image of the beast implies animation achieved by magic. Again, giving breath to an image is a parody of God giving the breath of life to Adam (Gen. 2:7; and see Rev. 11:11). Magicians in the ancient world boasted that they could make statues speak and move; thus, Simon Magus allegedly said, "I made statues move; I gave breath to inanimate objects." God allows all this mimicry and gives the beast permission to kill those who refuse to worship the image of the beast. [Kistemaker, p. 392]

The erection and animation of this image may well be the abomination of desolation that we have seen several times referenced in the Bible. The false prophet doing great signs and wonders now breaths life into an image. He is the caricature of the Spirit of God.

His Dominion

(v.16-18)

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.

I chose to separate this out and look at it briefly on its own. Because this paragraph has been the object of much curiosity and speculation, I want to take a moment to look at it carefully.

The point of this text is to highlight the extent of the power and authority given the second beast by the first and ultimately by the dragon. His power extends into the world of commerce as well as politics and religion. He creates some system of universal identification that controls who is able to carry on financial transactions. But more than that, this mark is a sign of allegiance to the beasts. It is a mark on the forehead thus of ownership and on the hand, thus of friendship. It is one more imitation of God – here of his people who have God's name in their foreheads.

Ah here is that number, 666. So much speculation around this. So much trying to figure out who it is. I think that we will not know who this is until the days when this is unfolding. Wisdom is always special and timely insight from God. The other times in the Bible this kind of statement is made, it is made to hide something until the days of its unfolding. In that day, the days of the antichrist and false prophet, we will be able to confirm the identity through whatever this actually means.

One aspect of it may be a part of wisdom in the whole of this age. The 666 simply refers to the unholy trinity, the triple parody of God – dragon, antichrist and false prophet. We know that behind the long war on God’s people is a dragon and the nations he has deceived. And there will come a day when this will reach a culmination in three and half years of tribulation for God’s people that will eventually, for their sake, be cut short.

The Message to the Overcomers

(v.9-10)

In between Satan’s two horrific messengers comes the call to God’s people. It is the center of this mini-chiasm. It is the highlight and the purpose of this text. For in the midst of what the two beasts will unleash against God’s people, we will need such faith-building, hope-giving words.

⁹ If anyone has an ear, let him hear: ¹⁰ If anyone is to be taken captive, to captivity he goes; if anyone is to be slain with the sword, with the sword must he be slain. Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints.

Its Connection

Recognize these words? Do you see the connection? This is the language of the opening letters to the churches and to the overcomers in their midst. The ears to hear are those enabled by the Spirit to hear and understand the words of God. It echoes Jesus’ conclusions to his enigmatic parables.

Its Content

These lines are similar to Jeremiah 17:2 and 43:11. Speaking of Israel whom God is sending into captivity:

² And when they ask you, ‘Where shall we go?’ you shall say to them, ‘Thus says the LORD: “ ‘Those who are for pestilence, to pestilence, and those who are for the sword, to the sword; those who are for famine, to famine, and those who are for captivity, to captivity.’

Like many of Jesus’ parables, these lines are deceptively simple. And like many of Jesus’ parables, the final line establishes the interpretation. At first, there seems to be a desperate fatalism here. But the Bible does not teach fatalistic submission to events, or even to God. Two important truths are being said here for Spirit enabled ears to hear.

There is terrible persecution coming. Sitting here in our comfy building with our freedoms and riches and softness, we need to be preparing spiritually for the almost certain hardship to come. If we are alive during the final weeks, months and years

before the end of this age, we will be persecuted. Some will go into prison; some will go to die.

We are in God's providential hand. What will take place is in and under God's control. Nothing happens that he has not carefully and wisely ordained. The sovereignty of God will sweetly sustain suffering souls in that terrible day, as it does in these days.

Its Call

We will be called to endure, to persevere to the end. Even more than that, we will need the perseverance and endurance *we will have already developed*. Do you see it – “this persecution and suffering, this captivity and sword, summons you to the great examples you had in the past and the great experience you have in the present of endurance and faith.” This is nothing short of reading and living Hebrews 11. Those great saints under the most severe of trials and tribulations, had a persevering faith to wait for God to fulfill His promises.

And so shall we.

Reflect and Respond

One conclusion that can be easily drawn from this text is that the world's kingdoms and rulers are mostly empowered by Satan. They are raised up by God for His purposes. Paul tells us how we are to honor, submit and pay our taxes to them. But we are not to put any faith in this world's kingdoms or governments, even our own. While we may have had a Christian heritage (and much of that is suspect) our government is not much different. So, let's keep our Bible lenses on when we talk about America lest we be in for a horrible jolt one day.

1 John tells us that there are many antichrists in the world today. There are many evil rulers and false prophets who come in the spirit and power of the final ones. Let us develop faith and endurance in our situation as it is.

As fearsome as these great beasts may and as horrible the days they usher in may be, we have a victorious God. He allows them to be who they are. He allows them to do what they do. He allows them to live, and breathe and have their being. They cannot and do not sustain their own existence. They are totally dependent on God to live.

And He will deal with them. He will bring them to a sudden end. He will appear in the heavens in flaming wrath. He will gather His people from the four corners. He will scythe through the earth with the powerful sword from His mouth. He will slaughter the wicked in the great and terrible Day of the Lord. And He will summon them before His throne. The two beasts will be thrown alive into the lake of fire. And Satan will crawl up the steps of the throne and before all the universe, he will kiss the feet of Jesus the King. And off to the Lake of Fire Satan will go.

Hallelujah, for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth!!!

