

## THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST: THE REBELLION

### Two Beasts

### Revelation 13

Mark Vroegop

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*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. 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. 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. 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?" And the beast was given a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words, and it was allowed to exercise authority for forty-two months. It opened its mouth to utter blasphemies against God, blaspheming his name and his dwelling, that is, those who dwell in heaven. 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, 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. If anyone has an ear, let him hear: 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. Then I saw another beast rising out of the earth. It had two horns like a lamb and it spoke like a dragon. 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. It performs great signs, even making fire come down from heaven to earth in front of people, 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. 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. 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, 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. 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 (Rev. 13, ESV)*

"And he stood on the sand of the sea."

If you were here last week, that's where our text concluded. It leads to more revelation, and I told you that you needed to come back to see what happens next. Welcome to Revelation 13 and the Two Beasts.

Do you remember who is standing on the sand of sea? It was a great seven-headed red dragon. This is a symbol of Satan described as “the ancient serpent, the Devil, Satan, and the deceiver of the whole world.” He’s been thrown out of heaven, and he attempted to devour the child. When that plan was thwarted, he pursued the woman.

When that plan failed, he “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” (Rev. 12:17). The seven-headed red dragon is standing on the sand of the sea strategizing his next move.

What follows in chapter 13 is a symbolic portrayal of the Devil’s gameplan to wage warfare against “the rest of her offspring.” Last week we looked at our cosmic battle. This week we’ll bring this closer to home.

This text is a call for **faithfulness and wisdom against the Devil’s strategy**. Here are the most important texts:

- “And I saw a beast rising out of the sea” (13:1)
- “Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints” (13:10)
- “Then I saw another beast rising out of the earth” (13:11)
- “This calls for wisdom...” (13:18)

And these verses will serve as our outline: Two Beasts and Two Callings. Or you could think about this text with two questions: 1) What is Satan doing? 2) What should I do?

### **Two Beasts: What’s Satan’s Strategy?**

Revelation 13 shows us one aspect of Satan’s strategy as it relates to two areas of dominion or authority. You might think of this like offense and defense. They use different “plays,” but the goal is still the same. The two beasts are the expression of how Satan operates now and in the future.

Let’s start with an overview. There are two beasts. One is from the sea and the other is from the earth. What do they represent? Well, let me ask you a question and invite you fill in the blanks: “At a family reunion, it’s best not to discuss which two topics?” Politics and religion.

It might not surprise you to learn that these two beasts are connected to politics and religion. The first beast relates to the way the Devil uses government authority and power to do his bidding. The second beast shows us how the Devil uses religion to his advantage. Now, to be clear. I’m not saying that politics or religion are inherently evil. The good use of authority in government and in religion is a great blessing from God. Remember that the child was described in political power language: “who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron” (12:5). But, like so many things, the enemy loves to take what is good and wickedly use it for his purposes.

The Devil's strategy is to conquer or subvert the faith of God's people. He uses a strategy "that will deflect their obedience or falsify their witness. He will frighten them into disobedience; he will deceive them into illusion."<sup>1</sup>

And this strategy is really important to understand. He'll use force or deception.

### **Sea Beast: The Antichrist**

The first beast rises out of the sea, and he is the greater of the two. In the Bible, the sea is associated with chaos, disorder, mysterious threats, and danger. You can imagine why. The sea is vast, life-threatening, and who knows what's down in its depths! When we get to Revelation 21, we'll read these words: "I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more" (Rev. 21:1). Everything that the sea represents will be gone.

Notice the description of the beast (13:1). He has ten horns, seven heads, and ten crowns. Sound familiar? It should because this is how the dragon is described in 12:3, except that (1) the crowns are on the horns of the beast (not the heads) and (2) there are blasphemous names written on the heads. The symbolism connects this beast to the image of the dragon and to a blasphemous figure in Daniel 7. These "names" are claims of grandeur and authority reserved for God: "Savior, infinite, majestic, powerful." This beast will receive worship from people, and it won't be accidental. The beast talks and leads in a way designed to make people worship him.

In verse 2 we learn that the sea beast is a patchwork of former kingdoms. The leopard, bear, and lion imagery parallels the empires in Daniel 7. This image makes it very clear that John sees a leader associated with earthly kingdoms or man-made governmental power. But it's not just earthly power. There are demonic forces in play: "and to it the dragon gave his power and his throne and great authority" (13:2b).

Don't miss this! The three words—power, throne, and authority—are meant to emphasize the real power behind this ruler. You may have heard the phrase "follow the money" when describing a political scandal. Well, Revelation 13 would say "follow the power." Behind evil earthly power applied through earthly governments is the Devil himself, especially when it's used to thwart the kingdom of God.

Verse 3 tells us a bit more. One of heads was wounded and healed. This is a bit mysterious, but it is some kind of false representation of the resurrection. Perhaps it's a leader who people thought was dead, and he reappeared. We're not sure.

However, it's clear how much the beast is worshipped. Verses 3b-4 show us the following:

- "the whole earth marveled as they followed the beast" (v. 3b) – The beast amazed the people. He is attractive, compelling, successful, and inspiring.
- "they worshipped the dragon" (v. 4)

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<sup>1</sup> Eugene Peterson, *Reversed Thunder: The Revelation of John and the Praying Imagination*, (New York: HarperOne, 1988), 122.

- “they worshipped the beast” (v. 4)
- “Who is like the beast and who can fight against it?” (v. 4)

Notice the connection between power and worship. People love what power gives them, and they love those who provide it.

Verses 5-8 tell us what the Antichrist/sea beast does. It’s a wicked, frightening picture, but one that is not outside of God’s sovereign control. Notice the words like “given” and “allowed.”

*And the beast was given a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words, and it was allowed to exercise authority for forty-two months. It opened its mouth to utter blasphemies against God, blaspheming his name and his dwelling, that is, those who dwell in heaven. 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, 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 (Rev. 13:5-8).*

The beast reveals his true agenda. He uses his power to talk in a manner that makes it seem like he views himself as a god. But he also makes war against the saints, securing the entire world’s support in that endeavor. The beast creates a powerful divide between God’s people and Satan’s people. And the result is the entire world turns against the followers of Jesus.

It’s a dark picture isn’t it? But it’s not without hope. And we’ll get to that at the end as we come back to verses 9-10.

But don’t miss the way in which this Antichrist will be empowered by the Devil, celebrated by the masses, and effective in his persecution. This vision is dark on purpose. Why is this here and in this way?

Eugene Peterson offers this hopeful reason:

“{Jesus} must fortify his people to face the worst. In a political world of sea beast violence, he must bring into the open what may be ahead for any one of them: exile, death, persecution, torture. He knows that when named, fears lose half their potency. He will make sure that no disaster inflicted by the evil power will be unheard of in his congregations. Knowing what to expect, they at least will not be surprised into cowardice.”<sup>2</sup>

Revelation is in your Bible so that you can stop being surprised when life is hard. This is here so that you won’t be surprised by how frightening life can be.

### **Earth Beast: The False Prophet**

The second beast rises not out of the sea but out of the earth. That’s significant. The threat from this beast is more subtle and familiar. According to verse 11, it had two horns like a lamb, but notice that it

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<sup>2</sup> Eugene Peterson, *Reversed Thunder: The Revelation of John and the Praying Imagination*, (New York: HarperOne, 1988), 125.

speaks like a dragon. The symbolism with a lamb is intentional. There are religious overtones here, and its designed to resemble the Lamb that represents Jesus.

The sea beast is about political power and persecution. The land beast is about religion and deception. That's why he's often referred to as the False Prophet.

Verses 12-14 tell us a number of things about this person:

- He has all the authority of the first beast "in its presence."
- He persuades the world to worship the beast.
- He performs miraculous signs in order to convince people.
- He's an expert in the dark arts of deception.

The False Prophet uses spirituality, religion, or belief as a backdoor power move for the Antichrist's agenda. There's even some kind of image of the beast (v. 15) that's similar to the situation faced in the book of Daniel with Nebuchadnezzar. This is the battleground of what people love, worship, and believe.

Military might is powerful. So is propaganda. You can subdue people with fear. But you can also subjugate them with falsehoods.

The signature act on the part of the False Prophet is a global acceptance of the mark of the beast. Verses 16-17 tell us of the breadth and importance of this identity marker. In chapter 7, God's people had God's seal on their foreheads. In chapter 14 we'll see that again. But here this is an anti-God seal, which creates an identification with the beast and Satan's agenda. Now, you might wonder what this will look like? Frankly, I have no idea. But here's what I do know.

The point of this mark is that it's the mark of man and not God. It's part of the anti-God association that is part of Satan's strategy. The beast and the number 666 are counterfeits to Jesus and God's kingdom. Throughout my lifetime I've heard a lot more about what the mark of the beast could be and not enough about being sealed with the name of the Lamb and the Father.

It would seem to me that the best way to recognize the Antichrist is to know the real Christ. And the best way to not be deceived by the False Prophet is to flood our minds and hearts with the prophetic word from Jesus. The best way to avoid the mark of the beast is to fully embrace the mark of Jesus.

So what is Satan's strategy as he stands on the shore of the sea? Two beasts: the Antichrist and the False Prophet. Two covert realities: power and belief. Two institutions: government and religion.

The book of Revelation helps us to see this strategy so that we can be prepared.

### **Two Callings: What's My Strategy?**

So, what do we do with this? John records this vision in order to strengthen the church. He's writing to congregations, just like ours, who live in real cities, with real families, with real governments, with real religious beliefs. This isn't fanciful mythology. This is real.

Is the Antichrist alive right now? Is the mark of the beast already in our culture? Is the False Prophet already on TikTok or Twitter? We don't know.

So, what do we do?

### **1. Faithful Endurance**

If we go back to verse 9, we see a familiar expression: "if anyone has an ear, let him hear." And then what follows is pretty dismal. It's a loose quotation from the book of Jeremiah designed to emphasize that the pressure and pain of persecution will not be easy.

Instead, there is a "call" for endurance and faith. What does this mean?

There's a call to believe—to faith. When persecution hits, it's easy to fall into despair. Hardship tends to reveal our expectations for what it meant to follow Jesus. It also has an uncanny ability to reveal our idolatry—the things we really trust in. And so, this text calls us to fortify our faith. To be sure that we know what kingdom we're really living for, what King really deserves our allegiance, and who really defines obedience for us.

With so many deceiving voices in the world—even now—we must hear the voice of our Great Shepherd.

But this is also a call to endurance. This means patient steadfastness. You see there is a temptation to use the same "tools of the trade" as the beast. We can trade violence for violence. I'm not calling for some form of blanket pacifism. But I am cautioning of what I feel in my own soul when I feel threatened and mistreated.

Again Eugene Peterson is so helpful to me: "When we live in a world of violence long enough, it is easy to adopt violent means ourselves, especially when we know that our cause is righteous and the opposition is evil. Killing the opposition is the sea beast's way of solving its problems. It is not ours. Ours is endurance and faith."

Oh, be careful, church! Let us practice endurance and faith whenever we face the spirit of the antichrist.

### **2. Wisdom**

The second calling is in 13:18. It follows the warning about the mark of the beast. The text says, "This calls for wisdom." Why wisdom? Because the nature of deception and propaganda is that you don't realize what is happening. The lies seem so believable. The masses are buying into "the narrative." The culture around you is changing, and you don't even realize how it's affecting you. So many people begin to believe something that it's hard not to join them.

The caution here is to not lose our heads! We need to be saturated with the Scriptures and aware of what is happening around us. We need to ask God for wisdom. We need to apply our hearts to wisdom. We need to help one another be wise—to know how to apply the Bible in the world in which we live.

While the Devil stands on the shore of the sea calling up his best strategy, can I remind you that our King is alive and seated in the place of victory! And while the Devil's plans may be fearful, we need not lose heart.

This chapter is in the Bible so that you can pay attention to the man behind the curtain! That gives us hope to live right now! To faithfully endure and to be wise in our generation.

The apostle John said this in another letter about ten years before receiving The Revelation:

*Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already. Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. They are from the world; therefore they speak from the world, and the world listens to them. We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us; whoever is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error (1 John 4:1-6).*

**Let's be faithful and wise against the Devil's strategy!**

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