



Part 28 – A Call for Endurance and Faith

Revelation 13:1-10

One of the weaknesses of the strictly futurist reading of Revelation is that it misses the significance of John's words for the churches he was writing to in Asia Minor. The futurist reading also fails to catch the significance of Revelation for every generation of Christians. For John's original readers, the beasts he sees in his vision would have been easily identified as Rome whose pride, blasphemies, and persecutions would increase in the decades and generations following.

Satan is a counterfeiter. He offers lies in the place of truth, and death in place of life. He offers counterfeit pleasures and counterfeit salvation. In this portion of John's vision, we can even see how Satan offers a sort of counterfeit trinity. The dragon (Satan) from chapter 12 is now, in chapter 13, joined by two beasts, one from the sea and the other from the land. As we will see, the beast from the sea represents the perversion of politics and kingdoms while the beast from the land represents the perversion of true worship. Together they make war on the people of God. This passage prompts us to ask where we see Satan's influence in our own time. What does godly resistance to Satan look like? John concludes with a call to Christians to resist the evil one, endure his cruelty, and stand faithfully for the sake of Christ.

The Beast from the Sea

1. The Power of this Beast

Vs. 1 – The idea of such a beast, as so much else in John's vision, comes from the book of Daniel, particularly his vision of four beasts (chapter 7). Daniel also saw great beasts rising out of the sea. In the ancient world, the sea represented chaos. It was the abode of evil and the unknown. Earlier, John saw a beast that came up out of the abyss (11:7). *Abyss* is another term for the great deep, or the underworld under the power of the Evil One.

The seven heads link this beast to the dragon who likewise had seven heads (12:3). The fourth beast of Daniel also had ten horns. The ten horns, symbols of great power, will later be explained as ten kings (17:12). This indicates that the beast has great political power, which was deployed against the church by the Roman empire in the first three centuries.

The symbolic character of numbers such as seven and ten suggest that we are not meant to try to identify one specific individual such as an end time "antichrist." The vision John is describing is symbolic and therefore has significance for each generation which have plenty of antichrists and wicked tyrants who arrogantly blaspheme God and do violence against the Lord's people.

The blasphemous name (or names) seems to represent the beast's claim to God's prerogatives. This is true in Daniel's vision where one of the ten horns "speaks words against the Most High." Or we recall Jesus' words in Matthew 24 where he foretells of the "abomination that causes desolation," the desecration of the temple by Antiochus IV in the second century B.C. and later in A.D. 70. Paul's words concerning the "man of lawlessness" also come to mind (2 Thessalonians 2:4). John's original readers would no doubt have pictured the likenesses of the emperors engraved upon Roman coins. Julius Caesar, Augustus, Claudius, etc. had been declared divine by the Roman senate upon their deaths.

Vs. 2 – The beast John describes combines characteristics of the four beasts in Daniel's vision (chapter 7). Daniel's beasts stood for successive world empires. So, the beast John sees is a composite of Daniel's four and combines in himself all the characteristics of world empires and human governments, as the reference to his *throne* further confirms.¹

The four beasts of Daniel's vision are often identified as the kingdoms of Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome. Each of Daniel's beasts, therefore, represented earthly kingdoms which caused great suffering for God's people. In Daniel's vision, during the time of the fourth beast, he sees the divine "Son of Man" – Jesus' preferred self-identification – receiving his eternal kingdom.

"In one sense, the monster is Daniel's fourth beast, as is evident from the fact both speak arrogant boasts and blasphemies (Dan. 7:8,11, 20; Rev. 13:5-6) and wage war against the saints (Dan. 7:21; Rev. 13:7). Rome was the expression of the beast that would threaten the churches of Asia

¹ G.B. Caird, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, BNTC (Harper & Rowe, 1966) p. 162

Minor and throughout the Mediterranean world...In another sense, though, the monster that John now sees is bigger than Rome, as the merging of imagery from all four of Daniel's beasts shows."²

2. The Influence of this Beast

Vs. 3 – This beast represents Satanic power as it is expressed repeatedly in the governmental structures of the world and as it will be expressed most terribly at the end of history. The vision John describes of one of the heads of the beast receiving a mortal blow is almost certainly a reference to Satan's defeat at the cross and resurrection of Jesus. Still the beast rises again in some form and will continue to do so to the very end.³ Think of Genesis 3:15 when God promised that the Redeemer would strike the head of the serpent.

In John's day, the death of Nero was followed by the chaotic "year of the four emperors" as various leaders laid claim to the throne. It was a time of political chaos and vulnerability for Rome. But from the brink of collapse, the empire recovered and gained, once again, overwhelming power.⁴ This beast is not a single world-wide tyrant but is to be identified with political power and worldly kingdoms in every age which oppose God and persecute his people. This also points to the likelihood that this beast is a wicked parody (counterfeit) of the Lord Jesus who truly died and rose again. Earthly and wicked kingdoms may "rise again" from defeat, but their "resurrection" is only unto final judgement.

Vs. 4 – The beast's influence extends to the hearts of people who are hungry for worldly power. In John's day, the Emperor Domitian demanded to be worshiped as a living god. Worldly empires are at their most satanic when they demand total loyalty.

3. The Blasphemies of this Beast

Vv. 5-6 – These are empires and kingdoms and political systems which exalt themselves above God, promote false religion, and blaspheme the name of God. In John's day, this certainly described Rome. Not every kingdom or earthly government fits the description of John's beast. Indeed, though no human government will ever be sinless, some approximate justice and decency more than others. And then there are the kingdoms of the world which actively blaspheme God and persecute his people.

Once again, we see the reference of the beast's influence being limited to "42 months." As we have seen already, that period of time (also counted as 1260 days, 3 ½ years, "a time, times, and half a time") is symbolic of the period of suffering God's people will endure until Jesus returns.

4. The Malice of this Beast

Vs. 7 – Do not miss the significance of the clause, "It was allowed..." Ultimately, whatever authority the beast wields on earth is granted by God. The sovereign rule of God over all creation is never in doubt. Though God is never guilty of sin or wickedness, for his own wise purposes, he has granted that Satan wield a particular level of power on the earth. The malice of the beast extends to all peoples around the world: "And authority was given it over every tribe and people and language and nation." But just as in Daniel's vision (7:14) this authority is a counterfeit of the final triumph of the "Son of Man."

Once again John's vision links up with Daniel's prophecy in which he predicts a wicked kingdom on earth will persecute and destroy Israel. Afterward, the persecutors themselves will be judged (Daniel 7:22-27). "John sees that the Daniel prophecy about Israel will be fulfilled in the world's persecution of the church in the latter days, which for him began with Christ's death and resurrection...Though [the church] suffers from oppression by the state, they will be the ultimate conquerors and will rule eternally with the Son of Man."⁵

5. The Deceitfulness of this Beast

Vs. 8 – Everyone throughout history whose names are not recorded in the Lamb's book of life are being referenced here. Here again, the world-wide and history spanning context of John's vision is revealed. John is not seeing a distant future event or a single world ruling tyrant. John sees a people who, in every generation, seek and serve the power of the beast over worshiping and serving the Lord. Just as John's

² Dennis Johnson, *Triumph of the Lamb* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2001) pp. 188-189

³ G.K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, NIGCT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) p. 691

⁴ Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (Cambridge University Press, 1993) p. 37

⁵ G.K. Beale, *Revelation: A Shorter Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015) p. 274

vision spans the entire epoch between Christ's two advents, so here the beast deceives men and women in every generation.

A Word to the Church

Vv. 9-10 – This is essentially the same word spoken by the prophet Jeremiah as God was preparing to send them into exile where they would suffer under “the sword” (Jeremiah 15:2; 43:11). For Israel, this was judgment for their unbelief and sin. But it would be during this time that the faithful remnant would be further sanctified. The passage ends with a call for the saints to endure and have faith.

Endure

- John's emphasis here “is more on the suffering of God's people than on the punishment of the wicked.”⁶ As we have already seen, the repeated call to the saints in John's vision is for faithful endurance through suffering and tribulation. Certainly, some Christians will find themselves living in times and places where persecution from the government is slight or non-existent. After all, not all governments are equal. But many other Christians have lived and continue to live under the cruel hand of godlessness and persecution. At times that has required Christians to disobey the civil authorities. We think, for instance, of Daniel's defiance of Nebuchadnezzar or the Oxford martyrs of the mid-sixteenth century executed for refusing to cease preaching the gospel of justification by grace through faith alone. Subject yourself to the laws of the state up until you are required to dishonor the Lord. Then may we faithfully endure the world's hatred for the blessed benediction of our Lord.

Have Faith

- The beast's efforts to destroy the church will ultimately be self-defeating. History has shown that the church advances in times of persecution. In the 1970's and 80's, sociologists and missions specialists were shocked at the enormous growth of the church in China during the exceedingly dark days under Mao's rule. The church in India has grown even while being cruelly treated by the Hindu government. We trust that God will never abandon his church or fail in his promise to triumph over the beast.
- Having faith also means that we must not ever come to the conclusion that the levers of governmental power are our hope. That does NOT mean that Christians should be indifferent to politics and public policy. God institutes government and all civil authority is granted by God (Romans 13:1). It does not mean that Christians should not seek to have a voice in the public sphere or appeal to their rights as citizens (the Apostle Paul did!). Christians should seek to be ideal citizens looking for ways to bless the nation in which they live just as God commanded his people to during their days of exile in Babylon (Jeremiah 29:5-7). However, the church does not depend upon any earthly kingdom. The church does not advance and disciples are not made by policies and legislation crafted by state officials. Our faith is in God to protect us, grow us, and bring us all the way home.
- The faith of the Christian is that God will triumph, his people will be preserved, and that the church will be brought to her blessed rest in the new creation. All that we endure in this life is “so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 1:7).

⁶ Ibid., p. 277