

Lesson Sixteen

The Two Beasts (13:1-18)

In this passage there are two monster beasts. The first monster beast comes from the sea and is a political beast. We know him in other scripture as the antichrist. The second beast comes from the land and is a religious beast. We know him in other scripture as the false prophet. The religious beast supports the political beast through sadistic religious influence.

The Beast from the Sea (13:1-10)

13:1-2. The dragon and beast both have seven heads and 10 horns. Seven heads suggest his desire for divine sovereignty. Ten horns suggest complete authority. The beast is empowered by Satan. Blasphemous names suggest that the beast seeks divine recognition. The fact that the beast comes from the sea references the severity of his evilness. The three animal descriptions used here underscore the strength and power of the beast.

Greater detail will be provided to the riddle-like nature of the seven-headed beast when 17:8-12 is studied. However, there are the two common interpretations for the beast. First, the beast represents the Roman Empire in John's day. This interpretation is unlikely. Second,

the beast represents a final political leader who seeks world dominion. He is both an alliance of nations (17:8-12) and an individual world leader (13:18). There have been many beasts or antichrists throughout history (I John 2:19). The Roman Empire was most likely the beast of John's day but not the final beast of Revelation.

13:3. One of the heads or kings of the beast dies and comes to life again. This is so significant that we find it recorded again in 13:12, 14; 17:8. This incites the nations of the world to greater allegiance due to its power, might, and victory.

13:4. The principle aim of the beast is to thwart allegiance to the true living God and lead people to follow Satan. Cosmic warfare escalates with the efforts of beast.

13:5-6. The beast is given power to blaspheme and acts under the authority of Satan. The beast desires divinity. The length of time the beast advances his blasphemous acts is 3 ½ years. This is the time of the Great Tribulation.

13:7. Satan empowers the beast to continue cosmic warfare by persecuting saints (cp. 12:17). "Saints" is the most common term for Christian Believers in scripture. While the beast temporarily overcomes them by taking their lives, the saints overcome the beast for eternity by the blood of the Lamb and their testimonies (12:11). The authority and warfare of the beast are global.

13:8. The beast successfully reigns over the people of the earth, other than the saints of God. The people of the world worship the beast while those whose names are in the book of life remain faithful. The providence of God is referenced in the phrase, “from the foundation of the world.” God’s providence assures saints of victory.

13:9-10. The refrain “If anyone has an ear, let him hear” found in the letters to the seven churches is repeated. Only the spiritually wise will understand. Destiny is determined. If a Believer is to experience captivity or persecution, it will be so. This message is given to inform and strength Believers to persevere. There is no thwarting the plan and purpose of God. Spiritual warfare is being waged and our Lord will win the ultimate victory. The beast will be defeated!

The Beast from the Land (13:11-18)

The second monster beast is a religious beast that exists to lead people to worship and align with the first beast. Organized religion is the servant of the state.

13:11. The second beast comes from the land rather than the sea. This may suggest a subordinate evil to that of the religious beast. This beast had two horns like a

lamb but spoke like Satan. This beast is a false prophet (cp. 16:13; 19:20; 20:10) who presents himself as Christ. Religion becomes evil and supports the terror of the political beast.

13:12. The religious beast assumes a blasphemous mission – to lead people to worship the first beast. We probably should not picture worship as entailing singing and praise, but rather allegiance and devotion. The beast that dies and comes to life is both one of seven kings (17:11) and a single king himself.

13:13-14a. The religious beast performs miracles. The beast utilizes satanic power. Magic and spiritual powers have deceived many throughout Christian history (Acts 13:6; 16:16; 19:13). As the two witnesses perform true miracles of God (11:6), the religious beast counters with the power of Satan. The mission to deceive the nations is largely successful.

13:14b-15. A speaking statue of the first beast adds to Satan's influence over people. The image purposes to influence people to align with the first beast. It appears that the image is used for people to pledge allegiance to the beast in order to retain their lives. The speaking image may accept and/or ratify the confession as acceptable. People who refuse to make such a confession are put to death.

13:16-17. Economic pressure also leads people to honor the first beast. The word “mark” means a stamp or brand. Animals and slaves were marked to denote ownership. The beast influences all people of the earth through economic control.

13:18. In riddle-like form the beast will be identified by a number. The man’s number is six hundred sixty six. Gematria was an ancient practice of assigning number values to letters. Neither Greek nor Hebrew has numbers. Who is 666? “Here is wisdom.” Most likely the final generation of informed saints will know the exact identity of the final beast.