

The Book of Revelation

"The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever." (Revelation 11:15)

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High Level Outline of the Book of Revelation

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

- *13:11 Then I saw another beast, coming out of the earth. He had two horns like a lamb, but he spoke like a dragon. 12 He exercised all the authority of the first beast on his behalf, and made the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose fatal wound had been healed. 13 And he performed great and miraculous signs, even causing fire to come down from heaven to earth in full view of men. 14 Because of the signs he was given power to do on behalf of the first beast, he deceived the inhabitants of the earth. He ordered them to set up an image in honor of the beast who was wounded by the sword and yet lived. 15 He was given power to give breath to the image of the first beast, so that it could speak and cause all who refused to worship the image to be killed. 16 He also forced everyone, small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on his right hand or on his forehead, 17 so that no one could buy or sell unless he had the mark, which is the name of the beast or the number of his name. 18 This calls for wisdom. If anyone has insight, let him calculate the number of the beast, for it is man's number. His number is 666.* (NIV)

13:11 *Then I saw another beast rising out of the [Land]. It had two horns like a lamb and it spoke like a dragon.* (ESV)

- John now introduces the ***third*** member of the evil trinity – a Satanic counterfeit of the Father, Son, and Spirit.
- The "*dragon*" comes from the ***sky*** (12:4, 9), the ***first*** beast from the "*sea*" (13:1), and here we see this ***second*** beast comes from the "*Land*" (of Israel).
- All three are linked (13:2, 11; 16:13).
- The beast "*rising out of the Land*" is the ***religious*** partner of the ***political*** beast "*rising out of the sea*" (13:1)
- The remainder of this chapter is meant to expose how deeply these two beasts are united against Christ and his people.
- Just as the (Mediterranean) "*sea*" from which the ***greater*** beast arises touches most of the Roman provinces, presenting him on the world stage, so this ***subordinate*** beast has a ***lesser*** realm—the "*Land*" of Israel.

13:11 *Then I saw another beast rising out of the [Land]. It had two horns like a lamb and it spoke like a dragon.* (ESV)

- We're further told that this beast has "*two horns like a lamb*".
- There is no special significance to the number "*two*" here, inasmuch as a horned lamb would ***naturally*** have two horns.
- However, given the fact that horns typically symbolize power and authority – the ***contrast*** with the ***ten*** horns of the ***first*** beast indicates that this ***second*** beast has ***less power*** than the first beast and is ***subordinate*** to him.
- His appearance as a lamb suggests gentleness and harmlessness, but this is ***deceptive***.
- Jesus warned, "*Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves*" (Matthew 7:15).
- The "*beast rising out of the [Land]*" is a wolf in sheep's clothing.

13:11 *Then I saw another beast rising out of the [Land]. It had two horns like a lamb and it spoke like a dragon.* (ESV)

- Though he ***looks*** like a "*lamb*", he "*spoke like a dragon*".
- The "*dragon*" is Satan himself – "*the great dragon... who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world*" (12:9).
- To ***speak*** "*like a dragon*" means to speak with the deceptive, slanderous, and blasphemous speech that characterizes Satan.
- Jesus tells us that Satan was a "*murderer from the beginning*" and "*has nothing to do with the truth*" (John 8:44).
- The second beast shares in this diabolical character.
- This "*beast rising out of the [Land]*" is ***later*** identified as "*the false prophet*" (16:13; 19:20; 20:10), and his role is primarily ***religious***.
- A ***true*** prophet leads people to worship ***God***, but "*the false prophet*" leads them to worship the state and, ultimately, the devil.

13:11 *Then I saw another beast rising out of the [Land]. It had two horns like a lamb and it spoke like a dragon.* (ESV)

- This beast arises from within "*the [Land of Israel]*" itself.
- Moses warned that false prophets would arise from among the covenant people, performing signs and wonders (Deuteronomy 13:1-5).
- This second beast has been understood by commentators in various ways.
- ***Historicists*** identify it as the ***Roman papacy***.
- ***Futurists*** see this as a future religious leader, perhaps the head of the ***future*** Roman Catholic Church.
- But the Roman papacy or a future religious leader both lie far beyond the scope of the book of Revelation, which John tells us concerns things that were "*near*" and would "*soon*" come to pass – things that would have ***direct relevance*** to the original first century churches that John was writing to.
- I believe this second beast "*rising out of the [Land of Israel*" represents the apostate Jewish religious establishment, and its high priestly aristocracy, which aligned itself with Rome against Christ and His followers.
- Josephus explains that the high priestly aristocracy was ***the*** central and dominating political-economic institution of ancient Judea (Antiquities 20:10:1).

13:12 *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.* (ESV)

- We're further told that the second beast exercises "*all the authority of the first beast*".
- The phrase "*in its presence*" or "*on his behalf*" (as it is translated in the NIV) indicates that the Land beast's authority is ***derived*** from the sea beast.
- The "*authority*" that is exercised by this beast is ***not independent***, but is exercised under the watchful eye if the first beast's and is subject to his constraints.
- The Jewish religious establishment was constrained by Rome's authority in its religious practices within the temple system.
- The massive tower of Antonia was used by the Romans to keep an eye on the Jews as they worshiped in the temple, which greatly offended the Jews (Jewish War 5:5:8).
- The Romans even controlled the high priest's vestments (Antiquities 15:11:4).
- The secular authority that Rome established in Israel was often the one appointing her sacred high priests.
- Far from representing the ***Judean*** people's interests, the high-priestly aristocracy ***collaborated*** with the Roman authorities on whom their positions depended.

13:12 *It exercises all the authority of the first beast in its presence, and makes the [Land] and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose mortal wound was healed.* (ESV)

- Next, we're told that the second beast (the apostate Jewish religious establishment and high priestly aristocracy) "*makes the [Land] and its inhabitants worship the first beast*" (Rome).
- This is not to say that the Jews literally bowed down to a graven image.
- But the Jewish leaders had corrupted the Jewish sacrificial system to a point where its participants worshipped in a compromised form that was designed to ***appease Rome*** rather than ***obey God***.
- Josephus records, for example, that priests offered sacrifices twice daily in honor of Caesar and the Roman people in order to gain favor with Rome (Jewish War 2:10:4).
- Altar sacrifices were ***originally*** given by God to show atonement and forgiveness of sin.
- Sacrifices offered in honor of the idolatrous emperor ***sold out*** the priestly system in order to allow the Jewish leaders to preserve their power and stay in good standing with Rome.

13:13 *It performs great signs, even making fire come down from heaven to earth in front of people...* (ESV)

- We're told here that the second beast (the Jewish priestly aristocracy) "*performs great signs*".
- This makes him a Satanic counterfeit of the true prophet Moses, who also performed signs (Exodus 4:17, 30; 10:2).
- It says here that he even makes "*fire come down from heaven to earth in front of people*", making him a ***counterfeit*** of the ***true*** prophet Elijah, who did likewise (1 Kings 18:38-39; 2 Kings 1:10-14).
- A straight-forward reading of this verse would seem to suggest that members of the Jewish priestly aristocracy deceived the Jews living in the Land to follow them by performing miraculous signs such by "*making fire come down from heaven to earth in front of people*".
- While this is, no doubt, the ***simplest*** reading of this text, the ***problem*** with this interpretation is that we have ***no*** historical records of anything like this being done by Israel's apostate leaders who were living at that time.

13:13 *It performs great signs, even making fire come down from heaven to earth in front of people...* (ESV)

- Given that this is the Word of God and therefore reliable, we are forced to one of two conclusions:
  - Either the seemingly ***straight-forward*** reading of this text is ***true***, and the priestly aristocracy ***did***, in fact, perform miraculous signs such as these in order to deceive the people – but (surprisingly) a record of these acts never made it into the history books.
  - ***Or*** perhaps there is ***another*** less obvious, but legitimate way of interpreting this text that ***fits*** with the historical information that we have of that time.
- The ***first*** option is ***possible*** ("absence of evidence is not evidence of absence"), but seems ***unlikely***.
- The ***second*** option is provided by Kenneth Gentry and, while it is a bit complicated to follow and feels at times like it might be stretching the text as it is worded here - it ***does*** match what we know of the historical events of that day.

13:13 *It performs great signs, even making fire come down from heaven to earth in front of people...* (ESV)

- The first thing Gentry points out is these "*signs*" are not ***necessarily*** miraculous, since the Greek word used here (*semeion)* is ***often*** used of ***non***-miraculous "*signs*". For example:
  - Luke 2:12 – "*And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger*."
  - Matthew 26:48 – "*Now [Judas] the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, 'The one I will kiss is the man; seize him'*."
  - Romans 4:11 – "*[Abraham] received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised.*"
- Furthermore, in Revelation the word regularly denotes symbolic images:
  - Revelation 12:1 – "*And a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars*."
  - Revelation 12:3 – "*And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great red dragon…*"
  - Revelation 15:1 – "*Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and amazing, seven angels with seven plagues…*"

13:13 *It performs great signs, even making fire come down from heaven to earth in front of people...* (ESV)

- Gentry proposes that the "*fire*" talked about in this verse represents the high priest's performance of the temple sacrifices at the altar whose fire was legitimate (not a "*strange fire*") since (presumably) it was originally started by a fire that came down from heaven, like the fires that burned in the alter Solomon's temple and also Aaron's tabernacle:
  - 2 Chronicles 7:1 – "*As soon as Solomon finished his prayer, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the Lord filled the temple.*"
  - Leviticus 9:24 – "*And fire came out from before the Lord and consumed the burnt offering and the pieces of fat on the altar, and when all the people saw it, they shouted and fell on their faces.*"

13:13 It performs great signs, even making fire come down from heaven to earth in front of people... (ESV)

- This is ***significant***.
- Because according to Lev 6:12–13, once the authorized fire in the alter was lit by the Lord, the Israelites were to keep it ***perpetually burning***: "*The fire on the altar shall be kept burning on it; it shall not go out... Fire shall be kept burning on the altar continually*"
- The point of all this in our passage is this: the corrupt Jewish priesthood claimed legitimacy by continuing the divinely-originated altar fire — yet we know historically (as I pointed out earlier) that in that very act they were offering sacrifices twice daily for Caesar and the Roman people (J.W. 2:10:4 §197; Philo, Embassy 32§157).
- So the "*fire [had] come down from heaven*" in the temple giving it the ***appearance*** of legitimacy and authenticity.
- But in ***actuality***, that "*fire*" was being used by the corrupt Jewish high priests to give honor (worship) to the first the beast (Rome) rather than honor to God.

13:14 *...and by the signs that it is allowed to work in the presence of the beast it deceives those who dwell [in the Land], telling them to make an image for the beast that was wounded by the sword and yet lived.* (ESV)

- Here we are told "*and by the signs that it [the second beast – i.e., the apostate priestly aristocracy] is allowed to work in the presence of the [first] beast [i.e. Rome] it deceives those [i.e., the Jews] who dwell [in the Land]*"
- Putting this together with what we just looked at in the previous verse, "*the signs*" here include, what appears to be legitimate sacrifices being offered by authorized "*fire [that had] come down from heaven to earth*".
- The people saw the altar burning, the sacrifices ascending, the priests officiating – and concluded that all was well between them and God.
- But they were being deceived!
- Because in reality, what the Jewish people were witnessing were apostate leaders (symbolized by the second beast) who had ***rejected*** the Messiah, ***persecuted*** his followers, and were cozying up to Rome (the first beast) by offering sacrifices twice a day in honor of Ceasar and the Roman people.
- Thus, because of the daily sacrifices offered in honor of Rome, the temple became the place where Israel's worship was, in effect, directed toward the beast rather than God.

13:14 *…and by the signs that it is allowed to work in the presence of the beast it deceives those who dwell [in the Land], telling them to make an image for the beast that was wounded by the sword and yet lived.* (ESV)

- Next, we're told that the apostate Jewish priestly leaders, by the idolatrous system they had put in place, were (in effect) "*telling [the Jews of the Land] to make an image for the beast that was wounded by the sword and yet lived*".
- On the surface, this would appear to say that the Jewish people were being told to go build a statue representing Rome (or its emperor) and worship it.
- But there is no historical evidence that anything like this ever happened.
- The apostate Jewish leadership was far too subtle to try anything that blatant.
- Gentry argues that what this text is saying is that by rejecting the Messiah (who had ***replaced*** the temple), persecuting his followers, and corrupting the temple worship, the second beast (corrupt Jewish leaders) turned the temple ***itself*** into the representative "*image*" of the first beast's authority, mediating his claims to the people.
- "*the beast that was wounded by the sword and yet lived*" – this mention at the end of the verse of how the first beast had recovered from a mortal wound (cf. 13:3) distinguishes it from the second beast and is a reminder of the first beast's resilience which had caused the entire imperial world to marvel.

13:15 *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.* (ESV)

- So, the "*image of the beast*" here refers to the Jerusalem temple, which had become a ***tool*** of Roman authority to keep the people in line and an ***idol*** in the eyes of the Jews, replacing the Messiah.
- The word for "*image*" here (and in the previous verse) is not *eidōlon* ("idol") but *eikōn* ("image").
- Just as man is the "*image* (eikōn) *of God*" (Gen 1:26; 1 Cor 11:7), the temple system controlled by the apostate Jewish priestly hierarchy became an "*image*" of ***their*** god — Caesar, and behind him Satan (13:2; cf. 2:9; 3:9; John 8:44).
- Giving "*breath*" to the "*image of the beast*" so that it "*might even speak*" does not mean the stone structure literally opened its mouth.
- But rather the temple's sacrificial worship and rituals seemingly issued reassuring and peaceful words to those who submitted to it, making people believe that their worship was still acceptable to God and that all was well.
- Furthermore, the Jewish temple authorities issued orders that any Christians "*who would not worship the image of the beast*" by participating in temple worship, were "*to be slain*"
- This "voice" came from the temple power center, demanding ***absolute allegiance***.

13:16 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. (ESV)

- Here we are told that "*it*" (still talking about the second beast, the apostate Jewish priestly leadership) "*causes*" everyone, regardless of their significance or social status, to be "*marked on the right hand or the forehead*".
- This "*mark*" is an attempt on the part of Satan to counterfeit the "*seal*" that God put on the 144,000 (7:3–8; 14:1)
- The "*seal*" that God had put on the 144,000 marked them out for Christ's safe-keeping; whereas ***this*** "*mark*" identifies the followers of the ***beast***.
- Like the "*seal*", the "*mark*" is ***not*** a literal object or physical marking, but a spiritual identifier of allegiance.
- The idea of a "*seal*" on the "*hand*" and "*forehead*" comes from the Shema:
  - *Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one… You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets [on your forehead (NAS)]*. (Deut 6:4,8)
- The Shema was recited twice daily by devout Jews (Tamid 4:3; 5:1).
- The design of the command is spiritual: the faithful must let God's law govern every thought ("*forehead*") and deed ("*hand*").

13:16 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. (ESV)

- Likewise, the "*mark*" was stamped on those who have given their allegiance to the beast.
- This allegiance was enforced through concrete social pressure.
- The leadership "*causes*" the mark to be given by using the levers it controlled: synagogue excommunication (John 9:22; 12:42; 16:2), social ostracism, economic boycott ("*no one can buy or sell*), and death threats (v. 15).
- To "receive the mark" was to comply – to go along with the beast-allegiance system, to keep your place in the synagogue and the marketplace by tacitly accepting the leadership's alignment with Rome.
- To "refuse the mark" was to be cut off, impoverished, and possibly killed.

13:18 *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.* (ESV)

- This verse begins with a genuine summons to ***discernment***; "*This calls for wisdom*".
- John himself is often perplexed and needs angelic explanation (7:13–14; 17:6–7), yet here he directs readers to "*calculate*" (*psēphisatō*) – so the number he is about to describe is ***knowable***.
- The verb implies actual ***computation***: if the number were merely symbolic ("three sixes falling short of seven"), John would not tell readers to "*calculate*" it; he would say "let him read the number" or "let him see."
- "*it is the number of a man*" – not mankind in general, but a ***specific*** man.
- Gentry argues that the "calculation" should be done using Hebrew gematria.
- Hebrew gematria is the practice of assigning numerical values to Hebrew letters and using those values to interpret words, names, and phrases.
- The use of Gematria was ***widespread*** in the ancient world.
- It was ***not*** an esoteric Christian invention but a ***common*** cultural practice.
- A number can be made to fit many names; the question is which name is contextually relevant.

13:18 *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.* (ESV)

- Hebrew has no separate set of numeric symbols.
- Instead, each of the 22 letters of the alphabet doubles as a number.
- This is why ancient alphabets (Hebrew, Greek, Latin) could conceal names in numbers — a number is simultaneously a word, and a word is simultaneously a number.
- The same is true of Greek, which is why the book of Revelation, written in Greek, can use a Hebrew technique.
- The Hebrew alphabet is arranged so that the first ten letters have values 1–10, the next nine have values 10–100 by tens, and the last four have values 100–400 by hundreds.
- Number ***greater*** then 400 are formed by ***adding*** the values of letters.

13:18 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. (ESV)

- As stated earlier, a given number (like "*666*") can be made to fit ***many*** names – the question is which name is ***contextually*** relevant.
- Gentry suggests five qualifying principles to determine the contextual name in this passage:
  - It must be the number of a man — a specific human individual.
  - He must be one of John's contemporaries (cf. 1:1).
  - He must be relevant to the first-century audience — they must be able to "heed" and learn from what is written (1:3; 13:9). An obscure or irrelevant figure fails this test.
  - He must be blasphemously evil — matching the beast's blasphemy (13:1c, 5a, 6a, 8).
  - He must be a political figure possessing great authority (13:2c, 4, 7–8a).

13:18 *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.* (ESV)

- Beyond those five, Gentry builds a case that in the context of this passage, the most likely candidate is Nero:
  - The persecution context (13:5–7): the beast is the power waging war on the saints. Nero is the emperor associated with the first great imperial persecution of Christians (AD 64–68), traditionally linked to the deaths of Peter and Paul.
  - The seven-heads chronology (17:9–11): Gentry reads the seven kings as a sequence of Roman emperors, with Nero as the sixth, currently reigning. That makes Nero the contextually indicated "one who is."
  - The "mortal wound" motif (13:3, 12, 14): the beast's wound and recovery involves Nero and the turmoil after Nero's death — the empire seeming to die and revive.

13:18 *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.* (ESV)

Neron Qesar (נרוקסר)	
Letter	Value
נ(Nun)	50
ר(Resh)	200
ו(Vav)	6
נ(Nun)	50
ק(Qof)	100
ס(Samekh)	60
ר(Resh)	200
Total	**666**

Nero Qesar (נרוקסר)	
Letter	Value
נ(Nun)	50
ר(Resh)	200
ו(Vav)	6
ק(Qof)	100
ס(Samekh)	60
ר(Resh)	200
Total	**616**

Class Discussion Time

- In our text today we were introduced to the ***second*** beast which represents a ***religious*** institution used by Satan to persecute God's people (as opposed to the beast representing a ***political*** institution that persecuted God's people that we looked at last week).
- Arguably, as we look over the history of the church, while Christians have met their share of persecution from secular authorities, it would seem that ***perhaps*** the ***majority*** of Christian persecution comes from religious authorities (the Jews in the early church; Roman Catholicism in the Middle Ages; Islam in recent times)
- To the extent that ***you*** have experienced what you would see as Christian persecution in your own ***personal*** life, would you say the ***majority*** of it came from ***religious*** authorities or ***secular*** authorities?

Class Discussion Time

- In our text today we encountered a passage where the most straight-forward reading seemed to describe events for which we have no historical verification.
- In such a case, I pointed out we basically have two interpretive choices:
  - Either we assume the seemingly straight-forward reading of this text is true – but (surprisingly) a record of these acts just never made it into the history books.
  - Or we can look for another less obvious, but legitimate way of interpreting this text that fits with the historical information that we do have.
- In the case of the texts that we looked at ***today***, having to do with Jewish priests calling down fire from heaven and demanding that the Jews literally bow down to idols – which of the above interpretive choices do you lean towards?