Satan’s Allies

Revelation 13:11-18

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Natural Divisions** | * Revelation 13:11-12 A beast from the earth appeared, resembling a lamb, but speaking like a dragon, and he validated the beast from the sea, causing the inhabitants of the earth to worship the beast. * Revelation 13:13-15 The beast from the land performed apparent miracles, causing people to worship the image of the beast from the sea. * Revelation 13:16-18 The beast from the land forced everyone to receive the mark of the beast before they could buy or sell, and the number of the beast is 666. |
| **Summary Sentence** | The beast from the earth will appear as a false spiritual leader who will validate the beast from the sea by performing apparent miracles, by persuading people to worship the image of the beast, and by forcing them to receive the mark of the beast—666. |
| **Central Idea** | Satan’s allies are anti-Christian governments and philosophies |

Finally, in our study of Revelation, we’ve come to that intriguing number—666. *“The number of the beast is man’s number. His number is 666.”* How are we to understand that number—666?

Over the course of the church age, there’s been a lot of speculation about who might be identified as having that number. Many have looked to the ancient Hebrew practice of gematria to determine who or what might have that number.

Let me explain how gematria works. Gematria is the practice of assigning numbers to letters of the alphabet, and then you can encode a word or a phrase by adding up the corresponding numbers.

Because of the widespread practice of using gematria in the first century, many readers of Revelation 13 have applied this technique to try to determine who or what the beast might be. But there’s a huge problem: there are many, many names, both ancient and modern that can be reduced to the number 666.

For example, when you take the name Nero and add the title Caesar, you get Neron Kaisar, and when you translate that into Hebrew, it yields 666. So one solution to the puzzle is Nero. Another solution is to add up the numerical values of the initials of all the Roman emperors’ names from Julius to Vespasian, and that comes to 666. If you add the emperor Domitian’s five titles to his name, that combination yields 666. Another name associated with 666 is the Roman general Titus, whose armies destroyed the city of Jerusalem in 70 A.D..

If we move forward to the 20th century, we find that the names of Josef Stalin and also Adolf Hitler have been calculated to equal 666. In the eighties, some of the dignitaries whose names could be calculated as 666 were Mikhail Gorbachev, Ronald Reagan, and Henry Kissinger. In the nineties, it was discovered that William Jefferson Clinton, Hillary Rodham Clinton, Bill Gates, and Prince Charles all had names that could be represented as 666. Even Barney the cute purple dinosaur has the number 666.

As I studied for this lecture, I went online to see who the current candidates for 666 are. You won’t be surprised; I found George W. Bush, Barack Obama, and Prince William.

We love puzzles; we love to apply our good minds to solving problems—but in my opinion, I don’t think that the number 666 was given to us as a puzzle to solve or a message to decode.

So this morning, let’s step back from that decoding mindset and let’s consider chapter 13 in terms of the overall message that’s being developed in this section.

(Pause) Consider again the situation at the time the book of Revelation was written. In many parts of the Roman Empire, Christians were suffering. Christians were experiencing great tribulation.

In your Bible, when you see the word *tribulation*—when you see the word *suffering (*or in the NIV *distress* or *hardship* or *trouble)*—they are the same Greek word - qlipsis.

In the first century, Christians were suffering. Christians were experiencing great tribulation.

Just consider some of the things that the Christians in the first century had experienced

* Christians of the first century had seen the city of Rome burn uncontrollably for five days.
* Christians were falsely accused of starting that fire, and Nero began rounding up Christians and executing them with gruesome and extreme cruelty.
* Christians saw the siege and destruction of the city of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.
* There had been many devastating earthquakes in the province of Asia.
* The eruption of Vesuvius had wiped out Pompeii and created clouds of soot and ash that spread over a large area
* There had been a 5-year famine just prior to the writing of the book of Revelation.
* Christians were hated; they were thought to be enemies of the state. The emperor Domitian had instigated intense persecution against Christians throughout the Roman Empire.

It was in this day of persecution and suffering that the apostle John received the vision that has been given to us in the book of Revelation. Christians in the first century were disheartened because of the dangers they faced and the because of the ongoing hardships in their lives.

Just as they were disheartened in the first century, many Christians today are disheartened—especially those living under totalitarian regimes. Just as the book of Revelation was meant to bring comfort to Christians suffering in the first century; even so, this book is meant to bring comfort to us as we live our lives in a world where evil is still prevalent.

Back in chapter 12 we saw a dramatic portrayal of the unseen spiritual realities that have influenced the course of history during the church age What we saw in Revelation chapter 12 is that it had been Satan’s plan to destroy Jesus at the time of His birth, but Satan was unable to do so. And so Jesus was born. Jesus lived a life of perfect obedience to God, and when Jesus was crucified, His death paid the penalty for the sins of mankind, and so those of us who are united with Christ by God’s grace through faith are now free from bondage to sin and death. We are free from bondage to Satan’s authority. Satan’s power was broken at the cross.

But Revelation 12 tells us that although Satan’s power was broken at the cross. Satan continues to oppose God’s plan and God’s people. Revelation 12 says that Satan *“wages war against those who hold to testimony of Jesus.”* Satan is our adversary. And yet, Revelation 12 also says that God is protecting His people. God has His people in a place of spiritual refuge where they are out of Satan’s reach.

So how does Satan manifest his hostility toward believers? What is Satan’s strategy to oppose God’s plan and God’s people? Satan is a spiritual being; we can’t see him. How does Satan operate within this physical, material world?

Revelation 13 answers that question. Open your Bibles to Revelation 13.

In Revelation 13, as John recounts his vision, he describes Satan as an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on his heads. The dragon stood on the shore of the sea, and from the sea there emerged a beast—a beast that would be empowered and influenced by Satan.

This beast from the sea had many heads and horns and crowns. We understand from our study last week that the image of horns and crowns signifies governments. It symbolizes rulers of nations and world empires. The beast from the sea represents governments opposed to God.

We saw that the beast appeared to be a composite of the beasts that appeared to Daniel in Daniel chapter 7. And so we concluded that this beast from the sea represents human governments down through the centuries that have rejected the authority of God. The beast from the sea represents all world political powers throughout history that have oppressed and have persecuted God’s people.

And so, when we see Christians persecuted today in Afghanistan, in China, in eastern Europe—what we are seeing is the ongoing war against God’s people inspired by Satan and expressing itself in the evil actions of oppressive regimes. In this present age, between the resurrection of Christ and His future return, the dragon uses earthly political authority to persecute God’s people and to oppose God’s values.

Now in chapter 13 we see another beast, and this one is rising from the earth.

Look at verses 11-12. *“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.”*

This beast also is an ally of Satan. The first thing we notice about this beast is that in some sense he resembles a lamb. He does have horns, but he has horns like a lamb. He has power of a sort, but he seems more gentle and harmless. His appearance is as non-threatening as a lamb, but his speech is like the speech of a dragon. He speaks as a minister of Satan. He speaks deception; he speaks heresy; he shapes the thinking of the world. His purpose is to foster allegiance to the authority of the first beast.

Later in the book of Revelation, this second beast will be called *“the false prophet,”* and clearly he offers a false religion. But what this beast brings may not be obvious as being a religion. It might be better to say that he brings a false, Satan-inspired ideology. It may appear as a false religion, centered around a false god; or it may be a secular worldview—a godless philosophy—a false set of cultural values.

This beast from the land—this second beast—represents the false religions and godless philosophies of this world. This beast represents cultural worldviews that are scornful of God. It represents all forms of idolatry; it represents false teachers within the church—false teachers who attempt to deceive God’s people. The presence of this beast becomes evident in the culture-shaping institutions of a nation. Today we would see evidence of this beast in the worldview presented in newscasts, in the entertainment media, in education, in art, and in the shared values of a culture.

**Throughout the church age, Christians will face opposition from anti-Christian belief systems**.

Whereas the first beast is a beast of power; the second beast is a beast of persuasion. The first beast wields the power of the state. The second beast wields the power of the mind. The first beast uses the power of the state to punish. The second beast uses the power of deception to mislead. These two allies of Satan work hand-in-hand in their attempts to hinder the plan of God and to oppose the people of God.

And so, when you see a nation’s government become antagonistic towards Christianity, you will *also* see that the culture-shaping institutions of that nation will provide philosophical support for that nation’s oppressive acts. We see the operation of these beasts when there develops an alliance between governmental authorities and cultural beliefs to enable acts that are hostile toward God's people and scornful of God Himself.

For instance, when Hitler came to power and began to devise his plan of *“racial hygiene”* whereby he would exterminate Jews and those deemed to be genetically inferior, his rationale in doing that was affirmed by the philosophical underpinnings promoted by Malthus and Darwin and Hegel. Hitler’s evil plans dovetailed with worldviews that were popular in Europe in that day. In the interest of promoting social Darwinism—social evolution—there was thinking in that day that it would be a *good* thing to *improve* mankind by eliminating weaker members and inferior genetic lines. And so, in that day, in that culture, Hitler’s plan didn’t seem as despicable as it is to us today.

The influence and operation of second beast was at work supporting the policies inspired by the first beast. And Revelation 13 tells us that **throughout the church age, Christians will face opposition from anti-Christian belief systems**.

Now look at verses 13-14. *“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 the earth.”*

A little over a year ago my sweet brother gave me a Kindle, and I have really enjoyed reading books on my Kindle. At Amazon.com you can find a list that updated hourly of 100 free books that you can download to your Kindle. So I check that list often. That list represents the sorts of books that are popular in our culture today. There are different genres. There are mysteries and romances and children’s books—but there are also lots of books of a newly popular genre—books about the paranormal—about psychics and witches and ghosts. Apparently lots of people today enjoy books about the paranormal. Why is that?

People are looking for security; they’re looking for a savior. People are looking for a greater power that will operate on their behalf. People are looking to be connected to something that is powerful enough to protect them from danger. They’re looking for … vampires. And so we have the Twilight series, in which a young girl receives devoted attention and protection from a powerful vampire. He watches over her while she sleeps. (Isn’t that creepy?)

And so, we can see that a person who demonstrates paranormal or supernatural power will have great appeal for those who are unwary.

We see from Revelation 13, verse 13, that this beast is able to validate his false religion or his false philosophy by convincing non-Christians that his worldview—his false religion—is from God. He appears to be able to make fire come down from heaven. Usually, in the Bible, fire from heaven represents the presence of God and often the judgment of God. So this beast may convince his followers that God is with him; that God has supported him. He may be able to produce what appear to be supernatural effects. He will be believable; he will be credible to those who do not know Christ.

As we look down the course of history from the time of Christ’s resurrection until the present day, we can see examples of both the beast from the sea—anti-Christian governments—and the beast from the land—anti-Christian religions. We can see them both at work, standing in opposition to the people of God throughout the church age. Christians in various places and at various times had to face opposition from these two allies of Satan.

This vision of the two beasts was absolutely relevant to Christians in the first century who *had* suffered gruesome persecution at the hands of Nero, and who were now suffering intense persecution under the emperor Domitian.

In our day, in the 21st century, we see these beasts in operation in several anti-Christian governments in Muslim countries. For instance, in Afghanistan, most of the provincial governors (that’s the state) rule in league with the Taliban (the false religion). In other Muslim countries, the governments enforce civil law, but they also impose Sharia law (a false religion).

And so, these beasts are a trans-historical reality. These beasts picture for us how Satan opposes God’s people in a world that is still fallen—a world that is still not the way it’s supposed to be.

But there’s more. Revelation 13 appears to be speaking not only of these ongoing realities of Satan’s influence, but it also reveals that at the end of the age, just before the return of Christ, there’s going to be a final and ultimate manifestation of these two beasts. We popularly refer to this future, final manifestation of the first beast as the Antichrist. The Bible refers to the future, final manifestation of the second beast as the *“false prophet”*.

The apostle Paul describes this in 2 Thessalonians 2:3-10. This is what the Bible says in 2 Thessalonians 2:3-10. *“Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God.* …Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? And you know what is restraining him now so that he may be revealed in his time. … *For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work. Only he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming. The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved.”*

This future man of lawlessness, whom we refer to as Antichrist, is the final instance of the first beast. This antichrist will be supported by the final occurrence of the second beast—*the false prophet*. Although these future human instruments of Satan *will* come to power one day, their authority will last only for a short time, and we are reassured that Jesus will destroy these beasts with breath of His mouth when He returns.

Now look at verses 16-17. *“Also this beast 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.”*

We have already seen in Revelation chapter 7, that God has placed a seal on the foreheads of those who belong to God. In our study of chapter 7 we saw that this seal is the Holy Spirit. In Ephesians 1:13, Paul says, *“…when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in Christ, you were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit.”* In Ephesians 4:30, the Bible says that believers have been sealed by the Holy Spirit for the day of redemption.

In the first-century, a slave was branded with a mark that signified who owned him. The mark meant that the slave belonged to his master. The expression *“to receive the mark”* of someone meant that you belong to someone; you serve someone, or worship someone.

To receive the mark of the beast is to support and affirm the anti-God works and beliefs of the beast. To receive the mark of the beast is to embrace an anti-Christian worldview and to live an anti-Christian lifestyle.

We have a similar contemporary expression that some of us have heard at times in our American culture. You send your brilliant godly son off to Harvard, and a year later he’s decided he’s an atheist. And we would say, he went to Harvard, and he drank the Kool-Aid.

Aside: When we say that someone is “drinking the Kool-Aid”, we mean that that person has embraced a false belief system and that they intend to follow that false belief system in the face of facts to the contrary. That’s what we mean when we say that someone is *“drinking the Kool-Aid”*, and it has nothing whatsoever to do with Kool-Aid.

In the same way—receiving the mark of the beast doesn’t have anything to do with tattoos or computer chip implants or anything like that. To receive the mark of the beast is to reject Christianity and embrace the anti-Christian worldview that will be prevalent in that day.

So why does it talk about the mark being on the forehead or right hand? The forehead represents the way you think; the right hand represents what you do. You have the mark of the beast when you embrace the values and live in service to an anti-Christian society.

And Revelation speaks of a future day when the authority of the beast will be so great that that future anti-Christian culture will require a person’s allegiance and service in order to engage in buying and selling in the marketplace.

The purpose of the dramatic images we’ve seen in chapters 12-13 is to alert us as Christians to keep the life decisions we make in perspective. We may have to live in a hostile culture, but our earthly struggles are trivial in light of out eternal future.

Now look at verse 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.”*

We’ve already seen that if you use the process of gematria, there are many, many letter combinations that will map to 666. In fact, the Greek word for *beast* maps to 666. So I don’t believe that gematria is really helpful to us.

Another approach to understanding 666 is to recognize that John frequently uses numbers figuratively. We’ve seen before that in the book of Revelation, numbers may have symbolic significance. The number *seven* is the number of completeness; it’s a number that represents *perfection* and *blessing*. And so, the number of God is the number *seven*. In the Old Testament, the day of worship—God’s day—was the *seventh* day of the week, the Sabbath.

The number *six* is one less than *seven*. It falls *short* of seven. Six is always less than seven. It’s the number that misses the mark. It is the number of *imperfection*. It’s the number that represents sin.

Whereas the number *seven* symbolizes perfection and completeness and blessing; the number six is incomplete; six is imperfect; six falls short of blessing. Six is said to be *man’s* number, because man was created on the sixth day. Just as 777 would connote holy, holy, holy; 666 signifies man, man, man.

The beast exalts man; he does not exalt God. This is how we are to recognize the activity and philosophy of the beast. This is how we are to be on guard against deception and heresy in the church. Whatever decreases the sovereignty and the majesty of God and exalts the power and accomplishments of man—that is the ugly heresy of the beast.

I don’t know what 666 means, but I do know that we are safe and we are blessed when hold fast to our faith and continue to live in obedience to God, whatever the circumstances. That’s all we are called to do. We do not carry the mark of the beast. It’s not just that we’ve been *marked* by the Spirit of God; we’ve been *sealed* by the Spirit of God. Nothing can snatch us out of God’s hand. We have nothing to fear; God is in control.