



Revelation 13

INTRODUCTION

I heard about a young boy who used to go to the beach in North Carolina. They had a great time with grandma and grandpa in their beach house. One day, the boy's grandma warned him about a dangerous undercurrent at the ocean. She told him to be careful even though he was a good swimmer and to stay close to the shore.

Recently, as I read Revelation 13, I couldn't shake the image of that warning. The text reveals an unseen spiritual battle pulling us away from heavenly thinking. It's like an undercurrent trying to take us out to sea, away from the Lord. This chapter introduces three beasts opposing the good things God is doing – Satan the dragon, and the beasts of the sea and the earth.

The message for us is one of caution and encouragement. Despite the satanic onslaught, God's people must persevere in faith, resisting the pull of persecution and deception. The chapter unfolds in two sections, emphasizing the need to stay strong and faithful to the true God.

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SECTION #1: THE BEAST FROM THE SEA (13:1-10)

13:1-2

This first creature emerges from the sea. To a Jewish person receiving this vision and to Jewish listeners, it's important to grasp that the sea symbolized chaos, danger, and the dwelling place of evil (Isaiah 57:20). So, whatever this creature is, John would have seen it as unsafe and inhumane, coming from a place of darkness. The mention of a beast raises the question of its connection to the Old Testament.

Likely, it refers to Daniel 7 where four beasts—a lion, a bear, a leopard, and a terrifying fourth beast—symbolize great empires (Daniel 7:1-28). In Daniel's time, these represented Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and a future empire, likely the Roman Empire. These rulers are described as beastly because they misuse their power, contrary to God's intended purpose for governments (Rom. 13:1-8).

As John sees this beast, it seems to be a combination of the beasts in Daniel's vision, but it's not a distant threat – it's a **current** danger preying on the citizens it controls. Symbolically, the beast has ten horns signifying complete power, seven heads representing comprehensive authority, and ten diadems suggesting kingly glory.

From John's perspective, this beast likely represents **Rome**—the oppressive empire he was living under, leading to his exile on Patmos. Rome's rulers, like the Caesars, claimed divine titles, contributing to their blasphemous image. However, it's essential to see that this beast isn't confined to first-century Rome but likely symbolizes every manifestation of evil in governments throughout history. The key observation is that the beast serves Satan, receiving power, throne, and authority from the dragon (Revelation 13:2). This aligns with the broader biblical context where Satan operates within God's sovereign control, working evil purposes for a limited time, while God uses it for good (Genesis 50:20, Job 1:12, Job 2:6).

13:3

Verse 3 introduces one of the more controversial parts of the book of Revelation. It describes a head of the beast seeming to have a mortal wound. However, the wound is healed and the whole earth marvels as they follow the beast. T

(Note: The word used for "wound" appears 11 times in Revelation—often indicating God's affliction or judgment.)

This theme of God slaying the dragon and the beast finds roots in Genesis 3:15, where the promised offspring crushes the serpent's head. Isaiah 27 prophesies the Lord punishing Leviathan, a sea beast, and slaying the dragon in the sea (Genesis 3:15, Isaiah 27:1).

Job also depicts God slaying two beasts, providing comfort to Job terrorized by Satan's attacks (Job 40:15-24, Job 41:1-34). In Revelation, God defeats the beast's head, but its wound seems to be healed. Some interpret this as Jesus defeating the beast, dragon, and satanic opposition through the crucifixion and resurrection. However, confusion remains in the ongoing struggles of the world.

Questions arise about the continued challenges if Jesus has won. Some speculate whether the healed head of the beast refers to a future **Antichrist** figure. While there are biblical references to a man of lawlessness in 2 Thessalonians (2:3), **we would do well, it seems, not to focus solely on identifying a specific person.** Rather, we would do well to recognize the broader existence of Antichrists – those embodying opposition to God's values and running oppressive and deceptive

systems. Jesus' warning to the church at Ephesus (Rev. 2:1-7) emphasizes that, while an Antichrist is coming, many "antichrists" are already present, requiring constant vigilance from the church against oppression and deception (1 John 2:18).

13:4

Here we see the world's response. They worship Satan and the beast instead of worshipping the Lord. They say things about the beast that should only be said about God, proclaiming, "Who is like the beast, and who can fight against it?" This stands in direct contradiction to the song of Moses, where Israel, after the Red Sea crossing, praised the Lord, saying, "Who is like You, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like You, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders?" (Exodus 15:11).

The beast manipulates power to draw people into worship, redirecting their allegiance from God to the dragon and himself. Despite Satan's subtle deception, John emphasizes the deceitful nature of the world system and Satan's craftiness.

While many may not openly claim to worship Satan, yet they unknowingly follow his ways. Satan's trick is to make people adopt his ways without recognizing it, presenting it as their own idea aligned with their "true selves."

It's crucial to recognize the power of the beast, which is most evident in the world's declaration of its invincibility. The statement "who is like the beast, who can fight against it?" is blasphemous. However, it reflects the pervasive influence of worldly systems. Followers of Jesus experience a constant pull away from Him, with various messages and ideologies opposing their faith.

Understanding this power emphasizes the need for Christ, who died for our sins, rose from the dead, and gives us his Holy Spirit to empower us against these satanic, worldly systems. We followers of Jesus can't resist these forces on our own. We require Christ's strength obtained through faith and mutual support within the church. This helps each other resist the "gravitational pull" of the world system.

13:5-6

In verse 5, this beast proclaims proud and blasphemous words for 42 months. This is the fifth time we've seen a reference to this period of time in Revelation. It's been referred to as "time, times, and half a time, 1260 days, 42 months." And in each instance, I think this refers to a time of tribulation for God's people—as foretold in Daniel 9:27—that begins at the resurrection and will conclude at the return of Christ.

This beast has power to speak blasphemous things from the resurrection until the return. Notice also here that the beast makes war against God's name (Rev. 13:6) by uttering blasphemies against God's name and dwelling. The beast hates God. He detests his majesty. He abhors the beauty of his holiness. And he does everything that he can do to twist and to distort and to confuse how people think about him, called here blasphemy, lying about God (violates the 3rd commandment – Exo. 20)

13:7-8

In verse 7, it is mentioned that the beast is given the power to make war against the saints and overcome them. This beast—representing the world's satanic system—opposes God and aims to suppress faith by conquering the saints. It's important to note that despite these challenges, believers

find assurance in Christ, who is the ultimate conqueror (Revelation 3:21). The ongoing spiritual warfare is a constant pull for souls, but our Savior ensures our security.

The beast also demands worship in place of God with authority granted over people from every tribe, language, and nation. Many are deceived by the satanic propaganda, highlighting the ongoing war for souls. It's crucial to recognize this struggle while acknowledging that the Lord is currently saving people from diverse backgrounds (Revelation 7:9-10).

Moving to 13:8, we shouldn't overlook the significance of those whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb who was slain. This book, mentioned in various scriptures, including Exodus 32:32, Isaiah 4:3, Daniel 12:2, Luke 10:20, Philippians 4:3, and Revelation, signifies God's recording of names before the foundation of the world. While the mystery of this process remains known only to God, believers can find comfort in knowing that God's love extends from eternity past (Ephesians 1:4).

Our redemption by the blood of Christ is predestined, emphasizing the planned nature of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross (Eph. 1; Rom. 9, etc.). This historical event, far from being an accident, serves to display the glory of Christ, who suffered, died, and rose again for sinners (1 Peter 1:18-20). The central theme of history is the glorification of Jesus, providing hope for those who turn from sin and trust in him.

Worshipping the beast doesn't affect anyone's name because none of those in the Book of Life worship the beast. **Biblical election = eternal protection!** Praise the Lord!

As for those whose names are not in the Lamb's book of life, the mystery belongs to the Lord (Deuteronomy 29:29). Believers are called to respond to Jesus' voice and turn from sin and trust in him for salvation. The final judgment emphasizes personal accountability for one's actions, with salvation found in looking to Christ (Hebrews 3:7-8).

13:9-10

Here, God's revelation calls for a response, echoing the familiar words: "If anyone has an ear, let him hear" (Revelation 2:7). This command, previously given to the seven churches by Jesus, is reiterated for all churches. It is a message for those who will be saved and brought into the church—"let them hear."

The church must be attentive because there is a temptation to yield to the pressure of satanic groups, compromising faithfulness to King Jesus due to the threat of another king. The vision of the beast serves as a sobering reminder not to succumb to the bullying of the beast (Revelation 13:1-18). The church is urged to hear, receive, and prepare to resist. As we resist the beast, we must also be prepared to endure suffering for our Savior.

In verse 10, it echoes an allusion to Jeremiah 15:2, speaking of God's people suffering during a time of exile. As earthly exiles heading toward heaven, the Book of Revelation teaches us that persecution and even death may come.

Yet, we are called to trust, never bowing to the beast. The Lord's guidance is clear: a call for the endurance and faith of the saints. Persecution must be met with persevering faith against the fury of Satan. This word intends to stir faith, urging us to trust the Lord, knowing that he sees, knows, and cares for us amidst challenges. The church, even now, looks to Jesus, leans on fellow believers, and embraces the hope of our heavenly home until we see him face to face.

It's crucial to note that the Book of Revelation prepares and strengthens believers for suffering. Our hope lies not in being raptured out of tribulation but in being resurrected after persevering through it. God calls his church to endure by faith, trusting him through any tribulation, confident that he will hold us fast against the destructive sea beast that seeks to harm the church (Revelation 13:10).

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SECTION #2: THE BEAST FROM THE EARTH (13:11-18)

13:11

As we enter this next section, we encounter the **earth beast**, which engages in deception. Other names he has been called are: False Prophet or the beast's minister of propaganda.

Both the sea and earth beasts work together, causing some overlap in their actions. The earth beast, described in verse 16, compels everyone, regardless of status, to bear a mark on the right hand or forehead. This mark, associated with the name or number of the beast, becomes essential for buying and selling. Wisdom is urged to discern the number 666, linked to a man (Revelation 13:16-18).

John transitions from witnessing the sea beast causing destruction to observing another beast emerging from the earth in his vision. This land beast, reminiscent of Daniel chapter eight, has two horns like a lamb (Revelation 13:11). It also speaks for Satan, earning the additional title of the false prophet in later chapters (Revelation 16:13; 19:20). Known for deception, this beast deceives people into worshiping the first beast and supporting the oppressive world system, forming a unified allegiance to Satan. Despite appearing harmless like a lamb, it speaks with the deceptive voice of a dragon, leading people astray and making the first beast's claims seem credible (Revelation 13:11-15).

13:12-14

Now, in verse 12, the second beast exercises the authority of the first beast in its presence, compelling the earth and its inhabitants to worship the first beast whose mortal wound was healed (Revelation 13:12).

Verses 13-16 depict the second beast displaying miraculous powers on earth, deceiving people into worshiping the sea beast and its image. The focus is on the imagery of counterfeit imitation, a deceptive tactic employed by Satan to make his words appear true.

The false nature of this religious beast becomes evident as it performs miracles reminiscent of the works of Moses and Elijah (Revelation 11 – two witnesses). This false prophet acts as the satanic counterpart to the true witnesses of God, attempting to divert people from the genuine testimony of the church. In contrast to the true representatives of God in Revelation chapter 11, who perform signs of power by the Holy Spirit, this demonic representative performs counterfeit signs by Satan's power to dazzle and deceive people into following him. He's the sinister minister of propaganda!

This deceptive strategy aligns with Jesus' warning in Matthew 24 about false Christs and false prophets performing signs and wonders to lead astray even the elect (24:24). The second beast aims to cultivate a counterfeit church, luring people away from the worship of the true God.

The Corinthians were similarly cautioned by Paul in 2 Corinthians 11 about false apostles disguising themselves as apostles of Christ, with Satan himself disguising as an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:13-14). This warning is relevant to the Corinthians' susceptibility to trendy ideas and deceptive teachings.

Notably, the passage emphasizes that when God permits, Satan can perform miracles. This is illustrated by the reference to the magicians in Moses' time mimicking some of the plagues (Exodus 7:22; 8:7). The crucial lesson is to be guided not solely by what is seen but by what God says, as God's actions will never contradict his words. This underscores the importance of knowing and adhering to God's Word in the face of deceptive miracles performed by Satan and his agents.

13:15-16

In simpler terms, in verse 15, it talks about giving life to a beast's image, allowing it to speak and threatening those who don't worship it with death. This might be confusing, and people have different ideas about it. The main point is, if you don't bow down to this image, you're in danger, similar to a story in the Old Testament.

Also, the false prophet insists that people get a mark showing loyalty. So, as pressure mounts to worship the beast, it forms an unholy trinity. Satan, portrayed as the father of darkness, calls his seemingly slain son, the sea beast, who rises to prominence by the spirit of the age, leading people away from holiness. This contrasts with God, who calls for allegiance for a holy purpose.

In verse 16, the beast forces everyone, regardless of status, to bear a mark on their hand or forehead, making it impossible to buy or sell without it. It's a public allegiance requirement to live in society, and it's said to be the number 666, requiring wisdom to understand. The idea is, if you want to survive and be part of society, you must have this mark.

What is the "Mark of the Beast"?

Let's take another look at Revelation 13:16-18 and the concept of the "mark of the Beast." This topic sparks ongoing debates about the end times, contributing to heightened concerns that sometimes cast a negative light on the Christian community. Many people interpret the "mark" as a tangible symbol, such as a tattoo, chip implant, or some distinctive physical mark that identifies followers of the Beast. This perspective, often embraced by dispensational futurists, suggests that this mark, whether the "name of the beast" or the "number (666) of its name" (Rev. 13:17), will be forcibly imposed on people just before Christ's second coming. It's seen as a necessary means of identification for buying and selling during those crucial times.

However, this interpretation hinges on viewing Revelation as primarily describing events of the last generation before Christ's return. If we consider Revelation as portraying events throughout the entire history of the church, this interpretation loses its foundation. Revelation 7 offers an alternative perspective, suggesting that the "mark" of the Beast is a sinister imitation of the "seal" placed on the foreheads of God's people (Rev. 7:3-8; 14:1; cf. 22:4).

I don't believe the "mark of the Beast" is a physical mark on unbelievers' bodies, like a tattoo on their forehead or right hand. Throughout Revelation, Satan imitates what God does, creating evil counterparts to the Holy Trinity. For instance, just as Jesus dies and rises again, the Beast is portrayed similarly (Rev. 13:3).

The "mark" on unbelievers is a demonic imitation of the "seal" on believers' foreheads. Consider texts where God's people are "sealed" on their foreheads, symbolizing belonging and loyalty:

- Revelation 7:3: "Do not harm the earth until we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads."
- Revelation 9:4: "Those people who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads."
- Revelation 14:1: "144,000 who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads."
- Revelation 22:4: "His name will be on their foreheads."

No one suggests that Christians will literally have names tattooed on their foreheads. It's a symbolic representation of belonging to God. Similarly, the mark of the Beast signifies loyalty to him.

When the False Prophet causes non-Christians to have the mark of the Beast, it indicates their allegiance (Rev. 13:16-17). This mark mimics God's seal, emphasizing ownership and loyalty. Just as the name of Jesus on your forehead means loyalty to God, the mark of the Beast symbolizes allegiance to the Antichrist.

Some connect the "mark" to Jewish practices like *tephillim* or *phylacteries* (Exod. 13:9,16; Deut. 6:8; 11:18; Mt. 23:5). Others relate it to the emperor's seal on contracts or coins. It likely alludes to the state's political and economic approval for those complying with religious demands.

In essence, the mark is a demonic counterpart to the seal, symbolizing loyalty and ownership (Rev. 13:16-17). Just as the seal is symbolic, the mark represents loyalty and ownership, emphasizing ideological commitment on the forehead and practical manifestation on the hand.

Revelation 13:18: What about "666"?

The significance of the number 666 has confused people studying the Scriptures since John wrote Revelation 13:18. There are three main ideas about this issue.

1 - Chronological View

Some people have suggested that the number signifies the length of the beast's life or the duration of his kingdom. However, very few, if any, support this idea nowadays.

#2 - Historical View

According to this viewpoint, the number is thought to represent a historical power, kingdom, or individual. This interpretation is the most widely accepted and is based on an ancient practice known as Gematria. Gematria, derived from the Greek "geomatria" (which gave us the English word "geometry"), was a practice in both secular and religious (Jewish) circles to give each letter of the alphabet a number.

As an illustration, consider the English alphabet where the first 9 letters correspond to numbers 1 through 9 (A = 1; B = 2; C = 3; and so on), the next 9 letters represent numbers 10 through 90 (J = 10; K = 20; L = 30; and so forth). To express the number "23," one would write it as "KC" (K = 20 + C = 3 -- for our Kansas City).

Attempts have been made to identify the Beast of Revelation through various forms of Gematria. For instance, the name of Jesus is claimed to be 888, which is the sum of the Greek letters in the name Jesus (Iesous). Some have noted that if 777 represents completeness or perfection, then 888 would signify more than perfection, representing Jesus. Consequently, by this reasoning, 666 is considered to represent imperfection and the number of man (Rev. 13:18), symbolizing the Antichrist.

Using English letters, where A = 100, B = 101, C = 102, and so forth, some intriguing connections emerge. Consider Adolph Hitler:

H = 107, I = 108, T = 119, L = 111, E = 104, R = 117. When added together, the sum is 666!

Similarly, if we assign values such that A = 6, B = 12 (i.e., 6x2), C = 18 (i.e., 6x3), and so on, and apply this to the name of [Henry] Kissinger, Secretary of State under President Richard Nixon, the total also turns out to be 666. I mean, in my research, various individuals, including Benito Mussolini, Anwar Sadat, Yasser Arafat, Ayatollah Khomeini, King Juan Carlos of Spain, Pope John Paul II, Saddam Hussein, Mu'ammarr Gadhafi, Mikhail Gorbachev, Jimmy Carter, and certain U.S. Presidents, have been suggested as potential candidates for the Antichrist, even if their names do not add up to 666.

#3 - Symbolic View

In the book of Revelation, nearly all other numbers are considered symbolic, representing spiritual or theological realities. There is no indication that Gematria calculations are involved.

According to this interpretation, the number is symbolic and points to the beast as the embodiment of imperfect humanity. The triple "666" serve as a contrast to the divine sevens in Revelation, symbolizing incompleteness and imperfection. In this context, 777 is associated with deity, while 666 falls short in each digit.

In other words: 666 (three 6s) is a parody of the divine trinity of 777 (three 7s). Although the beast attempts to imitate God, Christ, and the prophetic Spirit of truth, he falls short of success.

Finding hidden precise meanings in numbers is not the way that numbers work in the rest of Revelation. Think about it: All throughout Revelation, you have this time and time again. You have first a picture and then a number.

—The church is symbolized with 24 elders (Rev. 4).

—Then the two witnesses (Rev. 11) and then the woman (Rev. 12).

—And then the church is given a number, 144,000 (Rev. 7)

—The church age is symbolized with pictures.

—You have the measured temple (Rev. 11:1-2)

—You have the witnesses being trampled (Rev. 11)

—You have the woman protected in the wilderness (Rev. 12).

—And then the church age is given a number. 42 months, 1,260 days, three and a half years.

Likewise, false religion here is given a picture. The beast from the earth. And then it's given a number, 666. Therefore, the number doesn't identify the Beast but describes his character, conveying not who he is but what he is like.

Remember: Revelation tells the story of the Devil trying to defeat the church. However, the church wins because it belongs to the Lord, who has already secured victory for us (Rev. 5:5; 17:14). The book guides us on how to conquer, triumph, and be overcomers instead of being overcome or defeated. Each letter to the seven churches ends with "to the one who conquers." Giving in to persecution, worldliness, or Devil's temptations leads to loss, but overcoming through trials and suffering results in victory (Rev. 21:6-7). This is the main idea of Revelation and where history is heading.

Bottom-line: The book of Revelation is not intended to drive us to charts--it's intended to drive us to Christ. *God wins!*

The point of "666," then, is not to figure out a specific person using numbers. Instead, it's about being aware of how Satan tries to harm the church through pressure, persecution, and deceptive tactics. Our actions and words show where our loyalty lies — either with the passing world system or the enduring kingdom being built by faith. It's not as exciting as decoding 666, but it's practical. Every word and action is a declaration of our allegiance to King Jesus--and that's what truly matters!

Revelation 13 Application

As we wrap up, let's highlight three key points from our discussion.

#1- Trust in what God says, not just in what you see. Many times in the Bible, people fell into deception by trusting appearances rather than God's words. We must be discerning, careful with the messages we encounter, whether from political or religious sources, avoiding the trap of cultural influence. Trusting God and obeying His Word is the most compassionate and relevant choice (Genesis 3:6; Proverbs 3:5-6).

#2 - Make your allegiance to Jesus evident. Despite societal pressures, stand firm in your faith. Refuse to conform to worldly expectations and proudly follow Jesus. Remember the promise of blessings for those who endure persecution for his name's sake (Daniel 3:16-18; Matthew 5:10-12).

#3 - Don't fear, for the end is near. Despite the intimidating nature of challenges, do not be afraid. Jesus has already overcome, and he will ultimately triumph. The destiny of those who deceive and oppose him is sealed. So, stay strong, as Jesus will return soon to overcome all obstacles (Revelation 19:20; Revelation 5:5; Revelation 22:12).

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Read Revelation chapter 13 two times, without referring to notes or commentaries, prior to answering the following questions.

1. Where does the first beast come from? The second beast? In light of Revelation 10:1-2, what can we say about the ability of these beasts to disrupt God's plan?

2. Consider the first beast. Look at Rev 12:3 and Genesis 3:14-15 as well as Daniel 7, especially verses 1-7, 17, 18, and 23-27. List the characteristics of this beast. What similarities are there between the beasts in Daniel 7 and this beast? What do the beasts in Daniel 7 represent? What, then, might this beast represent?
3. Who worships the first beast? Why? What is the relationship between the beast and the dragon?
4. What does this beast say? What does he do? What impact does this have on the saints? How can you tell that God is in control, even now?
5. Reflect on verse 10, and how it would speak to Christians through the ages.
6. Detail the characteristics of the second beast. What does it mean for the beast to look like a lamb, but to speak like a dragon? What other lambs appear in Revelation? What does this beast represent?
7. What is the relationship between the two beasts? Given your interpretation of the beasts, how do you understand this relationship?
8. The beast requires its subjects to get a mark on their foreheads or right hands. Look again at Rev 7:2-3. What do people have to choose between? What are the only two options? What are the consequences of refusing the sign of the beast? What are the implications for us today?
9. Look at verse 18 carefully. The NIV is particularly accurate here: "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." John tells the one with insight to calculate the number of the beast, man's number. Presumably the reader would then pause, waiting for people to do the calculations! Then he gives the answer. How is 7 used in Scripture, particularly in Revelation? How is 3 used? Why might 666 be an appropriate number for the beast, for man's number?