

Revelation
Lesson VIII
Revelation 13:1-18

The Allies of the Dragon

Introduction:

1. As the second half of the book of Revelation begins, one must be sure to get straight on the list of characters.
 - a. In Lesson VII, we identified the woman, her child, a dragon, and the remainder of woman's children.
 - b. In this study, we shall become acquainted with two additional characters of importance to our drama.
2. Two beasts, one from the sea and the other from the earth, come into view in chapter 13.
3. There can be no doubt of their evil character and identification with the dragon's cause.
4. Our responsibility in this study is to identify them more precisely and to understand their significance to the development of the story of the Apocalypse.

Body of Lesson:

I. The Beast from the Sea: Rev. 13:1-10

A. Deterred from his purpose to destroy Christ and/or the church, Satan has turned his energies to the destruction of the church by warring with individual children of God's Israel. Rev. 12:17

1. The oppressed saints of the first century must have appeared vulnerable and hopeless.
2. The dragon stands on the seaside to call forth his allies. Rev. 13:1a

B. The first beast arises out of the sea. Rev. 13:1

1. The dark and mysterious sea was often associated with evil in ancient times.
 - a. At Rev. 11:7 and 17:8, the beast is said to come from the abyss.
 - b. Both the abyss and the sea denote the same thing, i.e. the source of evil.
2. The appearance of this monster is terrifying. Rev. 13:2

C. This beast represents Imperial Rome as embodied in its emperors.

1. The "seven heads" are individual emperors of Rome. Rev. 17:9-10
2. The "ten horns" (with their diadems) are the various vassal rulers of kingdoms subject to Rome and through whom Rome's international power was exercised. Rev. 17:12
3. The "name(s) of blasphemy" upon the beast's seven heads signify the divine titles claimed by various emperors for themselves.

D. The beast has fierce traits like those of such vicious animals as the leopard, bear, and lion; these likenesses emphasize the ferocity and awful power of this enemy of Christianity. Rev. 13:2a

E. We are informed that this beast's power, throne, and authority come from the dragon. Rev. 13:2b

1. Satan is behind every evil opposition to the work of God in the world.
2. He operates through human agency.

F. The beast had a terrible wound on one of its heads, but had healed; men “wondered after the beast”. Rev. 13:3

1. The so-called Nero redivivus myth is at the root of this imagery.
2. Nero died by his own hand in AD 68, after the senate had condemned him to death.
3. The rumor circulated that he was not really dead and was forming an army in Parthia to come against Rome and punish the empire for its repudiation of him.
 - a. By the end of the first century, the notion that Nero was still alive had faded.
 - b. It was replaced by the belief that he would return from the dead to lead armies against Rome.
4. Rev. 17:11 seems to reflect this same background and presents a revival of Nero in the renewal of persecutions against the church.
 - a. Nero led a vicious persecution of the church after the great fire in Rome of AD 64.
 - b. “The whole earth wondered” at the frightening return of Neronean persecutions under the beast.

G. The beast appeared invincible and warred against the church successfully. Rev. 13:4-7

1. This was not the limited persecution of the saints under Nero.
2. This is a description of the world-wide persecution under Domitian; it was a revival of the tactics of Nero on an even grander scale than he had undertaken. Rev. 13:7

H. A reference to the cult of emperor worship begun under Domitian is found in Rev. 13:8.

1. Unregenerate mankind worships the beast.
2. Those whose names are found in the Lamb’s “book of life” do not compromise.

I. A moving admonition to endurance and faithfulness is found at Rev. 13:9-10.

1. Many Christians would suffer at the hands of the beast.
2. God’s justice will be seen in that those who have doled out persecutions (i.e. killed with the sword) will suffer the same fate (i.e. be killed with the sword). Cf. Matt. 23:52
3. God’s people entrust their destinies to him and await the divine vindication of their cause; this is their patience and faith.

II. The Beast from the Earth: Rev. 13:11-18

A. The second beast comes out of the earth and leads mankind in its worship of the first beast.

1. He has the appearance of a lamb, i.e. presents himself as a religious figure.

2. Yet he has the voice of a dragon, i.e. speaks lies and damning falsehoods which have their origin with Satan. Cf. John 8:44

B. The original readers of this book would have recognized this character immediately.

1. This is the body of priests which leads in and enforces emperor worship throughout the Roman empire.
2. This beast is also known as the “false prophet”. Cf. Rev. 16:13; 19:20

C. The means of encouraging men to worship the beast are indicated in verses 13-15.

1. False signs and lying wonders. Cf. 2 Thes. 2:9
2. Temples and images of the beast.
3. Persecution and threats of death against those who resisted emperor worship.
4. Economic and social pressures.

D. “The mark of the beast.” Rev. 13:16-18

1. No passage in Revelation has stimulated more discussion than this one.
2. Many attempt to decode 666 in order to arrive at the identification of a specific historical individual by means of gematria.
 - a. Nero Caesar rendered into Hebrew will yield the number 666.
 - b. Stauffer makes a case for the abbreviated form in Greek of the full Latin name and title of Domitian.
 - c. Guthrie says the key to interpreting this number was known to John’s original readers but was lost in subsequent history.
3. My opinion is that far too much has been made of the effort to attach 666 to a specific individual.
4. In chapter 7, a mark or seal was placed on the forehead of God’s people to identify them with him and to place them under his protection; in chapter 13, a mark or seal is placed on those who follow the emperor and look to him for protection.
 - a. The mark of Rev. 7 was non-literal and invisible to the human eyes.
 - b. This mark need not be thought of as different in nature.
5. John says 666 is the “number of a man” (ASV) or, simply, “man’s number” (NIV).
 - a. Six falls short of perfection (i.e. 7) so 666 is evil raised to its ultimate.
 - b. The mark on the followers of the beast signifies their arrogant trust in man and his own powers in opposition to God.

Conclusion:

1. The dragon (i.e. Satan) the beast (i.e. Imperial Rome personified in its emperors) and the false prophet (i.e. the cult of priests enforcing emperor worship) constitute a sort of “unholy trinity” to challenge the works of God.
2. As surely as God knows his own people (i.e. the mark of Rev. 7) he knows those who have given themselves over to arrogant defiance of the divine will (i.e. those with the number of the beast).

3. When the triumph of God's cause comes, all those with the wrong mark of identification will perish in their sinfulness.

READING ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT LESSON:

Read Rev. 14 and thrill to the vision of the Lamb given there. What city is signified by "Babylon" in this chapter? What is its fate? Why?