



REVELATION

FOLLOWING THE WAY OF THE LAMB

Study 12 *The Beastly Powers* Revelation 13

Dwelling in the Word

1. Prayerfully read through Revelation 13 and ask: 1) What words, phrases, or images stood out to you? 2) What does this say about what God desires to accomplish in you? 3) How could you respond to what God says in this passage?

Digging Deeper

1. In Revelation 12-13, John is describing a spiritual conflict with Satan and his beastly puppets that is going on now and will one day be fully brought to a head when they are ultimately defeated by God and the Lamb (see Rev 17-20). How might we expect to see this satanic influence at work in our world today?
2. What are some of the implications for saying that the Dragon's (i.e., Satan's) power is behind the Beast's power? If the temptations to accommodate with the Roman Empire are actually temptations to accommodate with Satan, how might this notion apply to present-day followers of Jesus?
3. With the Sea Beast (13:1-10), we get a picture of Satan's use and abuse of power, in contrast with God's use of power, especially as exemplified by the way of the Lamb. How do you see power used and abused today?
4. The Land Beast (13:11-18) functions as the "propaganda minister" for the first Beast and tries to manufacture consent and allegiance to the Sea Beast through deceptive images, ideologies, and worldviews. How are some ways Christ followers can discern their way through such deception?
5. In the OT, the Shema prayer in Deut 6:8 is meant to be a symbol of belonging and devoting all your actions (hands) and thoughts (forehead) to the one true God, much like the symbolic writing of Jesus's name on the foreheads of believers is in the book of Revelation (see 14:1; 7:13; 20:4; 22:4). In contrast, the mark of the Beast is a parody of the Shema (an "anti-Shema") that also reveals one's allegiance (Rev 13:16). How does this explanation of the "mark" make sense to your reading of Revelation? What does it mean to show allegiance only to God?
6. What popular interpretations of the beast or its number (666) have you heard? How do they compare with the view of using the literary device of gematria to identify the beast with the Roman emperor Nero, who was the epitome of evil for the early Christ followers? How do these different approaches to the number cultivate hope and/or fear?

For Groups

1. In this chapter we are presented with another awe-inspiring yet terrifying vision. Have you experienced a vivid dream or vision that you can still describe in detail? If you are comfortable sharing, start off your time together as a group sharing about some of the dreams and visions you have had.
2. This passage illustrates the inappropriate (or "beastly") use of power to dominate and control. The Beatitudes show us an alternative way of living into kingdom values. Read Matt 5:1-16 (or watch this clip of "The Chosen," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o5OnF3sgocY>). Reflect on what it would look like to live as people of the Beatitudes and how that contrasts to the images of power that we read in Revelation.
3. Close your time together with prayer. We see too many examples of the misuse of power and authority in our world and we know that following the way of the Lamb takes us on a different path. Take time to pray for our world leaders, places that are experiencing conflict, and for God's people around the world to be people of life and hope.

Living it Out

1. This passage vividly reflects John's belief that "the whole world is under the control of the evil one" (1John 5:19) and that everyone is faced with the stark choice between following the Way of the Lamb (and God) or the way of the Beast (and Satan). Most of the choices we make in life, however, are seldom that clear cut. How can we prepare ourselves to discern faithful choices in the face of this spiritual conflict? (see Ephesians 6:10-18)



THE BEASTLY POWERS

Revelation 13
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THE BEASTLY POWERS

Paul talks about Satan as “the god of this age” (2Cor 4:4).

In John’s gospel, Satan is referred to as “the prince/ruler of this world” (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11).

“We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one” (1John 5:19; cf. John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11).

THE BEASTLY POWERS

Chapter 12 introduces a series of Seven Signs (12:1-15:4) that detail how God is going to judge “those who destroy the earth” (11:18).

We’ve already been introduced to the Dragon (a.k.a. Satan), and now in chapter 13 we have a tale of two Beasts.

THE BEASTLY POWERS

An “Unholy Trinity”

- The Dragon/Satan (12:1-13:1).
- The Sea Beast (13:1-10).
- The Land Beast/False Prophet (13:11-18).



THE BEASTLY POWERS

- A. The Dragon (Satan) thrown from heaven to earth (12).
- B. Sea Beast and the Land Beast/False Prophet conquer (13).
 - C. The Harlot rides on the Sea Beast (17).
 - C. The Harlot destroyed by Sea Beast (17-18).
- B. Sea Beast and Land Beast/False Prophet conquered and thrown into the lake of fire (19).
- A. The Dragon (Satan) thrown into the lake of fire (20).



THE BEASTLY POWERS

These beasts are a mosaic of OT images (Job 40-41; Daniel 7:1-14).

In the OT, they represent primeval evil forces of chaos that oppose God and seek to destroy and undo God's good creation.

They are embodied in a series of evil empires that constantly seek to oppress God's people.



THE SEA BEAST (13:1-10)

- “And I saw a Beast coming out of the sea” (13:1).
- Recalls features of the ancient chaos monster Leviathan (Isa 27:1; Ps 74:14; Job 41:1-33).
 - A horrific mash up of all four creatures in Daniel's apocalyptic nightmare (Dan 7:1-7).
 - This composite picture of evil is identified with the Roman Empire.



THE SEA BEAST (13:1-10)

Represents the imperial power of Rome, as exemplified by the excesses of Nero Ceasar.

- Alludes to the Nero *redivivus* legend (13:3).
- The “fatal wound” (σφαζω *spazo*; cf. 5:6, 9, 13; 13:8), suggests the Beast is a demonic imitation of Christ.
- An anti-Christ figure, indeed the paradigm of such tyrants.



THE SEA BEAST (13:1-10)

The Sea Beast is all about POWER.

- His authority is given by the Dragon (13:2).
- Revelation identifies the Beast with the imperial power of Rome.
- Before Rome, it was manifested in ancient Egypt, Babylon, Persia, and has been (and will be) manifested in other human kingdoms since.



THE SEA BEAST (13:1-10)

“Authority Given” (13:2, 4, 5, 7).

- The series of passive verbs suggests the Sea Beast’s power and authority came from Satan (13:2).
- But this authority is ultimately limited by God to “42 months” (= three and a half years = 1,260 days; cf. 11:2) which is the prescribed duration of the tribulation (the symbol of the church age, between Pentecost and Parousia).



THE SEA BEAST (13:1-10)

“Whoever has ears, let them hear...” (13:9).

- A call to hear the truth about the nature of evil and the abuse of power.
- A warning to followers of the Lamb that what may come for them (captivity and death), and a call for patient endurance and faithfulness (13:10).



THE LAND BEAST (13:11-18)

“And I saw another Beast coming up out of the earth. It had two horns like a lamb, but it spoke like a dragon” (13:11).

- May allude to the OT land beast Behemoth (Job 40:15); or to Daniel’s vision of the ram with horns (Dan 8); or could again be a parody of the Lamb.
- While it may look like a lamb, it speaks like a dragon.



THE LAND BEAST (13:11-18)

The Land Beast is all about PROPAGANDA.

- Authority comes from the Sea Beast (13:12).
- Singular aim is to make “the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast” (13:12).
- Its power is deception (13:14) in the form of spurious signs and miracles (13:13, 15).
- This Land Beast symbolizes the imperial cult.



THE LAND BEAST (13:11-18)

It makes all who worship the Sea Beast receive its mark.

“Also [the Land 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 who does not have the mark, that is, the name of the beast or the number of its name. This calls for wisdom: let anyone with understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a person. Its number is 666” (13:16-18, NRSV).



THE LAND BEAST (13:11-18)

The “mark” is symbolic of identity and belonging.

- Analogy may be to an imperial stamp used on commercial documents or the impression of the Emperor’s head on coins.
- Those who receive the mark of the Beast belong to him (13:16-17; 14:11), while those who follow the Lamb are also marked with his name (14:1; 7:13; 20:4; 22:4).



THE NUMBER OF THE BEAST

The number of the Beast is given as “666” (13:18).

- While the number is symbolic (if 7 is perfection, 6 is just short of perfection, i.e., the number of incompleteness and chaos), it’s not *just* symbolic.
- The readers are asked to “calculate the number of the beast” which indicates it also has a special “gematric” meaning.

Gematria is the practice of assigning numerical values to letters of the alphabet, and was a regular practice in the Greco-Roman world.

Hebrew Letters

1 = א	5 = ה	9 = ט	40 = מ	80 = ש	300 = ש
2 = ב	6 = ו	10 = י	50 = נ	90 = צ	400 = ת
3 = ג	7 = ז	20 = כ	60 = פ	100 = ק	
4 = ד	8 = ח	30 = ל	70 = ע	200 = ק	

Greek Letters

Α α = 1	Ϝ ϝ = 6	Κ κ = 20	Ο ο = 70	Τ τ = 300	Ω ω = 800
Β β = 2	Ζ ζ = 7	Λ λ = 30	Π π = 80	Υ υ = 400	
Γ γ = 3	Η η = 8	Μ μ = 40	Ϟ ϟ = 90	Φ φ = 500	
Δ δ = 4	Θ θ = 9	Ν ν = 50	Ρ ρ = 100	Χ χ = 600	
Ε ε = 5	Ι ι = 10	Ξ ξ = 60	Σ σ = 200	Ψ ψ = 700	

THE NUMBER OF THE BEAST

φιλω ἥς ἀριθμὸ[σ] ψλα, ‘I love her whose number is 731’ (Smyrna graffito).



Φιλω ης αριθμος φμε, ‘I love her whose number is 545’ (Pompeii graffito).

φιλω ἥς ἀριθμὸς τλα, ‘I love her whose number is 331’ (Tyler’s graffito!)

THE NUMBER OF THE BEAST

“John is using a literary or rhetorical device that he shared in common with his audience. The human name represented by the number 666 must have been known to at least some of his audience. It was not the purpose of this material to create a conundrum that the church would puzzle over for 2,000 years” (Ben Witherington, *Revelation*, 177).



THE NUMBER OF THE BEAST

Most common explanation is that the number 666 refers to Nero Caesar.

נרון קסר = *nerōn kesar* (Nero Caesar)



nun (50) + *resh* (200) + *vav* (6) + *nun* (50)
qof (100) + *samekh* (60) + *resh* (200)

 = 666



THE NUMBER OF THE BEAST

An anti-*Shema* that marks one's identity and full allegiance.

- The *Shema* is a symbol of devoting all your actions (hands) and thoughts (forehead) to the one true God (Deut 6:8).
- While the mark of the Beast is a parody of the *Shema* (anti-*Shema*) that also reveals one's allegiance (Rev 13:16).



UNDERSTANDING EMPIRE

Most early Christ followers would have been served well enough by the Roman Empire.

Paul recognizes that the “governing authorities” are established by God (Romans 13:1-8).

But, when it goes beyond its legitimate mandate by acting in “Beastly” ways... it becomes an Empire that rules with violence, demands idolatrous worship, and usurps allegiance that belongs only to God.



UNMASKING EMPIRE

As followers of the Lamb, we need to recognize and **unmask** systemic evil, the “principalities and powers,” including the idol of nationalism and other corporate sins (Ephesians 6:12; 5:11).

- Hold allegiance to political entities lightly.
- Our primary allegiance is to Christ and to the trans-national Kingdom of God.



RESISTING EMPIRE

The book of Daniel serves as a model of **resistance** in its day (Dan 1, 3, 6), as does the book of Revelation.

- Beastly powers can't be beaten by violence or the sword, but by “the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God” (Eph 6:17); i.e., the sword that comes from Jesus' mouth (Rev 1:16; 19:15).
- Our victory is found laying down power and persevering in following the example of Jesus, the Lamb of God.



FOLLOWING THE WAY OF THE LAMB

For John, these were seen as **mutually exclusive** options:

- You either worship and follow the Way of the Lamb (and God), or you worship and follow the way of the Sea Beast (and Satan).