

## **Apocalypse Now: Session Three**

### *The Bad Guys: What Does Revelation Tell Us About Evil?*

*I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was full of blasphemous names, and it had seven heads and ten horns. The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and jewels and pearls, holding in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the impurities of her sexual immorality. And on her forehead was written a name of mystery: "Babylon the great, mother of prostitutes and of earth's abominations." And I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of the martyrs of Jesus.*

- Rev 17:3-6

### **The Dragon: Satan**

*And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads seven diadems. – Rev 12:3*

- The most common title used to describe Satan in the book: *drakōn*
  - o "Serpent" 4x
  - o "Devil" 5x
  - o "Satan" 8x
  - o "Dragon" 13x
- In the Bible, dragon's don't usually fly and breathe fire, but are usually associated with the sea (Leviathan, Rahab, and the *Tannîn*)—in contemporary mythology, they are the prototypical "chaos monsters" that are always seeking to unravel the order of creation.
  - o "In that day the LORD with his hard and great and strong sword will punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent, Leviathan the twisting serpent, and he will slay the dragon that is in the sea." – Isa 27:1 (see also Ps 74:13-14; Ez 29:3; 32:2; Isa 51:9; Job 41)
- After chapter 12, the dragon becomes the animating energy behind all other enemies.
  - o Note the connection between 12:17 and 13:1 and the "sea".

### **The First Beast: Fallen Government**

*And I saw a beast rising out of the sea, with ten horns and seven heads, with ten diadems on its horns and blasphemous names on its heads. – Rev 13:1*

- Notice the similarity between the description of the dragon (10 horns, 7 heads, many diadems).
- "And the beast that I saw was like a leopard; its feet were like a bear's, and its mouth was like a lion's mouth. And to it the dragon gave his power and his throne and great authority." – Rev 13:2
  - o The "power...throne and great authority" of the dragon are given to it—this locates the beast as representing governmental and military power.
  - o This follows the description of the first three beasts that come out of the sea in Daniel 7:1-6: a lion, a bear, and a leopard—each representing a different

kingdom which will persecute God's people. The lion = Babylon, the bear = Medo-Persian, and the leopard = Greece.

- Daniel 7:7-8 then describes a fourth beast arising, "terrifying and dreadful and exceedingly strong," which we are told has "ten horns." Thus, the beast of Revelation 13 is likely this fourth beast.
  - But because the beast in Revelation 13 is compiled of three previous beasts (lion, bear, leopard), it likely is also a symbolic of *all* human governments which oppose God and persecute God's people.
  - The beast for John and his readers are clearly identified as Rome (see Rev 17:9).
- This beast is incredibly powerful; even when it appears to die, it does not (Rev 13:3)
- The people of earth worship this beast and its might, and therein worship the dragon who gave it power, "Who is like the beast, and who can fight against it?" (Rev 13:4)
  - A satanic patriotism
- The beast is permitted by God to make war on the saints and to kill them because they refuse to worship the beast (Rev 13:5-10).
  - But, we are reminded that the beast's authority is limited to 42 months (3.5 years)
- **MAIN TAKEAWAY:** The beast shows us that Satan can and often works through human government.

### **The Second Beast: Fallen Religion**

*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. – Rev 13:11-12*

- This is the "false prophet" of 16:13 and 19:20.
- The "two horns like a lamb" are likely a parody of Christ, the lamb.
- Whereas the first beast represents fallen government, the second beast represents pagan religion.
  - "The second beast, then, has a religious and prophetic dimension, showing that political power is intertwined with religious devotion so that there is no separation of church and state." – Schreiner, *The Joy of Hearing*, p. 38
- It performs "great signs" and miracles to deceive people (13:13-15)
- It's primary aim is to deceive people into worshipping the first beast and slaying those who refuse (13:15).
- It can impose economic discrimination through the "mark of the beast"—those who refuse to take the mark are forbidden to "buy or sell." (Rev 13:17)
- The "mark of the beast" requires wisdom to interpret and understanding to "calculate." The number is "666," a three-fold repetition of the number usually associated with "man" (Gen 1:24ff).
  - "The empire that claims to be divine is merely human; the number 666 falls short of the perfect number 777. In other words, the beast is human, not divine, and

thus John tells us that all its pretensions to glory are laughable.” – Schreiner, *The Joy of Hearing*, p. 37

- “When the Greek word *thērion* (“beast”) is put into Hebrew letters, their total is 666—so in gematria, this figure is literally the number of “beast.”” – Dennis Johnson, *The Triumph of the Lamb*, p. 192
  - Or, perhaps *Nerōn Kaisar*, which in gematria add up to 666
  - The purpose of the “mark of the beast” does not refer to a literal mark, like a tattoo or branding or mark, but symbolizes complete ownership. It is to be contrasted with the mark of the Lamb in 14:1 (cf. 7:3).
- **MAIN TAKEWAY:** Ungodly government doesn’t merely demand submission, but worship.

### **The Great Prostitute: Fallen Culture**

*Come, I will show you the judgment of the great prostitute who is seated on many waters.* – Rev 17:1

- “This woman represents fallen human culture in all the apparent glory of its achievement and the true repugnance of its arrogance.” – Johnson, *The Triumph of the Lamb*, p. 246
- She has a wide dominion:
  - We are also told she is seated on “many waters” (17:1), and are told that these waters represent “peoples and multitudes and nations and languages.” (17:15)
  - She prostitutes herself to the “kings of the earth”, in fact all “the dwellers of the earth” have become intoxicated with her sexual promiscuity. (17:2)
- The great harlot is seated upon the seven headed beast of Rev 13 (17:3), so her existence depends on the tyrannical governmental power.
- The harlot is identified as “Babylon”, Israel’s ancient enemy who led them into exile (17:6), but likely is a symbol of the city of Rome herself, since we are told that she is seated upon “seven hills” (17:9).
  - “And the woman that you saw is the great city that has dominion over the kings of the earth.” (17:18)
- She appears to be beautiful
  - She is “arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and jewels and pearls” (17:4)
  - See chapter 18 at her prosperity, goods, economy
  - “At first glance, she might seem to be the goddess Roma, in all her glory, a stunning personification of the civilization of Rome, as she was worshiped in many a temple in the cities of Asia. But as John sees her, she is a Roman prostitute, a seductive whore and a scheming witch, and her wealth and splendor represent the profits of her disreputable trade.” – Bauckham, *Theology of Revelation*, p. 17-18.
- She is drunk with the blood of martyrs (17:6)
- She is eventually devoured by the beast (17:16-17)
- **MAIN TAKEWAY:** Fallen culture is a mixture of beauty and horror, bent on destroying God’s people, doomed to be destroyed by the power it relies upon.

## **The Earth-Dwellers: Fallen Humanity**

*All who dwell on earth will worship [the beast], everyone whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who was slain.*

– Rev 13:8

- “Those who dwell on the earth” is a technical term in the book of Revelation to refer to fallen mankind.
  - They are contrasted with those whose dwelling is in heaven (cf. Rev 7:1ff, 14:1ff)
- They are spiritually blind, dumb, and deaf—no amount of miraculous intervention by God leads them to repentance (see Rev 9:20-21). They are enslaved to the demonic, deceived by false signs.
  - “He who has an ear to hear, let him hear”
    - Isa 6:9-10; Mark 4:10-12
    - “But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear” – Matt 13:16
- They rejoice at the death of the Church
  - “and those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them and make merry and exchange presents, because these two prophets had been a torment to those who dwell on the earth.” Rev 11:10
- Their fate is that of the beast
  - “And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night, these worshipers of the beast and its image, and whoever receives the mark of its name.” Rev 14:11
- **MAIN TAKEAWAY:** There is a large slice of mankind who hate God, and therefore will hate God’s people.

## **The Throne of God**

*From the throne came flashes of lightning, and rumblings and peals of thunder, and before the throne were burning seven torches of fire, which are the seven spirits of God, and before the throne there was as it were a sea of glass, like crystal. – Rev 4:5-6*

- The source of chaos (the sea) is still and subdued under the throne of God.