

## **Lesson Two**

(13:1-18)

### **THE LAMB AND THE SPIRITUAL CONFRONTATION**

John is now given a vision which connects the Roman empire's hostility against the church to the cosmic spiritual war of the devil against God. Rome is implicated as a tool of the devil in the blasphemous rebellion against the sovereignty of God and His Christ. Rome's attempt to kill the church is not merely human goodness in error—it is complicity with all that is evil.

The clear teaching of the Old Testament prophets is that no human form of government is adequate to produce the fellowship of man with his Creator. In fact, human government at its worst or best stands, by its very nature, opposed to man's allegiance to the absolute sovereignty of God. Therefore, the message of the prophets is that all human government is doomed while the government of God through the messianic kingdom (the church) will be established forever.

Revelation, chapter 13, while continuing that theme, applies specifically to the seven churches of Asia Minor in their struggle with the Roman empire. It has only general fulfillment beyond those centuries of early Rome. The beast of Revelation 13 is tied directly to the fourth beast of Daniel 7:1ff., as will be shown in later comments.

It is not unusual for men or governments to be called "beasts" in the Bible. Isaiah called Egypt, "leviathan" (monster) (Isa. 27:1; 51:9); Nahum called Assyria "lion" (Nah. 2:11-12); Daniel called four successive empires "beasts" (Dan. 7:1ff.); Isaiah called his own people "oxen, asses, dogs" (Isa. 1:3; 56:9-12). Jesus told his disciples not to cast their "pearls" before "swine and dogs"; Jesus called the Pharisees, "sons of snakes"; Jesus called Herod "that fox"; Jesus called false teachers, "wolves." Paul called the Judaizers, "dogs" (Phil. 3:2). Peter called false teachers "irrational animals" (II Pet. 2:12). When men and societies accept the evolutionary philosophy that they are nothing more than beasts, they begin to act like beasts and should be called "beasts."

### The Beasts (13:1-18)

**13** And I saw a beast rising out of the sea, with ten horns and seven heads, with ten diadems upon its horns and a blasphemous name upon its heads. <sup>2</sup>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. <sup>3</sup>One of its heads seemed to have a mortal wound, but its mortal wound was healed, and the whole earth followed the beast with wonder. <sup>4</sup>Men worshiped the dragon, for he had given his authority to the beast, and they worshiped the beast, saying, "Who is like the beast, and who can fight against it?"

<sup>5</sup> And the beast was given a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words, and it was allowed to exercise authority for forty-two months; <sup>6</sup>It opened its mouth to utter blasphemies against God, blaspheming his name and his dwelling, that is, those who dwell in heaven. <sup>7</sup>Also it was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them. And authority was given it over every tribe and people and tongue and nation, <sup>8</sup>and all who dwell on earth will worship it, every one whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb that was slain. <sup>9</sup>If any one has an ear, let him hear:

<sup>10</sup>If any one is to be taken captive, to captivity he goes;

If any one slays with the sword, with the sword must he be slain.  
Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints.

**11** Then I saw another beast which rose out of the earth; it had two horns like a lamb and it spoke like a dragon. <sup>12</sup>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. <sup>13</sup>It works great signs, even making fire come down from heaven to earth in the sight of men; <sup>14</sup>and by the signs which it is allowed to work in the

## THIRTEEN LESSONS ON REVELATION

presence of the beast, it deceives those who dwell on earth, bidding them make an image for the beast which was wounded by the sword and yet lived; <sup>15</sup>and it was allowed to give breath to the image of the beast so that the image of the beast should even speak, and to cause those who would not worship the image of the beast to be slain. <sup>16</sup>Also it causes all, both small and great, both rich and poor, both free and slave, to be marked on the right hand or the forehead, <sup>17</sup>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. <sup>18</sup>This calls for wisdom: let him who has understanding reckon the number of the beast, for it is a human number, its number is six hundred and sixty-six.

**vv. 1-2 And I saw a beast rising out of the sea** — The imagery of this chapter is not only comparable to Daniel 7:1ff., it is *directly connected* to Daniel's prophecy. Revelation 13 takes up and continues predicting the history of the fourth beast of Daniel 7. Daniel's fourth beast can be none other than Rome (see comments, *Daniel*, by Butler, Colledge Press).

John sees this beast rising out of the sea—so does Daniel (Dan. 7:3). "Sea" or "waters" symbolizes the mass of humanity in constant motion, or commotion, and especially the heathen masses in hostility toward God (cf. Isa. 8:7ff.; Jer. 46:7-9; 47:2; Isa. 17:2ff.; 57:20-21; Rev. 17:1, 15, etc.). The devil is the original anarchist and rebel. He is the source of all that in human government which sets itself against God's sovereignty in creation. Human government opposed to God is, therefore, beastly and animalistic in character. Each of Daniel's empires were symbolized by beasts. Human governments opposing God are (a) cruel, (b) concerned almost totally with animalistic aspects of men, (c) victimizers of mankind preying on man's weaknesses, (d) rule and dominate by "red tooth and claw" methods of animals. Human governments and rulers do not see themselves as God sees them. They dream about themselves as great images (Dan. 2) made of precious and enduring "metals." They dream about themselves as huge trees (Dan. 4) reaching to heaven providing sustenance and protection for the whole human race. They see themselves as "queens" in regal splendor adored by the world, (Isa. 47:5-9; Rev. 18:7). God sees them as hated *beasts* and despised *harlots*. They rend and tear; they seduce and prostitute.

The beast John saw had ten horns and seven heads, with ten crowns upon its horns and a blasphemous name upon its heads. Seven heads and ten horns identifies this beast as the same beast upon which the harlot rides in Revelation 17:3-18. The ten horns and ten crowns represent ten emperors who made emperor-worship (blasphemous name) popular—only seven of the ten were really "heads" of any significance; three of them were "bar-racks emperors" who ruled a total of 18 months among them: (see comments Rev. 17:3ff.).

1. Tiberius (14-37 A.D.) (begin with Tiberius because he was emperor
2. Caligula (37-41 A.D.) when Christ preached, died, and rose again
3. Claudius (41-54 A.D.) to found His church).
4. Nero (54-68 A.D.)  
Galba, Otho and Vitellius (18 months)
5. Vespasian (69-79 A.D.)
6. Titus (79-81 A.D.)
7. Domitian (81-96 A.D.)

Ten horns symbolize great power; seven heads symbolize a septumvirate of mentality; ten diadems symbolize a totality of human authority. And although this beast (and the one of Rev. 17) may be identified with the above emperors, it probably symbolizes the Roman empire in its continued beastliness from Domitian to Diocletian. The "blasphemous name" represents deification these emperors heaped to themselves, calling themselves "Lord, God, and Savior," and decreeing that they should be worshiped by their subjects.

The beast John saw was a composite of a leopard, a bear and a lion. This is in exact agreement with Daniel 7:12. There, the fourth beast is pictured as destined to be slain and burned with fire. That is exactly what happened to Rome (cf. Rev. 19:20-21). But *before* it was slain, the first three beasts of Daniel 7:1-6 (the lion, bear and leopard) had their lives and characters "prolonged for a season" in the fourth beast (Rome). Rome, so long as she lasts, perpetuates the beastliness of the first three great universal empires (Babylon, Persia and Greece) in herself. She becomes the tool of the devil for one last hope in universal heathenism to stamp out the universal reign of righteousness in God's church. Revelation 13:2 plugs right in to Daniel 7:12. All the characteristics of wild beastliness is resident in this fourth beast (Rome)—cruelty, viciousness, rapaciousness, cunning and predatoriness.

The dragon *gave* (Gr. *edoken*, aorist, already *gave* at some point in time past) the beast his power, throne and authority. Again we must emphasize the devil's power, throne and authority is only *pretended*. The devil creates nothing, he owns nothing, and whatever deception he exercises he does so within the sovereign limitations imposed on him by God. Whatever promises he may make to give power (cf. Mt. 4:8-10) are only empty promises he may make to give power (cf. Mt. 4:8-10) are only empty promises for God alone reigns sovereign over all the kingdoms of the world (cf. Isa. 10:5ff.; Jer 27:5ff., etc.). Whatever power the devil may have is in his ability to deceive through lying. The power he gave the beast did not last long for God overthrew the beast (cf. Rev. 19:20-21). (See Lesson Thirteen: "Questions About Whether the Devil Can Actually Perform Supernatural Deeds or Not.") Rome allowed itself to be deceived by the devil and willingly perpetuated that deception by persuading the whole empire (except Christians) that it should "exchange the glory of the immortal God for

## THIRTEEN LESSONS ON REVELATION

images resembling mortal man or birds or animals or reptiles" (Rom. 1:22-23). Rome broadcast the devil's original lie that man could become as god (Gen. 3:4). Rome used persecution, false religions and carnality to perpetuate the devil's "power." The devil's second great lie is that the flesh should take priority. This was Rome's motto. Engraved on the pavement of a Roman forum in Tingad, North Africa, is a checkerboard with the words, *Venari, lavari, ludere, ridere, hoc est vivere*—"to hunt, bathe, play, and laugh, this is to live." Thus Rome capitulated to become the devil's instrument for the seduction of a civilization.

**vv. 3-4 One of its heads seemed to have a mortal wound . . .** — One of the beastly heads had a mortal wound and died, but that did not kill the beast for the wound was healed and the beast went right on terrifying the world and seducing the world to worship it.

This is an apparent reference by John the apostle to the *Nero redivivus* legend. Nero (54-68) was a monster of wickedness and cruelty. When he killed himself in 68 A.D., people actually danced in the streets. A few mourned his death because their positions and fortunes had depended on his patronage. These "friends" perpetrated a legend that Nero had not really died; that he had gone to Parthia in the far east; and that he would return, incarnate in another ruler, leading the dreaded hordes of Parthia, and take up his power again. Suetonius mentions this legend. There were some who believed Domitian (because of the similarity of character) was the reincarnated Nero (see comments Rev. 17:3-14). The beastliness of Nero was not only perpetuated by Domitian but by others following him (e.g. Septimius Severus, Decius, Diocletian). John the apostle did not believe in reincarnation, but he used this myth about Nero to identify in cryptic (secretive) language who the "beast" was. Writing this Revelation during the reign of Domitian John was suggesting that in Domitian Christians were faced with a "reincarnation" of Nero. These "friends" propagated the idea that Nero was somehow immortal in his wickedness—having the power of the devil. The Romans could not rid themselves of this idea; and even as late as A.D. 80 a pretender arose in Parthia, claiming that he was Nero; and he very nearly succeeded in persuading the Parthians to invade Europe under him.

Satan-worship or demon worship was widespread in the Roman empire of the first century (and succeeding centuries) (cf. I Cor. 10:20ff.). The gods of the underworld were believed by the Romans (borrowed from the Greeks) to have powers to make those who worshiped them immortal. Men worshiped the dragon (Satan) for it *appeared* to men he had given his power and authority for immortality to the beast. It appeared Nero had been reincarnated in Domitian and his successors. The beast seemed invincible, immortal, with supernatural powers. Nero, the devil incarnate, had died—or had he? In Domitian the demonic power and viciousness is perpetuated.

Rome's beastliness seems unassailable, unconquerable. That kind of power (unless one believes there is Higher power) clamors to be worshiped. So men began to clamor for deification of their emperors. Most of the emperors gloried in such flattery—some more publicly than others. Popular adoration for and self-acclamation of the deification of political tyrants was nothing new to the world. It had been practiced as far back as ancient Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, and Greece. It is practiced in the modern world (e.g. Hitler, Lenin, et al.). But the beast is not invincible (13:18)—he is human, not divine.

**vv. 5-6 And the beast was given a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words . . .** — The same thing is said of the fourth beast (Rome) in Daniel's prophecy (cf. Dan. 7:8, 11, 20, 25). John is probably referring immediately to Domitian's *edictum domini deique nostri* ("Our Lord and God decrees"). Domitian commanded that he be addressed as deity; he promoted the practice of all bowing before him and embracing his feet. He was not the only emperor to assume such blasphemous arrogance. Caligula (37-41 A.D.) ordered that an image of himself be set up in the Holy of Holies in the Jewish temple in Jerusalem. Caligula believed he was a god; he once struck the English Channel with a rod believing he could whip it into submission to his deity. Diocletian declared himself to be Jupiter (the god) in the flesh, and required all visitors to kneel and kiss the hem of his robe. Not only did most of the Roman emperors think of themselves as gods, they made blasphemous utterances (depraved, defamatory, despicable words) against Christians and their Christ. Nero accused Christians of burning down the city of Rome. Other Romans accused them of cannibalism, sedition, and atheism.

Once again the time-limit of forty-two months (and its equivalent of 3-1/2 years or 1260 days) is decreed by heaven to be the extent of the Roman "blasphemy." This time-limit is the same mentioned in Rev. 11:3, 12:6 and 12:14. It covers, symbolically and generally, the time from Domitian to Diocletian (81-310 A.D.). With the coming of Constantine and the Edict of Toleration (312 A.D.), the beastliness and blasphemousness of Rome was conquered.

**vv. 7-8 Also it was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them. . . .** — Again we have exactly the same phraseology of Daniel (Dan. 7:21, 25). The beast of Revelation 13 is the fourth beast (and "little horn") of Daniel 7—it is Rome (and Domitian to Diocletian, specifically). Rome would not have had the power to bring such a severe test upon the church of Christ had not God "allowed" it. Permission from God for severe testing of his people is not strange to Biblical history. The covenant people of the Old Testament were put in the crucibles of Egypt, the Judges-period, Assyrian-Babylonian-Persian captivity, and the severest test of all during the days of Antiochus IV ("the contemptible one") predicted by Daniel,

## THIRTEEN LESSONS ON REVELATION

chapters 8 and 11. God will not have an untested, unpurged, uncommitted people. He allows his saints to be attacked, to struggle, to fight because they have need of endurance that they may do the will of God and receive what is promised them (cf. Heb. 10:32-39; 12:1-11; I Pet. 4:12-19; II Cor. 12:7-10, etc.). The first sentence of verse 7 is omitted in some less significant minuscule manuscripts of the Greek New Testament but in none of the more important manuscripts.

Authority over the whole civilized world was given to this beast (Rome). It is apocalyptic hyperbole. It is prophetic symbolism. It is not the intention of the writer to mean that Rome had authority over every single individual human being on the face of the earth (American Indians, South Africans, etc.). Nor is it the intention of the writer to predict some time future to the present when one "beast" will be given authority over every single human being living on the face of the earth. John is describing the power and authority of the Roman empire of the first four centuries A.D. Its authority extended over the known civilized world. It is apparent Rome is the beast with this authority when one compares the same symbolism being applied to the same "beast" in Rev. 17:1-18.

All who dwelled in the civilized world under Rome's authority would do obeisance to Rome and worship the emperor by compulsion. Only those who took their redemption in Christ seriously would not do so. These are distinguished as those "who had their names written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb that was slain" (cf. also 17:8). It was not enough to have merely embraced Christianity. When the imperial edict forced Christians to decide about emperor-worship, many capitulated to idolatry rather than suffer persecution. Only those Christians deeply committed to Christ ("those who loved not their lives even unto death" 12:11) were written in the Lamb's book of life. Only these refused to worship the beast.

**vv. 9-10 If anyone has an ear, let him hear: . . .** — Having painted a realistic picture of what Rome is going to do to the world and to the saints, John now calls for endurance (Gr. *hupomone*, steadfastness, lit. remaining under) and faith from the saints. When this great war and trial comes the saints will simply have to trust Christ enough to remain and not seek to get out from under the trial by renouncing their faith. If they must go to prison and death, they must go. This call for endurance is not any less than God asked of his saints in the Old Testament. Especially is this imagery taken from the time of the captivities of the Jews by the Babylonians in Jeremiah's time (cf. Jer. 14:12; 15:2; 24:10; 43:11; Ezek. 5:2, 12). Jeremiah told his people to surrender to God's chastening through Babylonian captivity (Jer. 27:1-15) and make the most of it (Jer. 29:1-9) and God would deliver them after 70 years (Jer. 29:10ff.). Jeremiah expected those who trusted God to believe his prediction and obey it as the word of God no

matter what they had to suffer. That is exactly what John is telling the Christians of Asia Minor.

John is telling the Christians, further, that those who slay them with the sword will themselves be slain through the judgments of God. Those who live by the sword will die by the sword. Jeremiah (and all the prophets) promised God's saints of old that their persecutors and executioners would die by the same violence they perpetrated on others. Rome will receive her *dues* (cf. Rev. 16:15-16; 18:6-8; 18:21-24). Rome lived by violence and that is the way she died! That principle has been repeated in history more than a thousand times, and the world does not repent!

**vv. 11-12 Then I saw another beast . . .** — The first beast was war-like. The first beast represents Roman military and political power in opposition to God's saints. The second beast is lamb-like, although it speaks the same as the devil (the old dragon). The second beast represents the powers delegated to Roman *concilia* to enforce emperor worship throughout the Roman provinces. *Concilia* (councils) or sometimes called *commune* were organized from politicians and heathen priests nominated from the provinces of the empire. They were charged with administering Roman law, judging in local civil disputes, and enforcing loyalty to the emperor by requiring an annual burning of incense to the emperor as god. Many of the members of these *concilia* were priests of the pagan religions and temples. The president of the *concilia* was usually called *archiereus* (chief priest) or *Asiasrches* in Asia Minor which means, "Chief officers of Asia" and probably refers to the high priests of the temples of the Imperial worship in the various cities of Asia Minor.

Pliny the Younger (62-113 A.D.), appointed governor of Bithynia (a province of Asia Minor) wrote in a letter to Trajan, emperor of Rome, concerning the prosecution of people for the crime of following Christ:

" . . . the methods I have observed toward those who have been brought before me as Christians is this: I asked them whether they were Christians; if they admitted it, I repeated the question twice, and threatened them with punishment; if they persisted, I ordered them to be at once punished. . . . An anonymous information was laid before me, containing a charge against several persons, who upon examination denied they were Christians or had ever been so. They repeated after me an invocation to the gods, and offered religious rites with wine and incense before your statue (which for that purpose I had ordered to be brought, together with those of the gods), and even reviled the name of Christ. . . . They all worshiped your statue and the images of the gods, uttering imprecations at the same time against the name of Christ."

The second beast exercises all the authority of the first beast in the very presence of the image of the emperor. The second beast (the *concilia*) gets



## THIRTEEN LESSONS ON REVELATION

its power to enforce idolatry from the emperor himself. It was after the death of Octavian (Caesar Augustus) that the Senate decreed his *genius* (or soul) was to be worshiped as one of the official divinities of Rome. But it was not until Domitian that an official edict was issued for all the subjects of the empire to annually worship the image of the emperor. Throughout the provinces, each *concordia* appointed *inquisitores* (secret investigators) to ferret out the identity of all persons refusing to burn incense to the emperor and to bring them to trial. Many Christians were tortured and slain because they would not burn incense to the emperor. Many declared publicly their allegiance to Christ and became "martyrs" for their faith. Thousands of others, Christian in name only, denied their faith and saved their lives by worshiping the image of the emperor and cursing Christ.

**vv. 13-15 It works great signs . . . it deceives those who dwell on earth . . .**—This second beast, presenting itself as a benefactor of man in the form of religion, works pseudo-signs. Notice John carefully designates all these "signs" by the second beast *deceptive* (Gr. *plana*, erroneous, wrong) signs. They are not true signs proving deity at all. They deceive people because people *want* to be deceived—not because they are authentic signs (cf. II Thess. 2:9-12). The student should read Lesson Thirteen at the end of this volume entitled, "Questions About Whether the Devil can Actually Perform Supernatural Deeds or Not."

The Roman world of the first four centuries was a polyglot of pagan cultism. Every religion of the world found its way to Rome and thence to the provinces. Priests and priestesses, prophets and prophetesses of every cult were allowed to practice their "religions" so long as they did obeisance to the emperor. Sorcery, magic, witchcraft, augurism, mystery-cultism, occultism of every kind was popular. Rome had long believed in and proclaimed a "sacred flame" which had fallen from heaven and had instituted an order of Vestal Virgins who were keepers of this flame. Priests were magicians skilled in sleight-of-hand amazing the worshipers and deceiving them into believing their tricks were supernatural miracles. Pagan priests often claimed natural phenomena such as falling meteorites as their own magic (cf. Acts 19:35). This alleged ability of the second beast to make fire come down from heaven to earth in the sight of men is in no way genuinely miraculous. As Homer Hailey puts it, "If God allowed Satan to deceive by genuine miracles He would thereby nullify His own witness to truth." It is clear from Acts 8:5-13 that the signs done by priests and sorcerers then were pseudo-signs, for even the sorcerer (Simon) recognized the true miracles when he saw them. If modern "magicians" may work illusions on television which mystify the modern mind, how much more might sorcerers do so with the superstitious and those subject to political pressure.

All these "magical" signs were done by the priests and augurs at the annual festivals, celebrating the births of emperors and at the worship of

the souls of the deceased emperors as gods. Roman officials and members of the *concilia* were present to represent the emperor (the beast). Worshipers were amazed and awed by all the pomp, power and magic displayed. They were all deceived into making images (Gr. *eikoni*, icon, idol) of the Roman emperor (specifically Domitian) and worshiping them.

The ancient pagan priests had for centuries practiced deceiving superstitious worshipers into believing images made of stone, metal and wood could talk. Many of them used drugs or self-hypnosis to induce a trance in which they claimed to be speaking oracles from the gods or images. One such was the "oracle at Delphi," a Greek temple inhabited by priestesses and from which Alexander the Great demanded a revelation. Ventriloquism was a highly skilled and widely practiced art in heathen idolatry. Eurycles of Athens was the most celebrated of Greek ventriloquists. They were called *engastrimanteis*, or "belly prophets" because the ancients believed the voices of these "gods" came from the bellies of the oracles. Priests of ancient pagan religions were masters of this art and to ventriloquism may be ascribed the alleged miracles of the "speaking statues" of the Egyptians, Greeks and Romans. Alexander of Abonoteichus trained a serpent to hide its head under his arm and allow a half-human mask to be affixed to its tail; he announced that the serpent was the god Asclepius come to earth to serve as an oracle; and he amassed a fortune by interpreting the sounds made by reeds inserted in the false head. Modern archaeologists have found devices used for secretly piping the human voice beneath the altars bearing the statues of pagan gods. Caligula had a contrivance made by which he could produce a fiery reply to Jove's thunder and lightning stroke for stroke. He claimed that the moon-goddess had come down and embraced him. Vespasian was alleged to have healed blind men with his spittle and lame people with the touch of his foot.

If the *concilia* (second beast) had the skill to deceive millions of gullible and superstitious people into believing the statues of Rome's emperor could speak, they would believe the emperor was indeed a god. Whatever the *concilia* or Rome wished to be carried out by its subjects would be obeyed with fear. The *concilia* also had delegated power to execute all who would not worship the beast (the emperor).

**vv. 16-17** Also it causes all . . . to be marked on the right hand or the forehead . . . — The Greek word translated *mark* is *charagma* and is the same word from which we get the English word *character*. The "mark" of the beast probably has to do with the stamp of heathen character manifested in life rather than some literal, physical mark.

Some think this figure of speech concerning a "mark" has reference to the requirement that all legal documents for ownership of property, purchasing rights for food, etc., had to bear the stamp of the emperor. Some refer to the fact that it was actually true that among pagan religions in

## THIRTEEN LESSONS ON REVELATION

many cases the devotees were branded with the sign of their gods (cf. III Macc. 2:29).

Decius issued an edict in 250 A.D. that demanded an annual offering of sacrifice at the Roman altars to the gods and the *genius* of the emperor. Those who offered such sacrifices were given a certificate called a *libellus*. A copy of such a document from that era is extant today and reads:

“To the superintendents of offerings and sacrifices at the city from Aurelius . . . thion son of Theodorus and Pantonymis, of the said city. It has ever been my custom to make sacrifices and libations to the gods and now also I have in your presence in accordance with the command poured libations and sacrificed and tasted the offerings together with my son Aurelius Dioscorus and my daughter Aurelia Lais. I therefore request you to certify my statement. The 1st year of the Emperor Caesar Gaius Messius Quintus Trajanus Decius Pius Felix Augustus, Pauni 20.”

Cyprian (200-258 A.D.), a Christian, writes that the imperial edict to worship the emperor or be arrested as an *atheotes* (atheist) struck terror to the hearts of all whose faith was weak. Many did not even leave it to be said for them that they seemed to sacrifice to idols unwillingly so anxious were they to escape arrest. Cyprian pictures many half-hearted Christians as running to the market place to burn incense to the emperor. Many were so impatient to deny their faith that they could hardly wait their turn. Many who would neither flee nor sacrifice suffered the most terrible tortures and died in prison, or were sent to labor in Roman mines until they died, or were cruelly executed without delay. Some by bribing the officials procured certificates of having sacrificed without committing the overt act. Some allowed others to say that they had sacrificed or to procure certificates for them. Holders of these fraudulent certificates were called *libellatici* and were despised as much as those who openly denied their faith. Some weak Christians who possessed precious copies of the Scriptures gave, under threat, these scrolls to be burned and destroyed—they were called *traditores* (traitors).

Whatever the “mark” was that distinguished one as loyal to the beast, it was apparently necessary to survive in the economic life of the empire. Anyone not loyal to the emperor and Rome would be banned from the business world and might even be deprived of the fundamental necessities of livelihood such as food, clothing and shelter. This form of persecution on Christians who refused to burn incense to the emperor may explain in part the scarcity of food symbolized in the third seal (Rev. 6:5-6). We know for a fact that some Christians were persecuted this way by Jewish authorities (cf. Heb. 10:32ff.). Even contemporary Christians are starved and discriminated against in employment and economics by modern “beasts.”

We believe John’s “mark of the beast” is symbolic, not literal. It is

probably the figurative counterpart of the "seal" of God on Christians (7:1-3). Nowhere in history do we find God literally putting a brand or tattoo on the hands or foreheads of Christians (Rev. 3:12; 22:4). God stamps his image (mark) on Christians through the character of the Holy Spirit living in and through them. The devil and the beast mark those who belong to them in the same manner. Those who have the mark of the beast are those who think like and live like the beast. The mark of the beast is the stamp of paganism impressed upon the character and conduct of idolaters. Men become like that which they worship (cf. Hosea 9:10; Psa. 115:8). Christians are "conformed to the image of God's Son" (Rom. 8:29; II Cor. 3:18) and non-Christians are conformed to the image of their father, the devil (John 8:42-47; Acts 13:10; I Jn. 3:8-10; 3:15).

v. 18 . . . it is a human number, its number is six hundred and sixty-six. — John intends readers and believers of this book to understand what this number means. He does not intend it to be misunderstood or misapplied. The Christian who has thus far understood the purpose and message of Revelation should have no trouble understanding the "number of the beast's name."

First, we must understand that had John written out the literal name of the beast it could have meant John's death warrant and anyone who possessed a copy of the scroll. So John identifies the beast in apocalyptic numerology—666. The ancient people had no figures for numbers so the letters of their alphabets did duty for numbers. The following, based on numbers for letters in alphabets, are some theories as to the identity of 666:

a. Hebrew consonants have numerical value as follows: N = 50; R = 200; O = 6; N = 50; K = 100; S = 60; R = 200; total—666 thus *NRON KSR* or *Nero Caesar*

b. Greek letters have numerical value as follows: L = 30; A = 1; T = 300; E = 5; I = 10; N = 50; O = 70; S = 200; total—666 thus *LATEINDS*, or Rome (others interpret as Roman Catholic Church).

c. Someone in 1941 applied an English numerology to it as follows: A = 100; B = 101; C = 102; etc. through Z = 126. H = 107; I = 108; T = 119; L = 111; E = 104; R = 117; total—666 thus *HITLER*.

But the English alphabet was unknown in John's day; the English alphabet has no numerical value; why start at A = 100—why not A = 1?

d. Roman letters have numerical value (where there is no numerical value, zero is the equivalent) thus: V = 5; I = 1; C = 100; A = 0; R = 0; I = 1; V(U) = 5; S = 0; F = 0; I = 1; L = 50; I = 1; D = 500; E = 0; I = 1; total—666 thus the Latin expression, *vicarius filii dei*, "in place of the Son of God." Roman emperor.

## THIRTEEN LESSONS ON REVELATION

- e. Another suggestion uses Greek alphabet thus:  
T = 300; E = 5; I = 10; T = 300; A = 1; N = 50; total—666 thus *Teitan*.  
Teitan could refer in Greek mythology to the Titans who were great rebels against God; or it could refer to the family name, *Titus*, of Vespasian, Titus and Domitian.
- f. All sorts of modern hypotheses have applied the number 666 to a multitude of persons, nations, things or ideologies.

One man suggests that by using three six-digital units the entire world could be assigned a working credit card number programmed through a universally-centralized computer all of mankind could be controlled. This is the “beast.” Others have appealed to license plates on cars in the Arab countries bearing the number 666 as an indication that the “beast” (or as they think, The Antichrist) is arising there.

Some have shown clothing labels from Red China bearing the number 666 as an indication that Red China is the “beast.”

While there may be some credence to the idea that 666 may symbolize Domitian as the reincarnation of Nero, we believe the idea to be symbolized is more general than specific. Seven is the number of perfection or infinitude. Six is short of seven and denotes incompleteness, imperfection or finiteness. A trinity of sixes (666) means fully human, fully evil and fully conquerable. The focus for understanding the number is in the phrase, “for it is a *human* number.” John is answering the question asked in 13:4, “Who is like the beast, and who can fight against it?” By pomp, power and sorcery the beast appeared *invincible*; he appeared supernatural; he claimed and tried to prove he was god. But John has his number! The beast is not invincible; the beast is not supernatural; he is not god—he is human! We do not think John means to identify a specific person so much as he is identifying the Roman emperorship from Domitian to Diocletian in all its beastliness but in its vincibility also. Emperors are not gods! They are human and are not to be worshiped no matter how deceptive their “signs” may be.

There can be no credence given to the interpretation that this number 666 refers to The Antichrist, some very wicked ruler to appear during the 7 years of tribulation, after the rapture, just prior to the establishment of the millennium. In the first place, the term *The Antichrist* does not appear in Revelation and is not even, by itself, a Biblical term. There had been many antichrists already gone out into the world before John wrote Revelation (I Jn. 2:18, 22; II Jn. 7). Second, none of the ideas concerning a tribulation, a rapture or a literal millennium are to be found in Revelation. Third, the idea of a very wicked ruler 2000 years subsequent to the time of John would have little, if any, relevance or meaning to the churches of *Asia Minor*.

John could not have more clearly identified the Roman emperorship nor exposed its facetious claims to supernaturalness than by using the

number 666. Had John simply said, "the beast is the heathen Roman emperor" it would have been fatal to him and many others. But in a cryptic symbol (666), hidden to unbelievers, but known to Christians, he got his message through. His message was, do not fear the Roman emperor's attempt to declare himself god—he is not, he is human.

### APPREHENSION AND APPLICATION:

1. How does the vision of chapter 13 connect Rome to the devil? Is all human government vulnerable to be used as a tool of the devil?
2. Is the Roman government the only one called "beast" in the Bible? Did Jesus ever call rulers and wicked men beasts?
3. Why are human governments symbolized as beasts in the Bible? Can you think of governments today which might earn the name, "beast"?
4. How does John's beast of chapter 13 fit into Daniel's four beasts (Dan. 7)?
5. What authority did the devil give to the beast? How much authority does the devil have? Do you think the devil is god of this world? In what way?
6. How did one of the heads of John's visionary beast become healed of a mortal wound? Why would this beast seem invincible?
7. In what way did the beast blaspheme? How long was his blasphemy to last?
8. Why would God allow the beast to make war on the saints and dominate them? Would God do that to his saints today? What were the saints to do when the beast conquered them? What was to happen to the beast who lived by the sword?
9. Who is the second beast? Can you think of governmental religious powers today, or world religious organizations, which might earn the name "beast"?
10. How did the second beast deceive the world then? Does the devil work miracles?
11. What is the mark of the beast? What is the meaning of the number 666?