

Revelation 13

TODAY IN HISTORY

May 8, 1945 – It was NOT Mother’s Day. It was V-E Day

While that day is significant and is a holiday in parts of Europe, the roots of May 8th 1945 go back to June 6, 1944 – D-Day

D-Day 1944 it has a meaning and brings to mind June 6. Saving Private Ryan, Band of Brothers. The decisive moment of WWII. Largest invasion ever.

When the beaches were taken, it was clear who would win. But Hitler did not raise the white flag. He counter attacked.

What happened in between June 6, 1944 and May 8, 1945? A lot of vicious fighting with some back and forth battles until the Allied forces came to dominate.

This is the situation of Revelation 13. We saw in chapter 12 – the spiritual D-Day with the birth of the child and the counter-attack by the dragon. The child is taken up and seated on the throne of heaven and the dragon, Satan, is thrown down. He is defeated and defanged, though he is still dangerous. Jesus is the dragon slayer and Satan knows his days are numbered. He is filled with fury because his time is short, so his evil intensifies.

Satan directs his evil intentions toward the “woman”, i.e. the church

How he does this is set forth in ch 13 – two agents – Beast of the Sea; Beast of the Earth.

There is an unholy trinity – Dragon and the two beasts. They reappear in ch 16, 19, 20,

We must remember the words of Rev 1:3; 22:7

3 Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near.

Those words are vital because without them, we might not be motivated to read this book all the way through.

REVELATION 13

1 And the dragon stood on the sand of the seashore.

Then I saw a beast coming up out of the sea, having ten horns and seven heads, and on his horns were ten diadems, and on his heads were blasphemous names. 2 And the beast which I saw was like a leopard, and his feet were like those of a bear, and his mouth like the mouth of a lion. And the dragon gave him his power and his throne and great authority. 3 I saw one of his heads as if it had been slain, and his fatal wound was healed. And the whole earth was amazed and followed after the beast; 4 they worshiped the dragon because he gave his authority to the beast; and they worshiped the beast, saying, “Who is like the beast, and who is able to wage war with him?”

5 There was given to him a mouth speaking arrogant words and blasphemies, and authority to act for forty-two months was given to him. 6 And he opened his mouth in blasphemies against God, to blaspheme His name and His tabernacle, that is, those who dwell in heaven.

7 It was also given to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them, and authority over every tribe and people and tongue and nation was given to him. 8 All who dwell on the earth will worship him, everyone whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain. 9 If anyone has an ear, let him hear. 10 If anyone is destined for captivity, to captivity he goes; if anyone kills with the sword, with the sword he must be killed. Here is the perseverance and the faith of the saints.

First, I need to say that this passage, like others in Revelation, seems so bizarre that we might be tempted to overlook it and think it is nonsense. AVOID THAT TEMPTATION.

Scripture and human history show us that evil is real and that the enemy plays for keeps. **We do ourselves and others a disservice when we underestimate the seriousness of sin and the schemes of the enemy.**

Whether we see the frontal assault of Satan, as Jesus did, or the subtle deceitful scheming that is all too common, the enemy is making war with the saints to overcome them.

The Devil is a liar, a deceiver, the accuser, and he disguises himself as an angel of light (2 cor 11:14). He doesn't present himself as one trying to do harm but as one trying to do some sort of good. When anyone "Brakes Bad" he rationalizes it as somehow being for the greater good. We have no indication that Judas Iscariot had an evil intent when he betrayed Christ. In his mind he, like the religious leaders, was probably persuaded that it was better for "one man to die than for the nation to suffer." (John 11:49-50)

This is an unholy replica of the trinity that is aimed at destroying God's kingdom and his people. And their attack runs for 42 months= 1260 days. This is a time of protection and persecution while the church is given the mission of bearing WITNESS to Jesus Christ.

Observations Regarding the beast

#1 He bears the image of the dragon 13:1

The dragon stays in the background and calls forth two beasts. He works through agents while he seeks to stay hidden.

#1 beast – ten horns, 7 heads, blasphemous names , i.e. names of one claiming to be God or to be in a position of God.

v. 2 ff description of the beast

leopard – swift in attack

bear – strength

lion – appetite to devour

What is this? Who is this?

How would the original hearers have taken this?

They were used to this genre of writing and familiar with OT, especially Daniel 7. Four beasts from the sea – 4 Empires that sought control and the persecution of God's people. They emerge from the sea, which is often shown as place of chaos and unrest.

Ch 11 he emerges from the abyss; similar to the sea.

Rev 21:1 – the sea was no more, i.e Now, I'm not a hydrologist, but I don't think he is talking about water levels in heaven. He is telling us that the source of evil is gone and will never again threaten God's people.

John turns all the four features into one great- transhistorical beast. This beast is like Babylon and Medio Persian, Greek and Roman empires, but more than any one or combination of them.

What is this beast?

Not one person or regime; it is an abiding principle or force at work in this world generated by the dragon that reoccurs over and over throughout history in the human manifestation of a "God opposing, Christ hating, church persecuting governmental power and man-centered ideology." Art Azurdia

The image of the beast with the 10 horns and 7 heads indicates an entity with power such as Imperial rule in the days of John or other totalitarian rule from governments or institutions.

This beast is some sort of a deified man-centered institution that demands allegiance that should only be reserved for God.

****SIDE ROAD** –The implications of this text are difficult for us because it has been hard for most Americans to think of our government “of the people, by the people and for the people” as being like the cruel evil oppressive regimes of world history. As Christians we know that the Bible affirms the validity and necessity of government as instituted by God. Most older believers have typically viewed government as friendly or neutral toward the Christian faith, or at least it was not an overt enemy. But history shows that the US government was never a willing servant of the kingdom of God. Over the years, most Americans have had their eyes opened to the fact that a “we the people” government can become quite power hungry.

REMEMBER that as we delve into the context for the original audience and for us today, we are dealing with issues that are much broader than political or cultural. They are theological in that “theos / God” has ordained rulers. He raises up and puts down kings and rulers _ Daniel 2:21ff. Politics and culture are downstream from theology. If we forget that then we have ceded the terrain to the evil one.

13:3 7 heads/ 10- horns – the dragon’s image bearer. The beast rules via force, i.e. the horns. Delegated resources of the Dragon. The Beast bears image of the dragon- i.e. his representative in human form.

The original audience would have seen the heads of Roman emperors on imperial coins. Several had already been declared divine by the Roman senate even in their own lifetime. Later in history we see “Christian” kings who claim ‘divine right’ as the source of their authority.

#2 The Beast imitates the pathway of the Lamb

v. 3 a death blow, but healed. The beast dies
5:6 is similar text ‘standing as if slain’
v.14 wounded yet lives.

The beast is a counterfeit expression of the lamb.

The beast is image bearer of the one who commissioned him, as Christ was sent by the Father.. Christ has power of God, so too the beast has power of dragon.

This reference to the death and resuscitation of the beast is often linked to the events surrounding Nero. He took his own life in AD 68 and there was a concern that the empire would collapse. But after a “year of the four emperors” Imperial power was restored under Vespasian in 69 AD. (He was the father of Titus who destroyed Jerusalem in 70 AD).

The imperial rule recovered after being on the brink of collapse. Some have seen this text in Rev 13 as identifying the beast with the government of the day.

Thus, the Beast dies and comes back to attract the devotion of his followers.

More significantly, he functions as a false lamb to replace the Lamb. The beast is a sort of parody of Christ. This is the concept of “anti-Christ’ (a term only used in 1-2 John); those who seek to stand against or in place of Christ. It is an attempt to obtain the ultimate allegiance of people by whatever means possible.

Thus it is not one single person per se but the demonic power that is expressed repeatedly in autocratic governmental structures of the world.

We have seen how the church and the kingdom of God have advanced in world history and the rulers of this world have been pushed back only to rise again in another form in another place.

#3 The beast receives the allegiance of the world v. 4-5

They don’t know it is the dragon per se. they worship the beast – the dragon’s proxy. They worship Satan by pledging allegiance to the rule of the beast, the values of the beast. When secular power is deified

and receives the allegiance that should only go to God, then that is worship. And the worship of the human proxy is a form of worship of the Dragon, even if one doesn't know it. The beast is not worshipped because of moral greatness or intrinsic beauty, but because of its power.

"Uh oh. The pastor has gone off on a tin foil hat conspiracy theory about the devil and governmental power."

I'm old enough to remember when voices now in power used to warn against big government spying on citizens, violating citizens' rights, and keeping secrets from the people. Now the shoe is on the other foot.

My point: The deceiver has been and still is active, and he still finds useful allies in the various governmental bodies around the world.

Allegiance to the beast is generated by fear, awe and despair. "What other option do we have?"

EX: Pastor Niemoeller, German pastor who spoke against the Nazi regime and was imprisoned. When asked by a pastor who visited him in jail, "Why are you in here?", he responded, "Brother why are you NOT here?"

Anytime a person or a people hesitate to do what is right because they are afraid of the powers that be, they are putting the rulers in the place of God. Those rulers are acting like the beast.

EX: When "we were just following orders" is the excuse for doing evil, then we know we are in a beastly regime.

EX: "What can I or we do in the face of government power" are the sad words of those ruled by a beast.

1 Pet 2:14 Government is instituted by God and we are to submit "as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good."

When government does the opposite, it has become 'beastly'. Intentionally or unintentionally, it is acting as the proxy for the Dragon.

When the government praises evildoers and punishes those who do good, then it is serving the Dragon.

Anytime a government or rulers exceed their proper bounds, when they take upon themselves divine privileges, or they move against the values of God, they are "Beastly."

Those in v.4 who cry, "Who is like the beast" mock God. They should be saying, "Who is like you O Lord" – Ex 15

John's description certainly fits the reality of the 1st and 2nd centuries under Roman rule. But that sort of state sponsored oppression shows up throughout history until this very day. It's not just ancient pagan leaders who oppressed the saints. "Christian" countries like England, France, Italy, and Spain have seen their share of oppression of other Christians. Communist and Muslim rulers have been involved as well. ALL HAVE SINNED...

While leaders don't come right out and say, "Satan take the wheel", when they follow their own desires and agendas they aspire to be like God. Power is addictive and those with it rarely curb their appetite voluntarily. Unrestrained power results in a clash with Christians and the kingdom of God. That is what the Devil wants, and he is more than willing to engage useful idiots in his schemes.

WHAT ABOUT THE CHURCH? The one group that can't be forced into submission by oppressive governments. That is the thrust of this text and this book. The beast uses human means to oppress the church.

(the oppression may not always be in the form of violence; it may be in the form of social pressure).

It sounds like, "We need to make these changes so that society will find us more acceptable, even if it means compromising God's truth."

Sadly, most churches that reach that point have already given up on True Truth so they don't see it as compromising. All that is left is earning the smile of the world because they've already turned their backs on God.

#4 The beast operates according to the constraints of God's Providence

The beast does much evil against the church and the unredeemed who worship him.

The beast has power and influence, but it still loses.

"IT was given or allowed" v 4,7,etc He is not in control. These are divine passive verbs, i.e. we understand that it is God's Providence at work.

The Devil is God's enemy but not His rival. The beast is given a long leash but is still on a leash.

The beast acts according to the restraints of God's providence

APPLICATION:

1. **God has ordained every experience of persecution.** Nothing can come in a haphazard way. Nothing comes that does not have God's purpose in mind v. 9 v. 10 A CALL FOR THE ENDURANCE OF THE SAINTS, i.e. to Overcome and endure until death. Even if we are to suffer unto death, it is by the providence of God. Knowing this will enable us to endure. Don't grant to the beast too much power.
**This is easy to say here in LaFayette, but we need to hear it so that we might be ready. What is happening to Christians around the world may come our way one day. Let us not be unprepared.
2. **No experience of persecution is wrath for our sin nor can it threaten our eternal reward.** V. 8 Our names are written from eternity.
Christ took the wrath of God for our sin, so whatever the divine reason, it is NOT His wrath on us. Those names not written worship the beast and are not persecuted.
Those who don't worship the beast and suffer do so because they were called from eternity. The roster of the New Jerusalem was put together from eternity. Nothing the beast does can impact what is written from eternity.
3. **To grow and stand firm we need relationships that reflect that our true unity is in Christ alone.**
This is cultivated in circles, not rows. Small groups can help us. Crabb - "show up and hush up."

Scripture shows that Jesus is the image bearer of God.

The kingdom of this world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ. And he shall reign forever and ever.

You don't have to fear the wicked beast if you belong to the slaughtered lamb.

COME TO THE TABLE

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