

“THE BEAST OF THE EARTH.”

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Scripture Texts: Revelation 13:11-18

Who is this beast of the earth?

You have heard the statement if it walks like a duck and talks like a duck it must be a duck. What has two horns and looks like a lamb and talks like a dragon? How can an innocent, harmless lamb speak for Satan? This is a beast in lamb's clothing.

This is just like Satan, who you remember is disguised as an angel of light. He takes a Christ-like appearance to deliver his message.

Revelation 13 describes two beasts. The first is a horrible sounding monster with ten horns and seven heads. The second appears much more harmless and for that reason is the far more dangerous beast.

As the last verse says we need wisdom here. We will need great discernment to differentiate between God's truth and Satan's lies.

[Do you know what a dragon sounds like? Would you know it's voice? Scripture tells us what a dragon sounds like; we hear his voice in Genesis 3 in the garden.

Genesis 3:1 Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden’?”

John 8:44 [He] does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

He is crafty. He asks questions in a way that gets you to question the truth and authority of God's Word. He lies and he lies to kill and destroy. He speaks against God and God's Word.

The first beast was from the sea, this one is from the earth, together they represent Satan's influence over the entire earth.

The beast of the earth is the third part of an *unholy trinity* described in Revelation 12-13, the dragon who is Satan, the beast of the sea who is like a false messiah and this beast of the sea who we will see is like a counterfeit Holy Spirit.

Three times in Revelation this beast is also referred to as the *false prophet*.

Revelation 16:13 I saw, coming out of the mouth of the dragon and out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the *false prophet*, three unclean spirits like frogs.

Revelation 19:20 The beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who in its presence had done the signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast.

Revelation 20:10 The devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were.

The actions of the beast of the sea imitate the actions of the Holy Spirit. Notice the similarities.

This beast does miraculous signs, like the miraculous signs in the book of Acts.

He makes fire come down from heaven, like the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

He influences the minds and hearts of the people to worship the first beast, like the Spirit who acts on behalf of Christ and reveals the truth and leads people to worship Christ.

He acts according to the authority of the first beast, as the Spirit acts under the will of the Father and the Son.

The beast gives breathe (pneuma, spirit) to the image.

One of the key themes of Revelation is that Satan is real and that our world and lives are in the midst of spiritual warfare. There is a huge cosmic battle being waged between Satan and his minions and God and His holy angels and His people on earth.

In this battle Satan resorts to death and destruction and deception. Imitation is a huge part of his warfare, deception, using *counterfeits*. He is disguised as an angel of light. He uses bait and switch, false advertising, lies, false prophets giving false teaching, wolves in sheep's clothing.

The beast of the sea is a counterfeit Holy Spirit, serving with the power and authority of Satan.

What does he do?

Notice again as we did last week that this beast is "allowed" (vs. 14) to do what it does. God is sovereign, God is in control. God is greater than Satan and sin and evil.

Satan is a destroyer, a deceiver and an idolater. If he can't destroy the church and the Gospel, he waters it down. Satan attacks the church through deceit and doctrinal confusion. He tempts the church to turn away from the truth of God's Word, to images and idols and counterfeits.

Every Sunday all across America and all across the world there are pastors who step into pulpits smiling, articulate, winsome, saying what itching ears want to hear, going along with the tide of the culture, giving false interpretations.

Satan has done this in every age and every generation in the church across the world for the past two thousand years. In the words of one famous theologian, what is preached is:

"A God without wrath brought men without sin into a kingdom without judgment through a Christ without a cross." (H. Richard Niebuhr's description of Protestant liberalism).

If you don't hear about the seriousness of sin and the reality of the wrath of God and the atoning death of Jesus as the only way for God's wrath to be satisfied and our sin forgiven, and the necessity of the Holy Spirit to make our hearts open and understanding of these truths then you aren't hearing the Gospel, you aren't hearing the message of the Bible.

Who are Satan's tools for deceit today? He has them in every age, the times change, the means change, but we need to be able to recognize the same old lies and deception.

Our secular, humanistic, materialistic, narcissistic culture is awash in lies and deception, in idolatry. God is increasingly non-existent and irrelevant, part of our primitive past.

He raises up others to help him, deceivers, false prophets and false teachers. He uses human instruments, human institutions, human governments to spread his lies.

He uses religions and cults, mass media and social media, culture and advertising, movies and books, television and the internet, politicians and governments. Planned Parenthood, ISIS, Islam, sexual immorality, drugs, evolution, abortion.

Modern technology is propelling us forward at incredible speed. Few are slowing down long enough to reflect on where it is taking us. Every new advanced is hailed as a great success without consideration of the possible consequences or ethics.

We just bow down and worship and praise the new beast and submit to its power and authority, the power of the expert, the power of the workers of modern miracles.

This is the air we breathe, it is our modern atmosphere, we don't even see it. We are no more aware of it than a fish is aware that it's wet.

Do we know the difference between the work of the Lamb and the work of the beast? Can we tell the difference between the voice of Jesus and the voice of the dragon? Can you tell the difference between a true prophet and a false prophet who is disguised as a true prophet?

There are authors of books published by Christian publishers who are helping Satan's cause more than the Gospel. There are TV and radio preachers who say they represent Christ and use His name and His book but they are not His true shepherds or preachers.

Some are pastors in the CRC. *Bob DeMoor*, the just retired editor of the Banner, is a false shepherd who is not laboring for the sake of the truth of the Gospel. He is tearing down people's faith and confidence in the truth of the Word of God.

When someone promotes something that Scripture forbids, that is a lie, a deception, a work of Satan. It is wolves in sheep's clothing.

All who refuse to worship the image are killed.

Notice the progression. First there are powerful signs that impress people and influence them toward idolatry. Then the idolatry becomes the rule of the day and becomes enforced, even under penalty of death.

Remember how Nebuchadnezzar threatened to kill Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego for not bowing down to his image (Daniel 3)? Christians in the early centuries were killed for not bowing to the Roman Emperor.

Totalitarian governments in the 20th century killed people by the millions for what they believed. And now in the 21st century Christians are killed for not swearing allegiance to Allah.

Our government is not yet killing Christians but they don't need to as long as everyone bows to their idols and images. They are killing our traditions and our values and our morals. They are killing our truth and our influence. Government is increasingly linked to religious ideology and bringing social and economic pressures to bear on Christians.

We may not feel the threat of the sword, but we are feeling the threat of conformity and compromise. The day is just around the corner when a truly consistent and faithful biblical Christian will not be able to hold political office because he won't bow to the ideologies of our time. The day is coming when the state will not tolerate resistance or rebellion or disobedience.

What is the meaning of his mark?

This calls for wisdom, lots of wisdom and discernment and the ability to avoid many popular temptations. This is one of the most debated and hotly contested verses in all of Revelation. I can't even begin to give you all the countless, popular interpretations out there.

Some say it is a chronological number, as in a number of years. They calculate the years between key events to find the anti-Christ and the time of Christ's return. The year 666 was especially noteworthy as was 1666.

Some say it's a number with historical significance pointing to a historical person. This is the most popular interpretation. The reason for this is in ancient times the letters of the old alphabets were also numbers. Hebrew, Greek and Latin numbers were indicated by letters of the alphabet so you can easily add up the numerical value of the letters of anyone's name.

This numerology was a common device in ancient times where a name could be converted into a number and a number could be converted into a name. The numerical value of the word beast in Hebrew is 666.

Hundreds of names have been proposed throughout history. Many have said Nero or Caligula or Domitian or all the Roman Emperors in general. Other suggestions have been Mohammed or Napoleon. The Catholics said Martin Luther, and the Protestants said the popes. Hitler was a favorite. I remember hearing it was Henry Kissinger or Mikhail Gorbachev.

Some say it is on the back of a one dollar bill. Others point to the numbers on a roulette wheel which add up to 666, 1 through 36.

My favorite is the world wide web. W is the sixth letter of the Hebrew alphabet (Vav or Waw). WWW is 666. The internet is the beast.

But it is all too clever and speculative and changes with every passing generation.

Just as the beasts are counterfeits so also the mark of the beast is a counterfeit of the sign and seal of God.

Remember in chapter 7 when we read of the angel coming with the seal of the living God to seal or mark the 144,000. God owns those who are marked with His seal.

This mark or seal is symbolic. It is to be spiritually understood, not physically. So we can reason that the mark of the beast is symbolic as well. This is typical of Satan, ***counterfeiting*** God's sign and seal.

We have pointed out before the numbers in Revelation are to be taken symbolically unless the context demands otherwise. Generally in Revelation numbers symbolize a spiritual reality and are not taken literally.

24 elders; 7 seals and 7 trumpets; 144,000; 3 and a half years; 7 heads and 10 horns.

The church in Revelation has been symbolized by pictures (the elders, the woman, the witnesses) and by a number (144,000).

The church age, meaning the last days or end times has been symbolized by pictures (the woman preserved in the wilderness, the witnesses preaching, the nation's occupying Jerusalem) and by a number (three and a half years).

So the question is what does the number 666 symbolically represent?

In Revelation 13 the false religion has been symbolized by pictures (the beast of the sea and earth) and by a number (666).

What number would be best to symbolize false and Satanic religion? A counterfeit number that is close to the real thing but falls short.

7 is the number for completeness as in the seven days of creation. The number 7 is used repeatedly in Revelation and is understood to be a number of completion each time (the seventh seal, the seventh trumpet, the seventh bowl). 6 is the number for incompleteness, falling short of perfection.

Divine completeness is expressed in 777 and by contrast 666 falls short of that suggesting incompleteness and imperfection. The beast epitomizes incompleteness and falling short and missing the mark. 666 reflects the unholy trinity, a counterfeit of the holy Trinity, 777.

This is not a number for a man, but a number for man, for humanity. 666 points not to the identity of someone, but to the character of that someone, the beast.

The forehead represents our *thinking* and the right hand represents our *acting* or doing. With our minds we make our commitments and with our hands we carry them out. We need God's Word on our foreheads and hands, applying God's Word to our thinking and our actions.

This isn't about tattoos or embedded computer chips in some future tribulation. This has nothing to do with credit cards or social security numbers.

You don't need a physical mark or a computer chip to think and act in a man-centered, godless way. You don't need that to be politically correct and to compromise the truth and to go along with the masses.

This is a symbolic number portraying the allegiance and loyalty of those who don't believe in Jesus and who join forces with those who oppose Christ and His church and His people.

This mark is a counterfeit to God's mark and seal on His people. This mark is contrasted to the mark believers receive in the very next verse, Revelation 14:1.

Revelation 14:1 Then I looked, and behold, on Mount Zion stood the Lamb, and with him 144,000 *who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads*.

The Lord's name here refers to a spiritual reality and by parallel so does the beast's name. God's mark is a sign of His ownership and His spiritual protection. The seal marks ownership, allegiance, loyalty.

Application and conclusion.

What is the wisdom we need most? To discern the times, to discern evil and the evil one, to know the number of our days and that the days are evil.

We don't need mathematical wisdom, we need spiritual and moral wisdom, the ability to see God and what He is doing in our midst.

We need wisdom and discernment to see through the deception of Satan.
We need spiritual perception to see the unholy nature of the beast.

This is a warning to heed the cosmic war and the spiritual warfare around us and in us. This is a call to arms, to make our allegiances and loyalties clear, we follow Christ and we are marked with His name. This is a warning to beware of Satan's activity in every age and generation and not just at some far distant time at the end of history.

We need wisdom for when our Christian commitment becomes costly, when it costs us dearly.

Hebrews 10:32-34 But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, 33 sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. 34 For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one.

John is exhorting saints to spiritual and moral discernment, not intellectual ability to solve a complex mathematical problem.

We need wisdom to know the Gospel, to know our misery and the source of our mercy, to know our guilt and God's grace. We need to know why Jesus came to earth and what the cross is all about.

Signs and wonders, miracles are impressive, they get people's attention. But you know what is really impressive, what is genuinely miraculous? People repenting of their sin, people confessing their sin and seeking forgiveness. People putting others before themselves, people serving others, people giving sacrificially and generously. People following Jesus no matter what the cost.

We need to know the wisdom of God that leads to salvation. The best way to know a counterfeit is to know the real thing especially well. Know Jesus, bear His mark, this is wisdom.