

The Book Of Revelation

*3 Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of the prophecy,
and blessed are those who hear and who keep what is written in it; for the time is near.
(Revelation 1:3. NRSV)*

*5 And the one who was seated on the throne said, 'See, I am making all things new.'
Also he said, 'Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.'
(Revelation 21:5. NRSV)*

Message 9

Revelation 13:1- 18
January 15th, 2012
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Introduction:

Good evening! Let's begin again with a bit of review. Maybe the easiest way to do this would be to just have you open your Bibles to Revelation chapter 1 and we will just fast walk up to the start of chapter 13 so that we can reengage our brains and drag up from the fog the things we learned last semester. You recall that the Book of Revelation, it is generally agreed, is organised around 7 major visions. These visions cover the time period we call "The Church Age" and stretch from the ascension of Jesus all the way to his Second Coming and even slightly beyond into eternity. They are rather like transparency slides in that when we lay them on top of each other and look at them collectively, we get a more complete picture of what is going on – each vision fills in the picture a little more, so to speak. Each of the visions is painted in colours borrowed from the Old Testament and so as we look at each vision we have to ask what stories, what characters, what images and what associated meanings are being imported to this new vision that is before us. Not all of the visions cover the same periods of the time frame with equal exactness and focus so we may see a vision that deals mostly with the generation before the Lord's Return or a vision that deals predominately with the generations immediately after his ascension or we may see one that covers the whole span of history in broad brush strokes but when we look at them together, a sense of the whole begins to emerge. But we are reminded, there is more in the mind of God for this season than has been disclosed to the mind of man. There will be surprises and things we will need to face in faith that God is in control.

In chapter 1 then we see the first vision. It begins in 1:10 with a vision of heaven. We need to understand the God of Heaven in order to make sense of events on the earth. The vision shows us Christ, powerful and majestic and then it shows us Christ in the midst of the churches. He sees, he rebukes, he sustains, he blesses and he judges.

In chapter 4 we begin a new vision, the second vision and once again it begins in heaven. We see the throne room of heaven and one seated on the throne. The second vision is of Christ on the throne and the seven seals and takes us all the way to the end of chapter 7. We agreed that the most likely way to understand the seven seals is that the first four cover the entire period of the church age, they are the means by which God manipulates and exercises Sovereignty over world events to execute his purposes of wrath and redemption. They serve three ends: to draw men and women to salvation, to purify the church and to punish the persistently rebellious. The fifth seal shows us the gathering saints in heaven and the sixth seal deals generally with the Great Day of Wrath. The seventh seal is a drop down box or black hole that leads us into the next vision which is the Seven Trumpets.

In chapter 8 we begin the third vision of the Seven Trumpets. We generally agreed that the seven trumpets are best understood as an extended telling of the 6th seal – the Great Day of Wrath. They seem to begin with a cataclysmic event described over the first four trumpets and at some point during the 6th trumpet it seems the last elect person is saved and things begin to rapidly draw to a close. The seventh trumpet brings history on earth to a triumphant close.

In chapters 10 and 11 we have two excurses. The first seems to be telling us that there is additional detail about the Great Day of Wrath which has not been disclosed to us and that there will be no delay between the 6th and 7th trumpet. The second excursus, the two witnesses, seems to be best understood as a retelling of the entire church age through the language of the prophet Zechariah and his two olive trees. It seems to speak of separation between the true people of God and the false, of the church purified through tribulation and trampling, empowered in her witness, protected in her ministry until such time as the mission is complete and her protection is removed. Then, like her Lord, she will be killed. However, also like her Lord she will be raised up to the presence and the glory of God. That completed our study then of the third vision.

Then last time we met, before the Christmas break we began to look at the fourth great vision in the Book of Revelation, the vision of the devil and his underlings. It begins in chapter 12:1 and it ends with the closing of chapter 14. Last time we met we dealt with the first part of vision four, the Woman, the Child and the Dragon. The devil has been trying to kill Christ in the womb since the Garden of Eden and has been thwarted at every turn. Christ was born, he was victorious and now the devil has been thrown down, he knows his time is short and so he makes war on the other children of the woman those, we are told in 12:17:

who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ. (Revelation 12:17. NKJV)

The church age, thus, is a time when the devil's power is limited, but focused entirely upon the destruction of the church. We continue with that story now in chapter 13 as we begin to learn about the devil's underlings, the beast of the sea and the beast from the earth. Open your Bibles to Revelation 13:1 and we will begin to read and by God's grace, to divide the text as we go.

¹Then I stood on the sand of the sea. And I saw a beast rising up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and on his horns ten crowns, and on his heads a blasphemous name.

²Now the beast which I saw was like a leopard, his feet were like *the feet of a bear*, and his mouth like the mouth of a lion. The dragon gave him his power, his throne, and great authority.

³And *I saw* one of his heads as if it had been mortally wounded, and his deadly wound was healed. And all the world marvelled and followed the beast.

⁴So they worshiped the dragon who gave authority to the beast; and they worshiped the beast, saying, "Who *is* like the beast? Who is able to make war with him?"

⁵And he was given a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies, and he was given authority to continue for forty-two months.

⁶Then he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme His name, His tabernacle, and those who dwell in heaven.

⁷It was granted to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them. And authority was given him over every tribe, tongue, and nation.

⁸All who dwell on the earth will worship him, whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.

⁹If anyone has an ear, let him hear.

¹⁰He who leads into captivity shall go into captivity; he who kills with the sword must be killed with the sword. Here is the patience and the faith of the saints.

The Beast From The Sea

Let's talk first then about this beast from the sea. That he comes up out of the sea most likely means that this beast arises from among the peoples of the earth. The sea is used in the Old Testament and the New Testament as a symbol for peoples and nations, raging, rising and

swirling about giving birth to all manner of foul things. You can find that in Isaiah 17:12 for example:

Woe to the multitude of many people *who* make a noise like the roar of the seas, and to the rushing of nations *that* make a rushing like the rushing of mighty waters! (Isaiah 17:12. NKJV)

We see it also later in the Book of Revelation in chapter 17 verse 15:

¹⁵Then he said to me, “The waters which you saw, where the harlot sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues. (Revelation 17:15. NKJV)

So this beast arises out of peoples, multitudes and nations. It is described language taken from the Old Testament Book of Daniel. Daniel describes four world empires using the imagery of beasts.

²Daniel spoke, saying, “I saw in my vision by night, and behold, the four winds of heaven were stirring up the Great Sea.

³And **four great beasts came up from the sea**, each different from the other.

⁴The first *was* like **a lion**, and had eagle’s wings. I watched till its wings were plucked off; and it was lifted up from the earth and made to stand on two feet like a man, and a man’s heart was given to it.

⁵“And suddenly another beast, a second, like **a bear**. It was raised up on one side, and *had* three ribs in its mouth between its teeth. And they said thus to it: ‘Arise, devour much flesh!’

⁶“After this I looked, and there was another, like **a leopard**, which had on its back four wings of a bird. The beast also had four heads, and dominion was given to it.

⁷“After this I saw in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, dreadful and terrible, exceedingly strong. It had huge iron teeth; it was devouring, breaking in pieces, and trampling the residue with its feet. It *was* different from all the beasts that *were* before it, and it had ten horns. (Daniel 7:2-7. NKJV)

In Daniel these beasts represent present and coming world governments. The lion is Babylon, the Bear is Medo-Persia and the Leopard is Greece. The fourth beast is Rome. Here in Revelation we have a composite beast, he is made up of all the beasts that have come before. That’s the symbol, now what does it mean? Commentators generally agree that the beast from the sea represents government and empire raised up in opposition to God’s people. This is a picture of the devil animating government in order to persecute God’s people. We are told that this beast is:

having seven heads and ten horns, and on his horns ten crowns, and on his heads a blasphemous name. (Revelation 13:1. NKJV)

That is to say that he looks like the devil but the devil is in charge. The devil had crowns upon his head the beast has them on his horns only. In the Greek it is striking to notice that *kai edothei auto* is used over and over again: and it was given to him. Power is given to the devil by God

and now the devil gives it to the beast. The point is that God is ultimately in charge and it is ultimately his purpose that is being advanced even if the devil has other desires and intentions. The seven heads is taken by some to refer to seven great persecuting empires, possibly Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome and then one more in the future.

It says in verse 2 that while he has seven heads he has only one mouth – *stoma* is singular there, meaning I think that while the face and shape of this anti-Christian government will change over the years, it speaks, as it were, with one mouth.

Verse 3 is very interesting. It says that one of the heads was as if it had been killed unto death and slain unto death and it was healed. This causes everyone in the world to be amazed and to follow the beast. There is much discussion and disagreement about this verse. Some see it as simply meaning that evil and anti-Christian persecution by government will seem to have been put to death time and time again, but time and time again it will re-emerge until finally everyone says: “Who can make war with the beast? If you can’t beat him, join him” and they give themselves over to one last, ultimate persecution of the church. And indeed we do see that over history. Again and again government rises up against Christianity and then that government falls or is itself converted and we think persecution is in the past and then it comes back around again. We are seeing that now in our day. More Christians have been martyred in the last 100 years than in the previous 1900 years combined. CNN is reporting a growing concern over the brutal persecution of Christians going on right now all across the Middle East and parts of Africa. It is worth your life right now to follow Jesus in Afghanistan, in Egypt, in Iran, in Iraq and in Nigeria. Others say it means that one of the heads, that is to say one of the Empires, will seem to be dead and then will come back to life. So they expect to see a revived Roman Empire and many see this in the EU and so forth. It is difficult to say for sure which is the preferable understanding but it probably doesn’t matter much at the end of the day. The point is, the devil will use the machinery of government again and again to persecute the church and will ultimately, in the last days, be so successful that he will wipe out, for all intents and purposes, the visible church and will appear to have destroyed them utterly.

⁷It was granted to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them. And authority was given him over every tribe, tongue, and nation.

⁸All who dwell on the earth will worship him, whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb

slain from the foundation of the world. (Revelation 13:7-8. NKJV)

This of course is what we saw in the story of the two witnesses. When they had finished their witness, what happened? Look at Revelation 11:7:

⁷When they finish their testimony, the beast that ascends out of the bottomless pit will make war against them, overcome them, and kill them. (Revelation 11:7. NKJV)

Putting these various transparency slides together then we might say that all throughout the church age, the church will give testimony against periodic and recurring persecution from government and that after the last great evangelistic harvest and after the last elect person is saved during the time of the sixth seal, and the sixth trumpet, the beast will make war and effectively destroy the church. She will lie slain in the streets and all the world will rejoice over her carcass. That is why verses 9-10 of chapter 13 read as they do. The Bible is warning us that some will go into captivity, some will die by the sword, this will happen. Saints must persevere and endure and keep faith.

The Beast From The Earth

¹¹Then I saw another beast coming up out of the earth, and he had two horns like a lamb and spoke like a dragon.

This beast comes up from the earth, looks harmless but speaks with the mouth of evil. He looks like Jesus but talks like the devil. All of these clues lead to the near universal conclusion that this beast represents “the wisdom of the world”. False religion, false science and godless philosophy. If the first beast is the fist of Satan, the second beast is the MIND of Satan. Some of these false prophets will be found in the Universities, some will be found on the television airways, some will be found leading other religions and cults and some of them will be found preaching in church pulpits on Sundays. Jesus says in Matthew 7:

¹⁵“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. (Matthew 7:15. NKJV)

Chapter 13 goes on to say:

¹²And he exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence, and causes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed.

So the forces of worldly wisdom, false religion, pseudo-Christian and full blown pagan, false science and godless philosophy will work together to elevate the authority and power of the first beast: anti-Christian government.

Now, I want to avoid too much prognostication but obviously, these texts do invite us to look at our world and ask, with humility, “where are we in this picture?” It is very interesting to note that as democracy begins to fail around the world it is slowly being replaced by technocracy. At the end of the day, the most important job of government, in the eyes of most people today, is to protect their wealth. Democracy STINKS at this because to make and keep money you have to accept short term pain for long term gain, and democracy can’t do that because politicians want to win the next election. So they never decide to live within their means, they never decide to pay down the debt because that means getting people to vote today for pain for themselves and prosperity for future generations. That will never happen. So Nero fiddles while Rome burns. But as the Europeans wake up to the fact that democracy has eaten their money, what are they doing? Handing the government over to technocrats! Smart guys! Most people would rather be rich and ruled then poor and democratic. This has already happened in Russia and this is the state of affairs in China. Democracy is seen as incapable of keeping us rich so it has been effectively rejected in Russia, never attempted in China and is being slowly replaced in Europe. Watch for the intellectual elite to suggest some form of meritocracy in the near future, where only the “smart people” – and of course they will decide who those people are – get to vote and participate in government. Stupid people who believe in God, the Bible, sin, things like that will be shut out.

All that to say, the second beast, worldly wisdom, false religion etc. fools the masses and exalts and extols the glory of the government.

¹³He performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men.

¹⁴And he deceives those who dwell on the earth by those signs which he was granted to do in the sight of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who was wounded by the sword and lived.

¹⁵He was granted *power* to give breath to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak and cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed.

The second beast offers many convincing proofs, some of them overtly religious in nature, such that the masses are deceived and they worship the first beast. The Bible speaks elsewhere about the false wonders that falsely Christian deceivers will employ. We see that in 2 Thessalonians 2:

⁹The coming of the *lawless one* is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders,
¹⁰and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. ¹¹And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie,
¹²that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness. (2 Thessalonians 2:9-12. NKJV)

The false prophets of the devil are armed with all manner of power, signs and lying wonders. These deceptions are able to deceive those who did not love the truth. But again, notice that God is Sovereign over it all. God sends these things. God is using these things to refine the righteous and to punish those who didn't love the truth. He is choking them on the very drink they asked for. He is accomplishing his purposes of wrath and redemption.

That the second beast was able to “enliven” an image of the first beast, is seen by many to be the language of parody. This is all sort of a ghastly mimicking of the work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit has charismatic gifts, well so does the second beast. The Holy Spirit enlivens the church as the dwelling place of God, well the second beast makes the idolatrous image of the beast live and speak with power too, but it is the power of death, not the power of life. It is probably best to understand this to mean that the beast of false religion and worldly wisdom will give to the powers of anti-Christian government the moral authority to finally and utterly persecute and destroy Christianity.

¹⁶He causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads,

Now again, remember the language of parody. He is mimicking the work of the Holy Spirit. What does the Holy Spirit do to believers? He seals them as belonging to the Lamb. The word used here for mark is the Greek *charagma* (*charagma*) and means “a stamp of servitude”. It was the way masters branded or marked their servants. This is a symbolic way of saying that just like the people of God were sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked off as elect, so also the second beast will cause everyone to be marked and sealed as servants of the devil. This is mimicry.

What did we see in Revelation 7?

²Then I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God. And he cried with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea, ³saying, “Do not harm the earth, the sea, or the trees till we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads.” ⁴And I heard the number of those who were sealed. One hundred *and* forty-four thousand (Revelation 7:2-4. NKJV)

All the people of God were sealed and marked as God's servants, so here all the servants of the devil are sealed and marked as his servants. This is a way of saying that finally and ultimately every person on the earth is going to be separated into two opposing camps: the followers of the lamb and the followers of Satan. Verse 17 says:

¹⁷and that no one may buy or sell except one who has the mark or the name of the beast, or the number of his name. Because the followers of Satan are going to have control of the machinery of government they will use that power to shut Christians out of the world economy.

¹⁸Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man: His number is 666. (Revelation 13:1-18. NKJV)

This is a clear instance of what is called gematria. This was very common in both Greek and Hebrew cultures and lots of people have tried to use it to find out who the beast is. No one has ever come up with an answer that has worked, so maybe you will be the one to do it. ☺ Gematria is pretty simple, I have a handout for you showing how it works in Greek and Hebrew, the problem is that there are two slightly different codes that were used, partly because the Greek digamma fell out of use, and as a result it really is an absolute crap shoot. You give me enough time and let me try it in Hebrew, Latin, Greek – by both codes and then English and I can prove that Hilary Clinton is the second beast, you just watch me! And that's the problem obviously, it can become a distraction and a magnet for silly people. The 666 probably means, at the very least, that the wisdom of the world ultimately falls short unto ruin. 7 is the number of God, 6 is the number of man and so 666 means less than god, less than god, less than god. Or "failure, failure, failure." It may mean more than that, but it doesn't mean less.

One last question we should talk about is the relationship between the first beast and THE ANTI-CHRIST and the second beast and THE FALSE PROPHET. The relationship is best illustrated by 1 John 2

¹⁸Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the^e Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour. (1 John 2:18. NKJV)

So the Bible says that there are always antichrists but that in the time before the return of Christ the last, great, archetypal Antichrist will appear. So also there will always be forces of worldly wisdom and false prophets who oppose Christianity, but in the last days THE FALSE PROPHET

will emerge. Think of it as being like a pyramid. There are always many antichrists throughout history – empires and emperors, kings and their kingdoms. Think Pharaoh and Egypt, Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon, Antiochus and the Greeks, Caesar and Rome, Hitler and Germany, etc. This is the wide base of the pyramid. All antichrists but not yet THE ANTICHRIST. A kingdom and a king is yet to come who will persecute the church in a fierce and final way. This is the tip of the pyramid. Likewise there have always been false prophets and professional scoffers but in the last days this will all culminate in one, great, powerful beast, the false prophet and he will deceive the world, except the elect. He will not deceive those whose names are written in the Book of Life.

Let's end there and we can take some questions.