

Lesson 30

Chapter 13

Revelation 13:1-2

1 And I stood upon the sand of the sea, and saw a beast rise up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and upon his horns ten crowns, and upon his heads the name of blasphemy. 2 And the beast which I saw was like unto a leopard, and his feet were as the feet of a bear, and his mouth as the mouth of a lion: and the dragon gave him his power, and his seat, and great authority.

We will see two terrible beasts in Chapter 13 — one here in verse 1, and another in verse 11. Keep in mind all that we have said about the number two and its association with Rome — founded by twins raised by a beast, composed of Roman power and Greek culture, composed of military might and false religion, two powerful dynasties in the first century, with each culminating in a great persecution of the church, the first with Nero and the second with Domitian. The number two is a thread that we have seen running all throughout this book, and in this chapter we see *two* beasts.

The first beast in verse 1 is a beast that rises out of the sea. We have seen the sea used before in this book to depict separation, and we have also seen the sea used to depict the restless, unsettled nations of the world. That latter symbol seems to be the one God is using here. Recall the similar imagery in Isaiah 17.

Isaiah 17:12-13 — Ah, the thunder of many peoples, they thunder like the thundering of the sea! Ah, the roar of nations, they roar like the roaring of mighty waters! The nations roar like the roaring of many waters, but he will rebuke them, and they will flee far away, chased like chaff on the mountains before the wind and whirling dust before the storm.

And that symbol fits perfectly. This beast represents Rome, and Rome rose from the restless, unsettled nations of the world.

But there may be an additional reason behind the use of the sea here. In Jeremiah 51:13, the prophet says this about Babylon: “O you who dwell by many waters, rich in treasures, your end has come.” And later in verse 42 of that same chapter, Jeremiah writes, “The sea has come up on Babylon; she is covered with its tumultuous waves.” And in Ezekiel 26:3, God says this about Tyre, “Behold, I am against you, O Tyre, and will bring up many nations against you, as the sea brings up its waves.” So not only does the sea denote wicked and restless nations, the sea also denotes judgment.

When we last saw the dragon we were told that it had gone off to make war against those who keep the commandments of God and bear testimony to Jesus. What we see here is one of the weapons that Satan was going to use in that conflict.

This beast from the sea is both a weapon of Satan and a manifestation of Satan. Satan was the driving power behind the attack by Rome against the church. That the beast is now wearing Satan’s royal headdress from Revelation 12:3 tells us that the great red dragon has given power and authority to this beast from the sea to act on his behalf. We are seeing both Rome and the power behind Rome, Satan.

This beast has seven heads with ten horns and ten crowns. This is the same description we were given of the dragon in Revelation 12:3. What is represented by the seven heads and ten horns in verse 1? When we first saw these heads and these horns in 12:3, I mentioned that we would see them again in Chapters 13 and 17, and that their meaning would be explained to us by an angel in Chapter 17. We will wait until Chapter 17 for an in-depth study the angel’s explanation, but one thing we will learn in Chapter 17 is that the seven heads are seven kings and the ten horns are ten kings.

Which kings? That's the part that we will look at in Chapter 17, but knowing that this beast is covered with kings is enough for us to know that we are looking at Rome in verse 1. Why? Because it was Roman kings who were persecuting the church at the time this book was written. It was the Roman king Nero who had previously persecuted Christians, and it was the Roman king Domitian who would very soon pick up where Nero had left off. As for why we see seven kings and ten kings, we will look at that question in Chapter 17, and we looked at previously in our study of Daniel.

Verse 1 gives us another reason to know that we are looking at Roman kings on this terrible beast. The end of the verse says, "and upon his heads the name of blasphemy." These Roman kings thought they were gods, and they demanded to be addressed as such. Recall how Paul described the man of lawlessness.

2 Thessalonians 2:3-4 — *Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God.*

That sounds just like what history tells us about Domitian. Domitian ordered that all address him as "Our Lord God Domitian," and one of our earlier handouts (available at www.ThyWordIsTruth.com) showed coins with blasphemous descriptions of Domitian and of his father and infant son.

And Domitian was not alone. Every emperor called himself *divus* or *sebastos*, which means divine. On his coins, Nero referred to himself as *The Savior of the World*. The emperors took as their title the Latin word *dominus*, or its Greek equivalent *kurios*, which mean Lord, and which is used throughout the New Testament as a title for Jesus.

Notice the end of verse 1 — heads, which we will see in Chapter 17 are Roman kings, with the name of blasphemy on them? Where have we seen that very thing — heads of kings with names of blasphemy on them? Isn't that a good description of a Roman coin? Was John seeing Roman coins on this terrible beast? Those coins certainly fit the description — they show the heads of kings, and they show the blasphemous names that were applied to those kings.

Verse 2 tells us that the beast “was like unto a leopard, and his feet were as the feet of a bear, and his mouth as the mouth of a lion.” These descriptions point us unmistakably back to Daniel 7, which we studied earlier. The fourth kingdom in Daniel 7 is Rome, and the first three kingdoms are Babylon (shown as a **lion** in Daniel 7:4), Medo-Persia (shown as a **bear** in Daniel 7:5), and Greece (shown as a **leopard** in Daniel 7:6). Daniel 7:12 tells us that these beasts lost their dominion but didn’t die.

Daniel 7:12 — As concerning the rest of the beasts, they had their dominion taken away: yet their lives were prolonged for a season and time.

Here we have an explanation of that verse from Daniel 7. Those earlier kingdoms lived on through Rome! That is how their lives were prolonged. And when Rome was judged, so were those earlier persecutors of God’s people.

We looked at these earlier kingdoms in our study of Daniel. Babylon, the first of the four kingdoms, was the invading power that carried Daniel and his three friends off to exile. The Medo-Persians, the second kingdom, was the kingdom that came to power after Belshazzar saw the writing on the wall in Daniel 5. It was this second kingdom that threw Daniel into the lions’ den. The third kingdom, Greece, conquered Persia under Alexander the Great but then split into four parts after his death. Rome was the fourth kingdom, which conquered Greece.

This beast in verse 2 is part leopard, part bear, and part lion. Rome, the fourth beast in Daniel 7, embodied all of the wickedness of the first three beasts and much more, and so Rome is pictured as being composed of pieces of the previous three kingdoms, which was actually the case in reality as Rome conquered and thus included their former territories.

Where did Rome get this great power? Who gave Rome its seat and its great authority? Verse 2 tells us that those things were given to Rome by Satan, the dragon. But how can that be true if God has all authority and if “there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God” (Romans 13:1)?

God has all authority and all power, and that includes all authority and all power over Satan and over Rome. Rome existed by the will of God and the providence of God. Rome was used by God as a great tool to spread the gospel, but Rome was also used as a tool by Satan to persecute the church. What we see at the end of verse 2 is Rome being used as a tool of Satan. What did Paul say about Domitian?

2 Thessalonians 2:9 — *Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders.*

All power and signs and lying wonders. Paul tells us that that all came from the working of Satan, and that is also what verse 2 tells us. Satan was using Rome as a weapon against the church, and it was a weapon with great power and great authority.

This description makes me think of the temptation of Christ.

Matthew 4:8-10 — *Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me. Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.*

Satan's temptation of Jesus was not successful — but when Satan made Rome that same offer, Rome accepted! Rome fell down and worshipped Satan in exchange for the power, the seat, and the authority offered by Satan in verse 2.

As a final point, we should note that as bad as Rome was, there is nowhere in this book any hint that the persecuted Christians were to violently resist Rome or even to seek the overthrow of Rome. The commands in Romans 13:1 and 1 Peter 2:13-14 had not be repealed. Yes, Rome had veered far away from the ideal government described by Paul and ordained by God — but nowhere was the church told to take matters into its own hands. When Peter commanded his readers to “honor the king” in 1 Peter 2:17, Peter was referring to none other than Nero himself!

Why? Why was the church told to honor the king who was at the same time putting them to death? Paul answers that question in Romans 13:2 — “Whoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God.” An attack against a God-ordained authority is an attack against God's authority. But what if that authority has departed from God's word and has become an evil authority? Then we have another verse: “Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord” (Romans 12:19). And we have Acts 5:29 — “We ought to obey God rather than men.” But the command to the church is to honor the king, even if that king is the Emperor Nero or the Emperor Domitian!

I think we can all see the damage that is being done by those who do not honor the leader of our own country — and that goes for both the current leader and the previous leader. The command of 1 Peter 2:17 is easy to disobey, but it is impossible to misunderstand: “Honor the king.” If we think that command is difficult, just think how difficult it was for those to whom that command was first directed!

Revelation 13:3

3 And I saw one of his heads as it were wounded to death; and his deadly wound was healed: and all the world wondered after the beast.

One of the heads on the beast is “as it were wounded to death.” That phrase does not mean that the head just looked like it was dead; that phrase means that the head was dead, and the marks of its death were upon it. We saw a similar phrase earlier in Revelation 5:6 with regard to the Lamb — “And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb **as it had been slain.**”

Did this wound kill the entire beast or just one of the seven heads on the beast? Later, in verse 12, we will find out that this wound kills the entire beast. That is, the entire beast dies when one of its heads dies. Whatever this beast is (and we will discuss that point in just a moment), it is inextricably linked to its seven heads (as we would expect with any creature). If (as I think we will see) these seven heads are the emperors of Rome, then this beast is something that lives and dies with those emperors.

But verse 3 tells us something else about this beast and its head that was wounded to death — verse 3 tells us that that deadly wound was healed, which caused all the world to wonder at the beast.

Which Roman emperor is depicted by this head in verse 3 that is slain? We will learn more about this head when we get to Revelation 17. In verse 8 of that later chapter we will read this about the beast: “it was and is not and is to come.” That verse suggests that when this vision was being received, the beast was dead (it “**is not**”) and the deadly wound had not yet been healed (it “**is to come**”).

If this beast is Rome, and if these heads are the emperors of Rome, then what does it mean that the beast died and then come back to life?

If we had been living in Rome in the first century, then we would not have had to pause for one second in answering that question. We would have known exactly what was being shown to us here. We would have immediately recognized **Nero** in this description. Why?

After the death of Nero in AD 68, there were many rumors that Nero had in fact not died at all, but rather that he was planning to return and retake Rome. This belief came to be called the *Nero Redivivus* legend. The earliest written version of the legend is found in the Sibylline Oracles, which claim that Nero did not really die but fled to Parthia, where he planned to build a large army and return to Rome to destroy it.

At least three Nero imposters emerged to lead rebellions. The first, who sang and played the lyre and whose face was similar to that of Nero, appeared in AD 69 during the reign of Vitellius. Sometime during the reign of Titus there was another impostor who appeared in Asia and who also sang to the accompaniment of the lyre and looked like Nero. Twenty years after Nero's death, during the reign of Domitian, there was a third pretender. Domitian himself was regarded by some as the *Nero Redivivus*. Tertullian called Domitian "a limb of the bloody Nero."

Why would *Nero Redivivus* have been so frightening? What sort of persecution occurred under Nero? What sort of person was Nero? Here is how Suetonius describes him:

Nero castrated the boy Sporus and actually tried to make a woman of him; and he married him with all the usual ceremonies, including a dowry and a bridal veil, took him to his home attended by a great throng, and treated him as his wife. And the witty jest that someone made is still current, that it would have been well for the world if Nero's father Domitius had had that same kind of wife!

We are also told that Nero married his step-sister and that he murdered his step-father, his mother, and his wife. Nero first tried to kill his mother, Agrippina, by putting her aboard a boat that had been constructed to collapse, but after she survived, he had her hacked to pieces by his soldiers. (It tells us something about Nero's mother that Nero was cheered by the Romans when he returned to Rome after having killed her!)

When Nero came to power in AD 54, there were six other males who traced their heritage back to Augustus or Claudius. These men all died during Nero's reign, which was the main reason that Rome was plunged into chaos and civil war at Nero's death.

Nero took the wife of his closest friend (Otho) as his mistress and later kicked her to death when she was with child. In AD 64, Nero set fire to Rome so that he could rebuild it himself, and when suspicion turned on him, Nero blamed the Christians, who all knew were anticipating a fiery end of the world. As one modern historian puts it, "the belief that the fire had been started deliberately became so prevalent that Nero was forced to point a finger away from himself. He singled out the strange eastern cultists called Christians." Tacitus describes Nero's subsequent persecution of Christians in this way:

Mockery of every sort was added to their deaths. Covered with the skins of beasts, they were torn by dogs and perished, or were nailed to crosses, or were doomed to the flames and burnt, to serve as a nightly illumination, when daylight had expired.

In short, it would be difficult to find a greater enemy of God and of God's people than the Roman emperor Nero — **and the rumor of the day was that this great enemy was about to return.**

While there was (and always will be) persecution of God's people, that persecution was much worse under Nero and again under Domitian. When we get to Revelation 17, we will see that this book was written between the reigns of Nero and Domitian, during the reign of Vespasian, Domitian's father. When this book was written there was a relative lull in the persecution. But the terrible persecution would soon start again — which is why the church really needed to hear a message of comfort and encouragement.

A modern analogy might be Hurricane Harvey. It is as if Houston had just been hit by that terrible storm, and then, a short time later, an equally terrible storm was once again approaching from the gulf. What sort of message would we need to hear in the lull between those two storms? That is the situation the church was in at this time, but they were not facing hurricanes; they were facing blood thirsty Roman emperors.

Domitian was that second hurricane, and he was coming. In fact, he was already around because he was the younger son of the current emperor, Vespasian. Domitian would become emperor soon himself after the death of his father and his older brother. Tertullian said that Nero was "the first emperor

who dyed his sword in Christian blood,” and Eusebius wrote that Domitian “finally showed himself the successor of Nero’s campaign of hostility to God. He was the second to promote persecution against us.” Hurricane Domitian was approaching!

This beast from the sea represents Rome from the perspective of the Roman emperors. This beast depicts Rome as a civil persecutor of God’s people, which reached its heights in the first century under Nero and Domitian. The government ordained by God had gone bad and had turned against the people of God. The first beast denotes that rogue Roman government.

In a moment, John will see a second beast, and that second beast will also represent Rome, but it will show us Rome from a different perspective.

Revelation 13:4

4 And they worshipped the dragon which gave power unto the beast: and they worshipped the beast, saying, Who is like unto the beast? who is able to make war with him?

In this verse we see two of the most horrible images in this entire book: dragon worship and beast worship.

Ralph Waldo Emerson: “A person will worship something, have no doubt about that. We may think our tribute is paid in secret in the dark recesses of our hearts, but it will out. That which dominates our imaginations and our thoughts will determine our lives, and our character. Therefore, it behooves us to be careful what we worship, for what we are worshipping we are becoming.”

If we worship the dragon, then like the dragon we will become. If we worship the beast, then like the beast we will become. And have no doubt — dragon worship and beast worship are alive and well today!

As we have already discussed, this dragon is Satan who was the driving power behind Rome’s attack against the church. Verse 4 tells us that the dragon had

given power to the beast. That tells us that Satan had given his authority to Rome so that Rome would attack the church on Satan's behalf.

Who is doing the worshipping in verse 4? It must be those on Rome's side, which this book consistently refers to throughout as those who dwell upon the earth. It is the ungodly who are worshipping the dragon and the beast. It is those outside the church.

But wait, some might say. What about all of the *good* Romans? What about the morally upright Romans who, although pagans, did not agree with what Rome was doing to the church. What about the people like Cornelius the centurion in Acts 10? Those Romans were in the same boat that Cornelius was prior to Peter's visit; they were lost. There was something they must do (Acts 10:6), but they had not done it yet. God had given them opportunities to repent, but they had not done so.

As much as mankind may want a third group of moral, well-intentioned people who are okay with God but who just haven't gotten around yet to obeying the gospel — there is no third group. There are only two groups: those in Christ and those out of Christ. And the group here in verse 4 is the group of those out of Christ. Yes, they weren't all cheering on the sidelines as these people in verse 4 seem to be doing, but Jesus' statement in Luke 11:23 is impossible to misunderstand: "He that is not with me is against me." Where is there a third group anywhere in that verse?

And why did these people worship the beast? Verses 3-4 tell us exactly why — this beast had died and had come back to life! Verse 3 tells us that this event caused the world to wonder after the beast. Verse 4 tells us that this event caused the world to ask who was like the beast and who could make war against the beast. This beast seemed unstoppable! But, of course, everything is not what it seems!

What did Jesus say about himself in the very first chapter of this book? "I am he that liveth, and was dead" (Revelation 1:18). What we are seeing here in Chapter 13 is truly horrible — we are seeing a ghastly parody of Jesus, who truly died and came back to life. Like Pharaoh's magicians, Rome is saying, "Look! We can do that, too!" The question in verse 4, "who is like the beast?" is a grim parody of the great question of Exodus 15:11 — "who is like thee, O Lord, among the gods?" It reminds us of Revelation 5:2 — "who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof?"

Remember one of the **central themes** running all throughout this book is the theme of Caesar or Christ. Which one has the true authority? Which one has the real power? Which one is worthy of our worship? Which one has a kingdom that will last forever and that will sweep away all other kingdoms? That theme is front and center in verse 4.

Just imagine this scene from the church's viewpoint. It must have almost seemed to them that even God was powerless to stop this great beast of Rome. Just when they thought the beast was dead, it had come back to life. What hope did the church have against such a powerful, unstoppable beast? Would this beast ever be killed once and for all? Would this beast always come back from the dead to persecute the church? Could this beast ever be stopped?

The situation looks bleak, but the very next verse includes a symbol that should provide hope and comfort to an alert reader!

Revelation 13:5-6

5 And there was given unto him a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies; and power was given unto him to continue forty and two months. 6 And he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme his name, and his tabernacle, and them that dwell in heaven.

What we are seeing in verse 5 is the resurrected beast — the beast who had come back to life. So if the beast who had been killed was Nero, then the beast who came back to life was Domitian. Let's see if the description given here fits with what we know about Domitian.

But first, why should an alert reader see hope and comfort in verse 5? Because verse 5 tells us that this resurrected beast has authority for only 42 months, which is three and half years — a broken seven! Now that we know what the symbol means, this statement in verse 4 provides a reason to rejoice. Verse 5 tells us that although this beast may seem unstoppable, all is not what it seems! This situation is temporary!

Jesus died and rose from the dead, never to die again. Verse 5 tells us that such will **not** be true of this beast from the sea! **Jesus is a seven! This beast is a broken seven!** (Keep that thought in mind as we inch ever closer to the very famous verse 18.)

The resurrected beast is pictured here as haughty and blasphemous. Was that true of Domitian? Yes. He required everyone to address him as “Our Lord God Domitian.” Remember the coins we looked at earlier. One coin described Domitian as a son of a god, and another coin pictured Domitian’s infant son as a deified world conqueror sitting on a globe and reaching for seven stars.

How did Paul describe Domitian in 2 Thessalonians?

2 Thessalonians 2:3-4 — Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God.

How did Daniel describe Domitian six centuries before Domitian was born?

Daniel 7:25 — And he shall speak great words against the most High, and shall wear out the saints of the most High, and think to change times and laws: and they shall be given into his hand until a time and times and the dividing of time.

Did you notice that broken seven there in Daniel 7? The Bible may seem like a puzzle at times, but the pieces all fit together perfectly! Daniel 7, 2 Thessalonians 2, and Revelation 13 are all describing the same person — the evil Roman emperor Domitian who picked up where Nero left off in persecuting the church of Christ!

Notice the end of verse 6 — “those who dwell in heaven.” That’s the church! That’s the opposite group from those who dwell upon the earth. Yes, those Christians who remained alive were still literally dwelling on the earth, but this book figuratively pictures them as dwelling in heaven. We see that comforting thought very clearly here in verse 6.

Why do I keep making this same point? Two reasons. First, because the text keeps making this same point. And second, because understanding this division between those who dwell on the earth and those who dwell in heaven

will be **crucial** to understanding the closing chapters of this book — chapters, I might add, that have very often been ripped from their proper context and from their proper time frame.