

Who Is The Beast Of Revelation? (#4)

Ezra 7:11-12

Revelation 19:19-20

Revelation 13:18

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Rev. Greg L. Price

In our present study we have sought to identify the Beast of Revelation, that great enemy of Jesus Christ, whom Christ (as King of kings and Lord of lords) will destroy (along with the False Prophet) in Revelation 19:19-20. We continue today to fit another piece of the puzzle into its place in supplying us with a more clear identity of the Beast of Revelation. We now come to a passage of Scripture (in Revelation 13:18) that has been abused and misused perhaps more than any other passage in the Book of Revelation. The sheer number of candidates whose names have been proposed as equaling 666 is remarkable and should in and of itself cause one to tread carefully when approaching this subject. Historically, 666 (the number of the Beast of Revelation) has been calculated (by various methods) to refer to the Roman Emperors Nero, Trajan, Diocletian, Julian the apostate, to refer to Mohammed, to Louis XIV of France, to King George III of England, to Napoleon Bonaparte, to Adolph Hitler, to Bill Clinton, to George W. Bush, to Barack Obama (and to scores of other persons throughout history).

However, I submit that such an abuse of interpretive principles ought not to drive the serious Christian to the point of despairing of any hope in identifying the Beast, whose number is recorded by the Holy Spirit as 666. To the contrary, I believe it is possible by a proper use of interpretive principles to arrive at a significant degree of confidence in identifying the Beast, whose number is 666. Why do I have such a confidence?

First, because there is a Divine promise of blessing attached to the reading, hearing, and keeping of the words of this prophecy (Revelation

1:3), (which certainly implies an understanding of the prophecy on our parts). Thus, the Holy Spirit does not preclude our understanding of this Book of Revelation as an impossibility or as an improbability, but rather assumes our understanding of the symbols and cryptic numbers in the promise of such a blessing.

Second, Revelation 13:18 infers that if we apply wisdom, we may (by God's grace) understand the interpretation of the number of the Beast, 666 ("Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding . . .").

Third, just as Christ gave parables to hide the truth from the proud and yet to reveal truth to the humble (Matthew 13:10-16), so also Christ gives us prophecies (as the number of this Beast of Revelation) that are hard to understand (as Peter says about some of Paul's letters in 2 Peter 3:15-16), in order to drive us to Christ in all humility for His illumination of our minds by His Word and Spirit.

Thus, we approach our text this Lord's Day neither with human confidence nor with slavish fear, but with a firm trust in God's promise of blessing to all who read, hear, and keep this word of prophecy, and to all who use biblical wisdom to interpret this number of the Beast (666).

We will not conclude our study of the number of the Beast this Lord's Day, but as we begin our study, let us consider the following questions as the main points from our text: (1) What Is The Wisdom Needed To Rightly Interpret The Number Of The Beast Of Revelation? (2) How Are We To Count The Number Of The Beast Of Revelation?

I. What Is The Wisdom Needed To Interpret The Number Of The Beast Of Revelation ("Here is wisdom" Revelation 13:18)?

A. As we approach the interpretation of the number of the Beast, the Holy Spirit informs us that wisdom is needed, if we would arrive at the right interpretation of this cryptic number (666). This is also the precondition that was given to us in Revelation 17:9 as well in coming to the right interpretation of the seven heads and ten horns: “And here is the mind which hath wisdom.” It’s not that wisdom is unnecessary in rightly understanding the rest of the Book of Revelation or any other portion of Scripture (but only necessary for understanding the number of the Beast in Revelation 13:8, or the identity of the seven heads and ten horns of the Beast in Revelation 17:9), but rather the Lord emphasizes our need of wisdom on particular occasions (as when approaching these portions of the Book of Revelation), due to a particular need to apply our hearts in understanding such difficult symbols and cryptic numbers.

1. Such an exhortation to wisdom is intended to awaken us from a routine (into which we can all fall) in acting as though the right understanding of Scripture will simply come to us immediately without sanctification, study, and effort on our parts. And dear ones, when that happens, the wonder of what we hold in our hands (the revealed will of God for our wisdom, salvation, and sanctification) becomes just another book that we pick up as a part of our daily routine.

2. Dear ones, it is so easy to plug along in the Christian life on our own steam, thinking we are doing fine, simply because our lives are not falling apart or simply because we are in a comfortable routine. It is at such times (whether in our work, in our family, in our sanctification, in our Bible study etc.) that we are most likely to be lulled into not consciously applying our hearts to wisdom. We need such flashing red lights as the Lord here gives us: “Here is wisdom.” Otherwise, we are prone to sinfully think we can approach our study of God’s Word as if we were merely reading the newspaper.

3. Dear ones, there are foundational doctrines revealed in Scripture that are like milk. They are so foundational and necessary that a

child can understand them—for example, we are sinners; we need a Savior; God in love sent His only begotten Son to atone for the sin of all who trust alone in Christ and His righteousness for their justification; God grants those who are once and for all justified eternal life and the grace to love holiness and to grow in holiness. However, there are also more difficult truths to understand from Scripture (like certain prophetic symbols or cryptic numbers), and these are like meat (they move us to a consideration of truths that stretch us and make our routine Christian life and superficial knowledge of Christian doctrine very uncomfortable, and yet they are truths that are built upon the foundation of Christ and the gospel). We always need God’s wisdom to rightly interpret God’s Word, but the Holy Spirit at times especially reminds us of that need, as in the passage that is before us today.

4. The wisdom to which we need to apply to our hearts and minds is not the wisdom which many in the world use so often, which consists in following the mere reason of man, acquiring and using the mere academic pursuits of man, or looking to the cleverness, originality, or mere sincerity of man. The wisdom of this world is foolishness to God (1 Corinthians 3:19), because the wisdom of this world glories not in Christ who is wisdom and who graciously gives wisdom to all who earnestly acknowledge themselves to be fools by nature and in need of Christ, in need of Christ’s righteousness, and in need of Christ’s wisdom. Dear ones, we can only become truly wise by receiving Christ as our wisdom, by filling our minds with the words of wisdom found in Holy Scripture, by praying in faith that our minds might be illuminated with wisdom by the Holy Spirit, and by delighting to apply all the truth revealed to us in loving obedience to His revealed will. Dear ones, there will be no wisdom in us to apply a right understanding of the number of the Beast (or any other difficult symbols found in prophetic Scripture) without such heavenly wisdom from Christ, “in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Colossians 2:3). The task before us,

dear ones, will be fruitless without this wisdom. The Holy Spirit thus begins this verse with our need of wisdom: “Here is wisdom.”

B. Now as we consider the heavenly wisdom that is needed in order to rightly interpret the number of the Beast of Revelation, let us review what we have already learned from the words of wisdom in Scripture concerning the Beast of Revelation. For certainly, the truths we have already discerned about the identity of the Beast should only become more clear if by God’s wisdom we rightly interpret the number of the Beast. The identity of the Beast should not become confusing or less clear to us, but rather the identity of the Beast should become even more clear, and we should even become more confident that we have rightly interpreted the identity of the Beast by a wise interpretation of the number of the Beast. What have we learned by God’s wisdom thus far concerning the identity of the Beast that will aid us in rightly interpreting and understanding the number of the Beast?

1. First, I submit that heavenly wisdom would dictate that we should not allow history to interpret Scripture, but rather Scripture to interpret Scripture. In other words, as we approach the number of the Beast, we should not begin by searching for wicked world leaders (whether past or present) whose names can by some form of clever calculation be added, subtracted, multiplied, or divided to equal 666, and then seek to impose that number of a world leader back into Revelation 13:8. The wisdom from above does not begin with man or with man’s creativity or with man’s knowledge or with man’s sincerity. The wisdom of God begins with God (in our glorying in Him and being humbled before Him), and begins with Holy Scripture (by comparing Scripture with Scripture, 1 Corinthians 2:12-13). The wisdom from above considers carefully the texts of Scripture in which the Beast of Revelation appears and connects all such relevant texts in Scripture to form a biblical interpretation of the Beast. Then and only then, the wisdom from above

takes that biblical interpretation of the Beast of Revelation, and searches and locates him in history. In other words, a faithful interpretation must precede a faithful application. If our interpretation of the Beast of Revelation is askew, then our application in identifying the Beast in history will likewise be askew. In stating this as the right method of interpretation to use in understanding prophetic symbols and cryptic numbers, I want to make two matters clear.

a. **The wisdom from above is not anti-intellectual.** In other words, heavenly wisdom does not require us to forsake all academic study in history and language in order to rightly interpret prophetic symbols. To the contrary, the more familiar one is with history and the language of the text of Scripture, the more likely one will be able to discern the meaning of a prophetic symbol or cryptic number—IF and only IF one’s knowledge and skill in history and language are fully submitted to the authority of God and His revealed will in Scripture. In other words, history and language are to serve Christ and Christ’s revelation, rather than Christ and His revelation serving history and language. And so, dear ones, biblical scholarship is not frowned upon (Paul’s gifts in history and language by means of his academic training were greatly used by the Lord to serve the Lord and to faithfully declare and interpret the revelation of God’s will). However, academic training and degrees certainly do not guarantee the right use of wisdom in the interpretation of the number of the Beast (or any other difficult passage in Scripture). The right use of wisdom begins with faith in Christ who is “made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption” (1 Corinthians 1:30), and then the right use of wisdom issues forth not in the glory of man, but in the glory of Christ (“He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord” 1 Corinthians 1:31). Pride in one’s knowledge, boasting in one’s academic attainments, and conceit in one’s knowledge are quite the opposite of heavenly wisdom.

b. **The wisdom from above is not anti-pastoral.** By that I mean, there is no contradiction in one being filled with heavenly wisdom and the same one being taught by faithful pastors, ministers, and teachers from the past and the present (contrary to the claim of many today who declare that they do not consult men or human documents for their interpretation of Scripture). Dear ones, it is Christ Himself as Head of the Church that has blessed His Church with pastors and teachers,

“for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ” (Ephesians 4:12-15).

The contradiction that occurs between heavenly wisdom and pastors is when the sheep give an implicit faith and absolute obedience to pastors and teachers who lead them from the heavenly wisdom found in Christ alone and His revealed will in Holy Scripture alone. But that problem is remedied not by ditching the gift of Christ to His Church in the form of faithful pastors and teachers, but is rather remedied by the Church being faithful Bereans and comparing the doctrine of pastors and teachers to the inspired, infallible Scripture (Acts 17:11). Thus, heavenly wisdom applies what is already revealed in Scripture about this Beast, which I again summarize for you.

2. I submit that because the time period in which the Beast of Revelation wars against Christ and His faithful witnesses is for 1,260 years, the Beast of Revelation cannot be a single individual (like Nero, Trajan, Diocletian, Julian the apostate, Mohammed, Louis XIV, to King George III, Napoleon Bonaparte, Adolph Hitler, Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, or Barack Obama). For using the Scriptural Day-Year Principle to calculate the 42 prophetic months in which the Beast is given power from Satan to war against Christ and His faithful witnesses (in Revelation 13:5-

7), we calculate the 1,260 prophetic days of the 42 prophetic months to be 1,260 calendar years (using the Scriptural Day-Year Principle). The Beast of Revelation is not a single individual person, but is rather a government or kingdom that exists in some form for 1,260 years.

3. I submit that the prophesied government or kingdom that is called the Beast in Revelation 13:1-3 is clearly identified with Daniel's fourth Beast (Daniel 7:7), which is the Roman Empire. And this Beast of the Roman Empire (in Revelation 13:1) has seven heads, which are seven successive forms of civil government: namely, the Kings of Rome, the Consuls of Rome, the Council of Ten of Rome, the Military Tribunes of Rome, the Dictators of Rome, the Emperors of Rome, and the Patricians of Rome.

4. I submit that the Beast of the Roman Empire (revealed in Revelation 13:1) not only has seven heads, but one of the heads receives a mortal wound (Revelation 13:3): namely the sixth head, which represents the Emperors of Rome. That sixth head of the Beast (the Emperors of Rome) received that mortal wound in 476 a.d. when Romulus Augustus was forced to abdicate the throne of the Western Roman Empire, leaving no Roman Emperor in the Western Roman Empire.

5. I submit that the Beast of the Roman Empire also has ten horns which represent ten kingdoms (according to Revelation 17:12) by which the unified Roman Empire is divided. This is also prefigured by the ten toes (mixed with clay and iron) that follow chronologically the united Roman Empire (which consists only of iron legs) in Daniel 2:40-43. This was realized in the ten barbarian kingdoms that divided the Western Roman Empire in Europe. And though these ten kingdoms were like clay that does not adhere to one another, these ten barbarian kingdoms would become the Revived Roman Empire, at times manifesting more of the iron of Rome (as the First Reich under the Holy Roman Empire, the empire of France under Napoleon, the Second Reich under Kaiser

Wilhelm, and the Third Reich under Adolph Hitler), and at other times manifesting more of the clay of division and national independence in Europe. Thus, the Beast of the Roman Empire as manifested in its revived eighth head has appeared more visibly at times in European history (when the iron of Rome is manifested) and less visibly at times (when the clay of national independence by the ten kingdoms is manifested).

6. Thus, I submit, dear ones, it is absolutely necessary (if we would heed the exhortation of the Holy Spirit) that heavenly wisdom be applied in gathering together all of the truth concerning the Beast of Revelation as we seek to identify the number of the Beast, which number gives us the name of the Beast (Revelation 13:17). In other words, I submit that heavenly wisdom would require that the interpretation of this number of the Beast of Revelation will only confirm what we have already learned about the Beast of Revelation: namely, that the Beast of Revelation is a political/civil kingdom descending from the Roman Empire, that is divided into ten kingdoms that form Europe, and that is ruled by Emperors in a revived Western Roman Empire. The wisdom that is from above will not give an identification of the number of the Beast that contradicts or is inconsistent with what the words of wisdom reveal about the Beast in the inspired Books of Revelation and Daniel. Such an application of heavenly wisdom will greatly narrow our search in history as to the right interpretation of the number of the Beast, which gives the name of the Beast.

II. How Are We To Count The Number Of The Beast Of Revelation (“Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast” Revelation 13:18)?

A. Let us now briefly turn our attention to the ancient practice of mystical numbering. The practice of using numbers to designate names in

the sacred writings of the heathens, Gnostics, and early Christian Fathers was far from uncommon. It would seem that the primary intention for using cryptic numbers for important names (regardless of the religious group) was to hide truth from the unfaithful, and to reveal truth to the faithful. That would seem likewise to have been the intention of the Holy Spirit in giving the number of the Beast of Revelation as 666. For the word of wisdom to those who read the Book of Revelation is, "Let him THAT HATH UNDERSTANDING count the number of the beast." When the text states, "him that hath understanding" is to count the number of the beast, the Lord would have the faithful (on the one hand) to be instructed in regard to the number of the Beast (which gives the name of the Beast), and the unfaithful (on the other hand) to be blinded in regard to the number of the Beast.

B. Since a number of ancient languages did not have a separate set of numerals as distinguished from the letters of their alphabet, the letters of their alphabet functioned both as letters to form words, as well as numerals to designate numerical value. For example, in languages like Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, the letters of the alphabet served as numerals as well. Perhaps we are most familiar with this in using Roman numerals: I=1; V=5; X=10; L=50; C=100; M=1,000 etc. This was likewise the case with the Greek numeral system: alpha=1; beta=2; gamma=3; delta=4 etc. The same was true in Hebrew also.

C. Thus, when our text speaks of counting the number of the Beast, this is the method by which the number of the beast is to be counted. However, as we shall see in the following sermon, we are working backwards, because we have the number of the beast (666) given to us in three Greek letters: chi=600, xi=60, and the final sigma=6, which totals 666. As I said, we have the number of the Beast in Revelation 13:18, but we do not have the name of the Beast recorded for

us by the Holy Spirit. That, my dear friends, is why wisdom is especially needed in this case. The name of the Beast of Revelation that equals the numerical value of 666 will be the revived Western Roman Empire that was divided by ten kingdoms and makes war against Christ and His faithful witnesses. In the following sermon, I will (by God's grace) propose an interpretation of the number of the Beast of Revelation, which I submit gives a name for the Beast of Revelation that has a numerical value of 666 and that corresponds to the revived Western Roman Empire, which was divided by ten kingdoms within Europe, and makes war against Christ and His faithful witnesses.

By way of application of doctrine to our lives, we need to understand how heavenly wisdom is increased and how heavenly wisdom is hindered in our lives. All those who have trusted in Jesus Christ and His righteousness alone for their justification receive the grace of heavenly wisdom. Like every other grace freely given to us by Christ (whether faith, love, hope, new obedience, etc.), our justification before God does not rest upon that grace bestowed within us or practiced by us, but rather rests only upon the righteousness of Christ imputed to us and received by faith alone. But that wisdom of the Lord will either be increased or hindered in our lives by our loving obedience of God's commandments or our refusal to lovingly obey God's commandments (John 7:17). Wisdom is a grace which may be increased as we plead with God for it (James 1:5). But, dear ones, we will be working against ourselves if we are not obeying the Lord in matters of truth and love which He has already revealed to us—for asking in faith also implies that we are believing and practicing what He has already revealed to us in His promises and commandments. Walking in Christ's love and truth is seeking to be iconoclasts in destroying all idolatry beginning in our own hearts and families (before we can ever hope to see idolatry removed in church and state) and is seeking to run away from temptation and sin, rather than

seeing how close we can get to it without falling into it. God grant us an abundance of that heavenly wisdom.

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