

Who Is the Beast of Revelation? (#11)

Ezra 7:11-12

Revelation 19:19-20

Revelation 17:9-11

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This Lord's Day we conclude our study of one of the great enemies of Christ in prophetic history: the Beast of Revelation. We begin next Lord's Day a study as to who the False Prophet is, another great enemy of Christ in prophetic history. Dear ones, I have a genuine concern and burden for so many who identify themselves as Christians today. For the vast majority are either not being taught anything in Churches about these great and powerful enemies of Christ (these Churches seem rather to exist to make you feel good about yourselves and would more likely teach Christians how to get along with the Beast and the False Prophet), or what professing Christians are being taught today about the Beast and the False Prophet is casting their eyes back to the first century to find these enemies (Preterism) or is casting their eyes forward to the end of the world to find these enemies (Futurism). However, regardless of which of these three options professing Christians are being taught in regard to the Beast and the False Prophet (nothing, past, or future), deception and delusion has so swept over Christ's Church that there is little or no immediate concern with these enemies as present foes who war against Christ and His faithful witnesses.

A series of sermons like this may seem less practical in nature, but dear ones, how much more practical could a series of sermons be than those that warn you and your family about present enemies, after whom the world is wondering and being led to destruction? The identity of the Beast and the False Prophet is not a game like 20 Questions, where we ask questions about these enemies, and think we have won some kind of game because we now have identified the Beast and the False Prophet. Scriptural knowledge comes at a great price—it demands we apply it in wisdom to our lives. And if we don't apply it, it only demonstrates that we really do think we are playing 20 Questions, rather than fighting for the very life and soul of Christ's Church (over whom He is alone Head) and for the very conversion and reformation of the nations (over whom He is Mediatorial King).

We have identified the Roman Beast of Revelation that has seven heads and ten horns as the Revived Western (or Latin) Roman Empire of Europe. In recent sermons, we have been considering objections to this position (for if we cannot soundly and biblically answer objections, a conclusion is not likely one worth defending). The first objection to which a response was given has come from fellow Historicists, who identify the Beast with the seven heads and ten horns as the Papacy. The second objection to which a response is now being given comes from Preterists, who identify the Beast with the seven heads and ten horns as the Emperor Nero. In the previous sermon, the first argument in support of the Beast of Revelation being identified with Nero was considered: The number of the Beast (666) identifies and points to Nero (Revelation 13:18). This Lord's Day we will consider the second chief argument that is offered by Preterists in support of the Beast of Revelation being identified with Nero: Nero is identified as the sixth persecuting head of the Roman Beast (Revelation 17:10).

I. Nero Is Identified as the Sixth Persecuting Head of the Roman Beast (Revelation 17:10).

A. Let us first consider the biblical warrant that Preterists allege will support the position that Nero is the sixth persecuting head that wars against the Church, and then a biblical response will be offered.

1. The case for Preterists (at least a very popular brand of Preterism at the present time) in identifying Nero as the sixth persecuting head of the Roman Beast is specifically tied to Revelation 17:10, where the angel gives a second meaning of the seven symbolic heads: “And there are [or “And they are” — GLP] seven kings: five are fallen, and one is, and the other is not yet come; and when he cometh, he must continue a short space.” According to Preterists, the angel not only identifies the seven heads with “the city of the seven hills”, Rome, but also then identifies the seven heads with seven Kings (which according to Preterists are the first seven Caesars of Rome).

a. Five of these seven Caesars of Rome have already fallen, i.e. died. They are Julius Caesar (the first head, or first Caesar), Augustus (the second Caesar), Tiberius (the third Caesar), Caligula (the fourth Caesar), and Claudius (the fifth Caesar).

b. The angel then states in Revelation 17:10 that “one is”, i.e. according to Preterists, one of these heads or Caesars is presently reigning, which in the succession of Roman Caesars would make Nero to be the sixth head or Caesar of Rome.

c. The angel then declares that the seventh head (which Preterists interpret to be the seventh Caesar in succession) would only reign for “a short space” or a little while (Revelation 17:10). Preterists interpret this seventh head of the Roman Beast to be Emperor Galba (who only reigned for about six months, due to civil war that fell upon Rome when Nero killed himself, which is alleged by Preterists to be signified by the deadly wound that the sixth head or Caesar received, Revelation 13:3). Perhaps at a first glance, the case presented by Preterists appears to be very plausible in demonstrating that Nero was the sixth persecuting head of the Beast (and therefore was that expression of the Beast that John saw in this prophetic vision, who was making war against the saints in Revelation 13:7). But let us take a much closer look at the text to see if the interpretation of Preterists really is consistent with and agreeable to Scripture and history.

B. In my response, I would like to identify what I consider to be two insuperable problems with the Preterist’s interpretation of Revelation 17:9-10.

1. **Problem #1.** Preterists claim that the head of the Beast that persecuted and made war against the saints (in Revelation 13:7) and the number of whose name equals 666 (in Revelation 13:18) is Nero Caesar, who is also alleged to be the sixth head of the Roman Beast (in Revelation 17:10). However, what is devastating to the Preterist position is that it is not the sixth head of the Roman Beast (whom Preterists claim to be Nero) that is the persecuting head that made war against the saints (in Revelation 13:7), but is rather the revived eighth head that is the persecuting head that John sees in this vision making war against the saints (in Revelation 13:7). And if that is the case, the whole case for Preterists goes up in smoke. Thus, let’s determine which head of the Roman Beast is the persecuting head—the sixth head (as claimed by Preterists) or the eighth head?

a. In Revelation 17:8, the angel gives a most important description of this terrible Roman Beast that has seven heads and ten horns: “The beast that thou sawest **was**, and **is not**; and **shall ascend out of the bottomless pit**, and go into perdition: and they that dwell on the earth shall wonder, whose names were not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, when they behold the beast that **was**, and **is not**, and **yet is**.” And then, a similar description of the Roman Beast is given in Revelation 17:11: “And the beast that **was**, and **is not**, even **he is the eighth**, and is of the seven, and goeth into perdition.”

(1) This Beast with the seven heads and ten horns is in some sense said to **have lived** (“The beast that thou sawest WAS”), and then **to have died** (“and IS NOT”), and then **to have lived again** (“and YET IS” or “shall ascend out of the bottomless pit”, and “is the eighth”). Preterists understand this to mean that the Roman Beast under the first six Caesars reigned strong in imperial power (that according to Preterists is the Roman Beast that “**WAS**”). But then the sixth head (Nero) was wounded to death with a sword by his own hand (Revelation 13:3), which led the Roman Empire into civil war for about a year. Caesar Galba, the seventh head (according to Preterists), reigned for only six months, to be followed by Caesar Otho who

reigned for three months, and then Caesar Vitellius who reigned for three months. This period of civil war and instability is the Roman Beast that “**IS NOT**” (according to Preterists). Finally, there appeared Emperor Vespasian, whom Preterists identify as the eighth head or Caesar (thus skipping over the two previous Caesars, Otho and Vitellius, in order to get to Caesar Vespasian). Under Vespasian the Roman Empire was revived and rescued from internal ruin and civil war (that period according to Preterists is the Roman Beast that “**YET IS**”, i.e. the reviving of the Roman Empire).

(2) There are at least three significant problems in how Preterists view the Roman Beast that “was, and is not, and yet is.”

(a) First, it is claimed by Preterists that Nero is the sixth head that receives the mortal wound. The problem is that Nero does not come back to life (even though there were rumors that existed at that time that he would come back to life). This is a problem, because according to Revelation 13:3, it is the same head that is mortally wounded that lives again (which is why the world wondered after this Roman Beast according to Revelation 13:3). In other words, if the position of Preterists was true, we would have expected to see Nero (the sixth head) mortally wounded, then to see Galba (the seventh head) reign for a short space, and then to see Nero revived and made alive to reign again as the eighth head. For the revived eighth head is the sixth head that was mortally wounded (Revelation 13:3; Revelation 17:8,11). However, for Preterists to introduce Caesar Vespasian as the eighth head is not the healing of the same head that was mortally wounded. It is an altogether different head.

(b) But, dear ones, the most significant and glaring problem with the view of Preterists in their attempt to identify Nero as the persecuting sixth head (or Emperor) who wars against the saints is that it is not even the sixth head of the Roman Beast (whom Preterists claim to be Nero) that makes war against the saints (because it is the sixth head that receives the mortal wound and dies), but is rather the revived eighth head of the Roman Beast that is the blaspheming and persecuting head of the Beast (whom Preterists identify as Emperor Vaspasian). It is the healed and revived head of the Roman Beast (i.e. the eighth head and not the mortally wounded sixth head), after whom the world wonders (in Revelation 13:3). It is the same healed and revived head of the Roman Beast (i.e. the eighth head and not the mortally wounded sixth head) who blasphemes God (Revelation 13:5), and who wars against the saints (Revelation 13:7). In other words, the case that Preterists seek to build in alleging that Nero is the blaspheming and persecuting head in Revelation 13 and Revelation 17 is built upon sand. For the blaspheming and persecuting head in Revelation 13 is not the sixth head that received the mortal wound (which Preterists identify as Nero), but is rather the revived eighth head who ascends out of the bottomless pit (Revelation 17:8,11; Revelation 11:7).

(c) Now Preterists identify the revived eighth head (or Caesar) as Vespasian. The fallacy of this position becomes evident in history; for there is NO historical record of Vespasian having had a policy or practice to make war against the faithful Church of Christ during his reign as Caesar. To the contrary, we have historical testimony that Vespasian did NOT persecute Christians. In the words of the ancient Church historian, Eusebius, we read (emphases added):

Domitian, having shown great cruelty toward many, and having unjustly put to death no small number of well-born and notable men at Rome, and having without cause exiled and confiscated the property of a great many other illustrious men, finally became a successor of Nero in his hatred and enmity toward God. He [Domitian—GLP] was in fact the second that stirred up a persecution against us [Christians—GLP], **although his father Vespasian had undertaken nothing prejudicial to us.**

And a footnote by the editor of that volume, Philip Schaaf, likewise confirms what Eusebius noted about Vespasian (emphases added):

The fact that the Christians were not persecuted by Vespasian is abundantly confirmed by the absence of any tradition to the opposite effect. Compare Tertullian's *Apol.* chap. 5, where the persecutions of Nero and Domitian are recorded (EUSEBIUS PAMPHILUS: CHURCH HISTORY, LIFE OF CONSTANTINE, ORATION IN PRAISE OF CONSTANTINE, Book 3, Chapter 17, "The Persecution under Domitian", <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf201.iii.viii.xvii.html>).

b. So what is the first insuperable problem that Preterists have in identifying Nero as the persecuting sixth head of the Roman Beast?

(1) Preterists have completely misidentified who the blaspheming and persecuting head of the Roman Beast is. It is NOT the sixth head that receives the mortal wound that is the blaspheming and persecuting head (who Preterists falsely claim is Nero), but rather it is the revived eighth head that is the blaspheming and persecuting head (who Preterists falsely claim is Vespasian).

(2) The position that I submit best represents all of the evidence from Scripture and history is that the sixth head of the Roman Beast is that form of civil government that followed first five heads of Kings, Consuls, Dictators, the Council of Ten, and Military Tribunes: namely, Roman Emperors. The sixth head of Roman Emperors was the civil head upon the Roman Beast that was ruling over Rome when the Apostle John penned this prophetic vision: "and one is" (Revelation 17:10), which sixth head of Emperors received its mortal wound in 476 a.d. when Romulus Augustus was deposed (and the reign of Emperors in the Western Roman Empire came to an end). Then followed after the sixth head of Emperors the seventh head of Patricians of Rome. But the mortally wounded sixth head of Emperors was again revived in the eighth head when Charlemagne was crowned Augustus and Emperor of the Roman Empire in 800 a.d. by Pope Leo III in Rome.

(3) Thus, since Nero is not the revived eighth head (even according to the position of Preterists), Nero is not and cannot be that expression of the Roman Beast that blasphemes God and makes war against the saints.

2. **Problem #2.** Preterists likewise face another insuperable problem in indentifying Nero as the persecuting head of the Roman Beast: Nero had long since died when the ten horns or ten barbarian kingdoms (of Revelation 17:12) joined in alliance with the Roman Beast in warring against Christ. In other words, the expression of this Roman Beast in its revived eighth head (which is the blaspheming and persecuting head of the Beast that the vision specifically has in view) comes to power centuries after Nero had committed suicide. Thus, Nero could not be the persecuting head of the Beast because Nero had been dead for centuries when this prophecy is fulfilled. For we read in Revelation 17:12: "And the ten horns which thou sawest are ten kings, which have received no kingdom as yet; but receive power as kings one hour with the beast." Preterists interpret the ten horns of the Beast (as was noted last Lord's Day) to be the governors of ten imperial provinces of Rome who rule with him at the time of Nero. But this cannot be the case for the following reasons.

a. Revelation 17:12 clearly states that these ten kings/kingdoms had not yet received a kingdom to reign with the Roman Beast at the time that John penned the Book of Revelation, but that they would in the future receive power as kings/kingdoms one hour to rule with the Roman Beast. However, the ten imperial governors of the Preterists (which were actually 18 imperial governors) had already received power from Nero to rule as provincial governors over their kingdoms before he died (in 68 a.d.). Thus, the ten (or 18) imperial governors at the time of Nero could not be the ten horns or kings that are in view here in Revelation 17:12, which likewise means that Nero could not be the head upon the Roman Beast with whom they united to make war against Christ and His faithful witnesses (Revelation 17:13). If the ten kingdoms did not exist at the time of Nero, Nero could not be the head to whom they give their power.

b. Furthermore, when the ten kings are given power to rule with the Roman Beast (Revelation 17:13), they do not rule with the wounded sixth head of the Roman Beast that dies, but rather

with the revived eighth head of the Roman Beast (in Revelation 17:11-13; Revelation 13:1-3). I submit that these ten kings were ten barbarian kingdoms that became western and central Europe and were united with the Revived Roman Empire when the eighth head was healed in the year 800 a.d. at which time Charlemagne was crowned Emperor of the Revived Roman Empire by Pope Leo III. Therefore, this prophecy concerning the ten kings in Revelation 17:12 could not have been realized during the reign of Nero, because the fulfillment of the prophecy is linked in time not to the wounded sixth head (which the Preterists allege to be Nero), but is rather linked in time to the revived and healed eighth head, which is the head of Roman Emperors of the Revived Western (or Latin) Roman Empire.

c. Thus, the second insuperable problem with Nero being the persecuting head in the Book of Revelation is that Nero was long dead when the ten barbarian kingdoms that formed Europe were united with Revived Western (or Latin) Roman Empire to war against Christ and His faithful witnesses. That brings our study of the Beast of Revelation to a conclusion.

By way of application, as we study prophecy, we must always remember why God has given to us His prophetic revelation.

First, God has given to us His prophetic revelation in order to glorify Himself as the sovereign most holy and most wise God (who decrees from eternity and governs in time all that comes to pass). He who loves us most, dear ones, has a most holy and most wise plan which He is accomplishing in history, in your life, and in my life. There is much comfort in knowing that nothing catches our gracious and loving God by surprise. We can entrust all our concerns and anxieties to such a wondrous God.

Second, God has given to us His prophetic revelation in order to exalt Christ as His Prophet over His Church. We would know absolutely nothing concerning our salvation or concerning future prophetic events if Christ were not our Prophet. As we hear God's Word preached, it is Christ as Prophet fulfilling His ministry to us. As we read God's Word in family worship and in secret worship, it is Christ as Prophet who sends His Spirit to illuminate our understanding to see and to embrace the truth revealed to us. Without Christ as Prophet, we would be in darkness. In Christ's light, we shall see light.

Third, God has given to us His prophetic revelation for our edification. When we read of the Beast of Revelation, we are warned, so that we do not fall unto the deception and delusion that has overwhelmed the world and so much of the Church in regard to this great enemy of Christ and His faithful witnesses. Christians are being lulled to sleep by religious toleration. Christians for the most part consider religious toleration to be our great hope, when it is our great curse. For it officially and constitutionally gives to the civil Beast the power to rewrite God's First Commandment: Thou shalt have no other gods before me. The civil Beast has established Polytheism as the national religion by placing all religions on an equally protected footing with the Biblical Christianity that is revealed in Scripture (and professed by our Reformed forefathers in the Westminster Confession of Faith). As long as there is "religious liberty" (which is really religious tyranny), so many Christians are willing to wonder after the Beast and to submit to his usurpation of Christ's supreme authority as King of kings and Lord of lords. But, dear ones, you have been warned. I know it is not easy or comfortable to be warned (in sermons like these) and to take heed to such warning from the Lord, especially when most Christians could care less.

Dear ones, this is a time in which the faithful Church is not established upon the mountains in all her glory, but is rather wandering in the wilderness (Revelation 12:6). This is the time of apostasy and falling away from the truth that was prophesied to come with the Man of Sin (that Papal Antichrist) in 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4. This is the time in which the world blindly wonders after the Beast in submitting to all his treason against Christ (as

King of kings and Lord of lords) and in submitting to all his tyranny against Christ's royal laws and commandments. Be warned, dear ones. It is a time to prepare ourselves and our families spiritually against the indifference so many Christians and Churches have to the crowned rights of Jesus Christ. Dear ones, these prophecies are given to warn and to sound the trumpet that there is presently a battle for the life of Christ's Church and the soul of every Christian. Do you hear the sound of that trumpet? What are you doing in your family and in your life to prepare yourself for this battle? Dear ones, turn from your sleep, turn from you lukewarmness, and turn from your indifference. We are assured of victory in Christ, but we are also warned that victory over these enemies does not come easily and comfortably, but victory is only found in trusting Christ (who died and rose again) and in wondering after Christ rather than after the Beast.

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