

Revelation

*Part Thirty-Five
The Beast of the Sea
(Revelation 13:1)*

With Study Questions

*Pastor Paul Viggiano
Branch of Hope Church
2370 W. Carson Street, #100
Torrance, CA 90501
(310) 212-6999
pastorpaul@branchofhope.org
www.branchofhope.org
5/22/2022*

Revelation

*Part Thirty-Five
The Beast of the Sea
(Revelation 13:1)*

Then 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 (Revelation 13:1).

Introduction

I feel like I have a decent grasp of my own strengths and weaknesses. So, when I come to portions of Scripture where, especially, my weaknesses are addressed, I can generally preach those passages more effectively. If I am wrestling with something, it helps me with others wrestling through a similar challenge.

But in all openness, and at the risk of sounding boastful, the quest for power has never been an enticement for me. If anything, my weakness lies on the other end of the spectrum. That is, I can be complacent to a fault. I'll take a beach chair over a throne any day. Having watched a number of movies and documentaries on British royalty, I sympathize with the words of Shakespeare, "Uneasy is the head that wears a crown."

Having lunch with an old college roommate, who had become a military doctor, we spoke of this idea of power. Similar to myself, power was not for him a sparkly object of desire. But he did say there was a time in his military career where he was sought after by significant governmental agencies (like the CIA) who went to him for counsel. He found it invigorating. It was a bit of the Turkish delight.

The quest for power can be intoxicating. And there may not be a character in all of Scripture who wants it more than the devil. And what we are learning as we move through the pages of Revelation is that the means by which the devil seeks that power is through human crowns.

In chapter 12 we saw that the crown of Herod sought to devour the Christ child in order for the devil to remain the ultimate ruler of this age (1

Corinthians 2:6) and continue to hold his massive sway over **“the whole world” (1 John 5:19).**

Having failed against Christ Himself, he turns his efforts to the body of Christ, the church. We ended chapter 12 with the dragon (the devil) frustrated that he could not snuff out the early, faithful, Jewish Christian church. These saints were protected by obeying the counsel of Christ in his instruction for them to head for the hills of Judea when they saw the armies surrounding Jerusalem (Luke 21:20, 21). Now, the enraged dragon will **“make war with the rest of her offspring”** which is the first century church, made up of Jew and gentile alike.

The dragon (the devil) will now utilize a formidable power in his efforts to snuff out the advancement of the Truth. Perhaps he thought he underestimated what was necessary to maintain his darkness by utilizing someone as irrelevant and powerless as Herod. Satan will now up his game to the most powerful nation on earth at the time, and perhaps, the most powerful nation ever to exist. Rome.

Let us work through this.

Then 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 (Revelation 13:1).

Heads, Horns and Crowns

If one is standing on the shore of the sea in Asia Minor (where the churches receiving the Revelation were), or in Jerusalem, or really anywhere in that region, and looked toward the sea, you would be looking in the direction of Rome. We might think along the lines of viewing a ship ascending out of the horizon.

Adding impact to this vision is how the sea, in Scripture, is often associated with evil and darkness. Here we read of the beast coming out of the sea, yet elsewhere we are told he **“ascends out of the bottomless pit [abyss]” (Revelation 11:7; 17:8).**

We are then given a bizarre description, which would be almost impossible to paint (though some have tried) of having **“having seven heads and ten horns, and on his horns ten crowns.”**

The “**seven heads**” designate life. The beast is hard to kill. Take one head off and another takes its place, like the mythical hydra. The defeating of the Roman Empire would go well beyond the removal of one person.

The “**ten horns**” symbolize great power. Then we read of something that is not immediately apparent, though it should be. Where does one normally place a crown? On the head. But these crowns are not on the head but on the horns. The ten crowns on the horns rather than the heads tell us that this beast rules by power. It is a *Might Makes Right* system.

What we are seeing rising out of the horizon is a legitimate authority figure which has set its sights on the crumbling of the church. It would take us beyond the scope of this message to dig too deeply into social theory at this point, but I found it enlightening that Dr. Bahnsen, in his classes on Revelation referenced Thrasymachus, who said,

Justice is but a euphemism for the will of the stronger in a society. The strong does what they will and call it ‘justice’.

We will be treading some turbulent waters as we wade through (SCUBA might be a more suitable metaphor) Revelation 13. Christians are called to have a general deferential disposition toward legitimate authority figures. Romans 13 teaches us that political (truly the entire idea of hierarchy, as opposed to anarchy) power is a gift from God.

But when one begins to deify the state, that is, to assign to the state that which belongs to God, the state becomes bestial. Romans 13 is not a blanket endorsement of any human and all human institutions, no matter what.

I have been often asked by those who were raised, and still have, abusive mothers and fathers, if they should still honor and obey them. I am asked the same from wives married to abusive husbands. The same can be asked of abusive elders in a church. These questions are not always easy to answer and must be examined individually. It is enough for now to say that there comes a time when authority figures must be defied. To be put it simply and biblically, “**we ought to obey God rather than men**” (Acts 5:29).

Again, there ought to be a general, default deferential disposition. This should not be used as a license for viscerally generated rebellion and disrespect. But something we must organize our thoughts about as we

garden the field of Revelation 13 is that it is not in conflict with Romans 13. Romans 13 tells us to “**subject**” ourselves to governing authorities. Revelation 13 appears to tell us just the opposite. May God help us know when one is required over the other! And this verse first is designed to help us sort things out.

Blasphemous Name

We learn one other thing about this beast in this verse. It is a legitimate authority, it is generationally strong (one head replaced by another), it is powerful and will use its power rather than its head. So unlike our Savior, who had the ultimate power of all things at His disposal and chose to love and serve a rebellious people. But the one other thing we read in this verse is that on his heads was a “**blasphemous name.**”

Unlike the High Priests who wore a divine name on their foreheads (Ex 28:36-38), the heads of state wore blasphemous names. There is a very common and foolish notion that one can separate religion from politics. One can never separate religion from politics or any other human endeavor. As an apostate people seek to exclude the Triune God from their legislative chamber, we find the people themselves become inherently and viciously religious.

With the force of a Greek god or the fickle pantheon of Rome, we watch as our political luminaries sit in their thick chairs and decide what a human is and whether it should live or die. They decide who should be fed and whose money should be used to feed them. When governments reach that bestial level, they develop an unwavering and uncontested sense of entitlement over the affairs of their subjects.

Perhaps I am overstating our current situation, but I am not overstating the situation in which the early church found itself. The Caesars were not satisfied with being public servants. Such a notion probably never crossed their minds. They were quite taken, however, with the idea of divinity (godhood).

Roman imperial theology sought to revere the Caesars as gods. Earlier in our study of Revelation, we learned of Polycarp (one of the last living students of the Apostle John-the writer of Revelation) who was the bishop of Smyrna (one of the churches receiving the Revelation) in 155 AD. Polycarp, at the age of eighty-six was arrested for his faith. The proconsul

threatened him that he would be torn apart by wild beasts unless he denied Christ and offered just a pinch of incense in worship of Caesar, acknowledging Caesar as Lord. Polycarp responded:

Fourscore and six years have I served him, and he has never done me injury; how then can I now blaspheme my King and savior?

Polycarp was then threatened to be burned with fire. The Sabbatarians (likely some relationship to the “synagogue of Satan” in this passage) of the day actually gathered wood on the sabbath for this event. Again, we have a record of Polycarp’s response:

You threaten me with fire which burns for an hour and after a little while is extinguished but are ignorant of the coming fire that is reserved for the ungodly. So why do you delay? Do whatever you will.

Polycarp was burned and was refused an honorable burial in hopes of sending a message to the church. It did not have the desired effect!

These blasphemous names may be referring to the very actions of the Caesars. Each emperor was called Augustus or Sebastos, meaning One to be worshiped. According to David Chilton “they also took the name *divus* (god) and even *Deus* and *Theos* (God)...Nero commanded absolute obedience and even erected a 120-foot-high image of himself.” Nero also proclaimed his divinity on coins as the "Savior and Benefactor of the World.”

We will speak more of this later in the chapter, but we must end here for now. Suffice it to say that this chapter will put before the reader the question: In whom shall you trust and who will you serve? This will be put forth in the way of taking a mark on the hand or forehead. Like every other chapter in this book, truly in all of Scripture, may our answer ever be, **“as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord” (Joshua 24:15).**

Questions for Study

1. How do you feel about power? Are you tempted by it? If so, how? What role do you think it plays in the world (pages 2, 3)?
2. What is meant by heads, horns and crowns (pages 3, 4)?
3. Are there legitimate dangers in deifying the state? Explain (page 4).
4. Should Christians have a general deferential disposition toward authority? Are there limits? Explain (page 4, 5).
5. Who had blasphemous names on their heads? Why (pages 5, 6)?