

The Apocalypse | Finding Composure in the Unveiled Christ

“The Monsters”

Revelation 13.1-14.13

6.20.21

And the dragon stood on the sand of the seashore. Then I saw a beast coming up out of the sea, having ten horns and seven heads, and on his horns were ten diadems, and on his heads were blasphemous names. ² And the beast which I saw was like a leopard, and his feet were like those of a bear, and his mouth like the mouth of a lion. And the dragon gave him his power and his throne and great authority. ³ I saw one of his heads as if it had been slain, and his fatal wound was healed. And the whole earth was amazed and followed after the beast; ⁴ they worshiped the dragon because he gave his authority to the beast; and they worshiped the beast, saying, "Who is like the beast, and who is able to wage war with him?" ⁵ There was given to him a mouth speaking arrogant words and blasphemies, and authority to act for forty-two months was given to him. ⁶ And he opened his mouth in blasphemies against God, to blaspheme His name and His tabernacle, that is, those who dwell in heaven. ⁷ It was also given to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them, and authority over every tribe and people and tongue and nation was given to him. ⁸ All who dwell on the earth will worship him, everyone whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain. ⁹ If anyone has an ear, let him hear. ¹⁰ If anyone is destined for captivity, to captivity he goes; if anyone kills with the sword, with the sword he must be killed. Here is the perseverance and the faith of the saints. ¹¹ Then I saw another beast coming up out of the earth; and he had two horns like a lamb and he spoke as a dragon. ¹² He exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence. And he makes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast, whose fatal wound was healed. ¹³ He performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down out of heaven to the earth in the presence of men. ¹⁴ And he deceives those who dwell on the earth because of the signs which it was given him to perform in the presence of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who had the wound of the sword and has come to life. ¹⁵ And it was given to him to give breath to the image of the beast, so that the image of the beast would even speak and cause as many as do not worship the image of the beast to be killed. ¹⁶ And he causes all, the small and the great, and the rich and the poor, and the free men and the slaves, to be given a mark on their right hand or on their forehead, ¹⁷ and he provides that no one will be able to buy or to sell, except the one who has the mark, either the name of the beast or the number of his name. ¹⁸ Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for the number is that of a man; and his number is six hundred and sixty-six.

14:1 *Then I looked, and behold, the Lamb was standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand, having His name and the name of His Father written on their foreheads. ² And I heard a voice from heaven, like the sound of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder, and the voice which I heard was like the sound of harpists playing on their harps. ³ And they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders; and no one could learn the song except the one hundred and forty-four thousand who had been purchased from the earth. ⁴ These are the ones who have not been defiled with women, for they have kept themselves chaste. These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These have been purchased from among men as first fruits to God and to the Lamb. ⁵ And no lie was found in their mouth; they are blameless. ⁶ And I saw another angel flying in midheaven, having an eternal gospel to preach to those who live on the earth, and to every nation and tribe and tongue and people; ⁷ and he said with a loud voice, "Fear God, and give Him glory, because the hour of His judgment has come; worship Him who made the heaven and the earth and sea and springs of waters." ⁸ And another angel, a second one, followed, saying, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, she who has made all the nations drink of the wine of the passion of her immorality." ⁹ Then another angel, a third one, followed them, saying with a loud voice, "If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, ¹⁰ he also will drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger; and he will be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. ¹¹ "And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever; they have no rest day and night, those who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name." ¹² Here is the perseverance of the saints who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus. ¹³ And I heard a voice from heaven, saying, "Write, 'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on!'" "Yes," says the Spirit, "so that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow with them."*

This is our tenth sermon on the *Book of Revelation*. We continue to focus on the big sweeping themes; not trying to understand every detail in this apocalyptic literature that's so often figurative and metaphorical and mysterious.

Today, we come to a few features with which most people (in our society) *are at least familiar (if not fascinated!)* even if they've never read the *Book of Revelation*, i.e. the Beast, the other Beast (or false prophet), the image of the Beast, the Mark of the Beast and the Number of the Beast – namely 666.

These symbols are in section *that exposes the strategies of the resistance*. The kingdom of darkness mimics or parodies the Kingdom of Light. The kingdom of evil impersonates the Kingdom of God. There's a worldwide attempt to replace the Holy Trinity with an unholy triad/trio and the first Christian churches are being counseled to cultivate discernment/perseverance in order to be saved from the great deception.

This challenge facing the “first-fruit” churches (see 14.5) is also a challenge for people today. Being able to distinguish between truth and falsehood isn't easy... AND in our cultural moment “PhotoShop” and “deep-fakes” and information overload where data are being sprayed at us from every direction (like a mechanized carwash!) *it's more important than ever that we be able to differentiate the real thing from the counterfeit*. The gospel (basic message of Christianity) is the way of TRUE spirituality... there's always a priority on TRUTH.

Let's get the help we need from this passage by looking at:

- 1) The Scary Monsters and Their Strategy**
- 2) Excursus on Gematria and Symbolism**
- 3) The Rest of This Passage**

The scary monsters start with the seven-headed, red dragon we met last week. That symbol was decoded for us (12.9): it's the serpent of old, the devil or Satan. He now stands at the seashore, a symbol of chaos and of the gentile nations, the islands and distant lands (see Jonah 1 et al). And there, as if he's the Creator, hovering over the primordial chaos-waters of creation, the devil calls a beast UP from the sea. The sea-beast looks a lot like the dragon – seven heads, ten horns, ten crowns on his horns. He's a composite of all the beasts that Daniel the prophet saw in his ancient vision in Babylon (Dan 7) – part leopard, part bear, part lion.

The sea beast is the agent of Satan, the executor of the plan (like the relationship between the Father and the Son in the Holy Trinity). The dragon authorizes him to carry out the plan of worldwide deception (last week – CH 12 v.9). Then, one of the seven heads is fatally wounded but then healed (like a resurrection). The earth is amazed and worships the beast and the dragon (as Father and Son are worshiped). The world ascribes uniqueness to the sea-beast (“who is like the beast?” 13.4)

And for a limited period of time, this spokesman or word of the devil blasphemes God (like Goliath did); he mocks God's character and God's people. Then he actually comes after God's people and kills their bodies. He dominates every tribe, people, tongue and nation (he's a counterfeit Christ). The whole earth worships this agent of the devil *EXCEPT* those whose names have been written in the Lamb's book of life.

Then a little charge in v. 9 – “Pay attention! You may die. Don't repay violence WITH violence – *the way you win THIS war* is by persevering in faith and repentance - (Jeremiah 15.2) – “the body they may kill, God's truth abideth still.”

Then the third member of this unholy triad is introduced – a beast coming up out of the land/earth. The land is very important to Jewish people (then *and now!*). This third monster who's later called the “false prophet” is a parody of Third Person of the Holy Trinity, the Lord and Giver of Life who spoke through the prophets. The land beast/false prophet does signs, calls fire from heaven (like a fake Pentecost when the Spirit of Truth came with fire). This land beast is likely a Jewish power who calls people to worship the first beast (as the Holy Spirit glorifies the Son).

Then the land-beast commissions an image of the first beast (it's like a fake parallel of the church which is the Body or *image* of Christ) and he makes the image come to life (or at least it appears to come alive!) and everyone has to worship the image of the beast or be killed – everyone i.e. (v.16 – the small/great, rich/poor, free and slave – just like the Holy Spirit makes all different people into one body – Col 3.11; Gal 3.28 et al).

And finally (in CH 13) everyone must receive this stamp or mark to show that he/she worships the beast. The mark is applied like the phylacteries Moses gave to the Israelites in the Exodus: “These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads.”

The forehead symbolizes THINKING and the right hand symbolizes ACTION; by their thoughts and actions the whole world must align with the beast. And before I delve into that (just a bit) let's make sure we see the big idea here: the devil mimics God. The point is to expose a satanic strategy: the dragon wants to take God's place. He's mad/insane with jealousy and envy. He wants only to steal and kill and destroy (John 10.10). He'll act like God in his attempt to subvert and vandalize God's Kingdom.

He comes to deceive the whole world (12.9). He masquerades as the Trinity. He tries to upend the way power works in the kingdom of God – grace, favor, blessing, provision, authority, power all come from above in God's Kingdom: James CH 1 – “Every good and perfect gift is from above,

coming down from the Father of lights..."(v. 17). But the dragon wants to capsize the ship. He wants to build from below upward.

He's the one who inspired that ancient revolt that had the whole world saying, "*Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves...*" (Genesis 11.4) The Tower of Babel attempts to rise from Earth to heaven. So, the dragon calls the beasts UP from the Gentile sea and UP from the Jewish land.

He wants to teach us how to make a name for ourselves and how to live NOT depending on God (the Father of Lights) but to depend on ourselves... and to worship ourselves and the beast (to worship anything else...anyone but God.)

And that brings me to the EXCURSUS ON GEMATRIA (gem-AY-tree-ah) AND SYMBOLISM.

Gematria is a new word to me... It's sometimes called numerology. It's the practice of assigning numerical values to letters. Using this practice (which can sometimes get a little weird) readers of Revelation over the centuries have attempted to "calculate the number of the beast" (13.18).

If you translate "Emperor Nero" into Hebrew as "kaisar neron" and assign numerical values to each consonant (and also to the "O" which can be a consonant in Hebrew) the letters add up to "666."

Is Nero the Beast? Some say he had that as a nickname. He was awaiting execution when he committed suicide... and there were rumors that he rose from the dead. Was Nero the Beast? Yes... in the sense that was a tool of the dragon *used to kill believers in Jesus and do a lot of other evil things.*

But let's look a little closer to "calculate the number of the beast, for the NUMBER IS THAT OF A MAN". Man was created on the Sixth Day. He was told to work six days, "For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day." (Exo 20.11)

Six is a special number. If you're into mathematical theory or "Pure Math" you know there are all kinds of special features to this number. It's the sum of the first three digits: $1+2+3=6$ (unity, duality and multiplicity). It's a "triangular number" – an equilateral triangle with 36 dots on each side adds up to 666. It's a beautiful number.

It's a kind of complete number. It's NOT the dark, creepy, Ozzy Osborne number that we think it is. It's after the Sixth Day that, "God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good." (Gen 1.31)

But of course... it's NOT complete. It's the workweek but without the day of worship and without "the LORD'S Day". The Sabbath is a deliberate interruption to the apparent completeness of Number Six. It's as if the Beast wants us to forget the day of rest/worship and be complete in what we make with our own hands – making a name for ourselves – building from below and moving upward; turning upside-down the direction of GRACE.

Did you know that 666 is a significant number from the Hebrew Bible? In (what we call) the Old Testament it occurs twice; once in a long list of people ("the family of Adonikam, 666" Ezra 2.13). But the other time is *when Solomon became the kind of king against which the Law had warned*.

The Law said, "If you have a king, he must NOT be like the other Middle Eastern kings who multiply wives and horses and gold." In other words, "Your kings must rule by depending on ME – NOT by depending on their own greatness and will-power and status symbols and by being showy and impressive. I want the world to see the beauty of grace – not another insecure man making a name for himself."

And in that CH, 1st Kings 10.14, it says, "*Now the weight of gold which came in to Solomon in one year was 666 talents of gold*" (repeated in Chronicles 9.13). In other words, Solomon was making a name for himself. Solomon was relying on his own work independent from God. He was building a kingdom for himself trusting in the size of his army (horses) and harem (1,000 wives) and 666 talents of gold in annual taxes.

Man, with resources like THAT, who needs God!

What IS the mark of the beast? Well, it means a lot of things. It's paralleled in CH 14 where in v.1 it says that God's army of worshipers who overcome by faith and worship, they have God's Name on their foreheads. It's not a visible thing, like a tattoo or a bar-code or a vaccine or a microchip. It's a way of life. It's a way of thinking and acting.

The mark of the beast is a life lived by human effort and by human independency and by building upward in order to make a name for oneself. The mark of the beast is not something that can be detected with a scanner or a black-light. It's a life lived without overt reliance on God and His grace that came DOWN from Heaven in the Person and Work of Jesus Christ.

And that brings me to my shortest point – "the rest of this passage" (I'm indebted to Gordon and Barry here): God's people don't make a name for themselves. They receive a name. The dragon stood on the sand (the sinking sand) of the seashore and calls a monster up. The Lamb (in CH 14) stands on Mount Zion and calls grace and beauty down on His complete people whom He is conforming into His own glorious image.

They're NOT the Frankenstein image monstrosity the beast brings to life (like Artificial Intelligence; Trans-humanism). We who believe in Jesus Christ, the source of all grace, belong to the God who loves us and will love us for all eternity (we're the sheep of His hand!)

We're tuning up for a symphony where we'll sing like harps. We'll know that we have NOT made a name for ourselves. We've often failed at parenting, at relationships, at politics; we've failed at our vocation and we never did achieve that perfect work-life balance. We sinned. BUT we were purchased from among men. God made a name for us. He bore the cost and purchased us by sacrifice.

This is why we sing a new song the world doesn't understand. The whole world is based on 666 – doing the work of making yourself enough. Work without reference to God and the Seventh Day *that was fulfilled when Jesus Christ worked FOR us and rested in the tomb on the SEVENTH Day.*

In ourselves and our desperate attempts to be enough...to make a name... to feel good about ourselves, to please the "Man upstairs" we always and only FALL SHORT. God is truly complete HOLY, HOLY, HOLY, 777 and we always fall one digit short – 666 not 777.

But God shows us here that the way of the world, the way of the beast, ends in eternal frustration (Sisyphus pushing the boulder uphill and never reaching the top).

But the Way of the Lamb who purchased His people by His own blood, that way ends in rest: "Here is the perseverance of the saints who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus. And I heard a voice from heaven, saying, "Write, 'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on!'" "Yes," says the Spirit, "so that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow with them." (Rev 14.12-13)

That's the rest of this passage. There's no hope in the way of the beast. It's a trick. It's a monstrosity and ends in eternal restlessness and shame.

But in the Way of the Lamb is joy and blessedness that sweetly changes us so that our deeds/works don't gain us entry but are instead the sweet fruit of the Spirit who made a name FOR me at infinite cost to Himself.