

The Beast out of the Sea—the Antichrist (Revelation 13:1-10)

It should come as no surprise to careful readers that the Bible describes the evil enemies of God as monstrous beasts. Daniel 7:1-14 presents four world empires as four ferocious beasts coming out of the sea. Revelation 11:7 states that a beast coming out of the Abyss, likely a reference to Satan, will attack and kill God's two special witnesses. Revelation 13:1 introduces a beast coming out of the sea and Revelation 13:11 introduces a beast coming out of the earth. In both cases these beasts possess a frightening countenance and symbolize future actors on the human stage. The first of these two beasts can be designated as the Antichrist, while the second the False Prophet. Although John never uses the word "antichrist" in the book of Revelation he does use it in his epistles (1 John 2:18, 22; 4:3; 2 John 7). The term can apply to anyone who rejects Jesus Christ, but more specifically applies to a future individual who embodies deep hatred for the Messiah. The word itself means one who is opposed to Christ or even tries to take the place of Christ. The beast that rises out of the sea certainly fits this description. While this beast's description presents some challenges of interpretation, there are a number of facts that become clear when compared with others passages of God's Word. Like many of the interludes in Revelation this passage reminds us that while evil seems overwhelming, God's people will triumph in the end.

The Antichrist will be an awe inspiring beast—evil always seeks to steal worship from God (13:1-4).

Although to human appearances the Antichrist will be an attractive world leader, through the eyes of faith his nature as a monstrous beast becomes evident. This future world ruler will blaspheme God and demand, beyond mere allegiance, the worship of earth's inhabitants.

John saw a beast emerge from the sea having ten horns, seven heads, and ten crowns (13:1).

The opening sentence of verse 1 could serve as a conclusion to the previous chapter or an introduction to chapter 13. It could also read either "I stood on the sand of the sea," referring to John or "He stood on the sand of the sea," referring to the dragon since different copies of the text preserve both versions. Because John's previous vantage point had been in heaven (Revelation 12:1), it makes sense to have him state his changed perspective for this next vision, making the first version preferable.

John saw "a beast coming out of the sea." The sea might refer to the sea of humanity, the Gentile population (compare "waters" in Revelation 17:15). However, in the Old Testament the sea stood for chaos (Genesis 1:2), danger (Psalm 74:13-14), and spiritual unrest (Isaiah 57:20). The fact that beast will emerge from the sea seems to indicate that this beast will be both fearsome in its origin as well as its appearance.

The beast out of the sea will have "ten horns and seven heads, with ten crowns on his horns." The symbolism of heads, horns, and crowns is prevalent in apocalyptic writings and usually refers to national entities, their rulers, or both. In Daniel 7:7 the fourth beast, representing the Roman Empire, had ten horns which were ten kings (Daniel 7:24). In Revelation 12:3 the dragon, Satan, has seven heads, ten horns, and seven crowns—identical to

the beast out of the sea except for the number and location of crowns (the dragon's seven crowns were on its seven heads, whereas the beast's ten crowns are on its ten horns). In another context seven heads refer to seven successive kings and consequently their kingdoms and may refer to the series of empires that oppressed God's chosen people—Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome, and a future global empire (Revelation 17:9-10). Therefore, the beast out of the sea will be an individual who encompasses and personifies the worst of world domination and the oppression of God's people. Each of its seven heads bears a blasphemous name, meaning that each successive empire resisted the true and living God. The beast's ten horns with ten crowns of regal authority could refer to ten lesser kings who comprise the beast's future empire. This Antichrist will wield great control over rulers and people alike.

The beast resembled a compilation of fierce animals and received its power from the dragon (13:2).

The beast out of the sea possesses traits that are like three other animals. It's like a leopard, apparently a reference to its speed of conquest. It has feet like a bear, powerful and destructive. It also has a mouth like that of a lion, a majestic beast with a blood-curdling roar. In Daniel 7:3-7 these same three animals, in reverse order, symbolize Babylon (the lion), Persia (the bear), and Greece (the leopard). Daniel's prophecy also included a fourth animal that defied comparison and referred to Rome. The beast from the sea, the Antichrist, will possess characteristics of all of these world empires and will, in a way, serve as an extension of the fourth empire, Rome. In addition to these ferocious qualities the Antichrist will receive his power, his throne, and his authority from none other than the dragon, Satan.

The beast was healed from a deadly wound to one of its heads, causing the whole world to be amazed (13:3).

One of the beast's seven heads received a deadly blow. The original text says that it was "as having been slain" unto death, a phrase used in Revelation 5:6 to describe Jesus' death. Since Jesus' death was a real death, followed by resurrection, the death of one of the beast's heads must also be a real death, not merely an appearance of death. Does this mean that the Antichrist will be killed and raised again to life? If so, his role as a replacement for the true Christ would carry significant influence—death followed by resurrection. However, only God can raise the dead to life and this doesn't seem to be the case with the beast. Since the whole beast didn't die, simply one of its heads, it seems better to see here a reference to the death and restoration of a world empire. The last of the ancient empires in Daniel's prophecies was Rome, which did die historically. For Rome to be restored as a global empire in the future would fulfill Revelation 13:3 and astonish the inhabitants of earth. The Antichrist will, therefore, rule over a restored Roman Empire. In many ways, the seeds of ancient Rome have always influenced western nations, so the future Antichrist will likely come from the western world and maintain a political base in the west.

The whole world worshiped the dragon and the beast for its irrepressible power (13:4).

While the Antichrist appears like a monstrous beast to those who see him through the eyes of faith, he will be an attractive personality to the world. When he comes on the scene as

the leader of a global empire people will praise both him and the one who empowers him. People will actually worship the dragon for giving the beast his authority. They will also worship the beast, admitting that no one is like him and no one can resist him militarily. According to 2 Thessalonians 2:4 the Antichrist will proclaim himself to be God and demand worship, worship which the unbelieving world will be all too ready to render. Evil always seeks to steal worship from the true and living God.

**The Antichrist will be a blasphemous beast—
evil always demeans God’s reputation and God’s people (13:5-6).**

To demand worship is certainly a blasphemous act. The beast out of the sea will engage in even more blasphemy. In fact, blasphemy will characterize his message.

The beast was given a mouth to speak blasphemies and authority to act for forty-two months (13:5).

The beast out of the sea will be given, presumably by God through His sovereign permission, a mouth to speak great blasphemies. In the same way, through God’s sovereign permission the beast will be given authority to carry out his nefarious work. However, the beast’s time is limited to forty-two months, the last three and a half years of the Tribulation Period. Apparently the Antichrist will broker a peace deal at the beginning of the Tribulation Period, catapulting him to prominence (Daniel 9:26-27). Midway through that period he’ll gain world dominance and demand worship. Daniel 7:8 refers to the Antichrist as a “little horn” that will have a mouth that speaks boastful words. These boastful words will be blasphemous because he will claim the right to be worshiped, a right that belongs to God alone.

The beast blasphemed God’s name, God’s tabernacle, and those living in heaven (13:6).

To blaspheme is to speak evil of that which is good. The target of the beast’s blasphemy will, of course, be God Himself. He will deny God’s goodness, demeaning the name—the very character—of God. In addition the beast will blaspheme God’s tabernacle, His heavenly dwelling place as well as those who dwell (literally “tabernacle”) there. Those who call heaven their home—angels and people, particularly the martyrs—will become the brunt of the Antichrist’s irreverent verbal attacks. He’ll demean God’s reputation and His people, thereby attempting to elevate his own prestige.

**The Antichrist will be a powerful beast—
evil always attempts to dominate and destroy (13:7-9).**

How will the Antichrist manage to command the worship of the entire world? He will, by the power of the dragon, control the military might of his oppressive regime.

The beast was given freedom to defeat God’s people and authority to rule over the entire world (13:7).

Just as the beast will be given by God's sovereign permission both a mouth to speak blasphemy and authority to operate (verse 5), so likewise he will be given the ability to wage war against God's holy people (literally "the saints"). The beast will actually become victorious over the saints militarily, although of course the saints prevail at the spiritual level. The scope of the beast's power will be all inclusive. He will be given authority over "every tribe, people, language, and nation." Although Jesus died to redeem people from this same scope of humanity (Revelation 5:9), the Antichrist will usurp Christ's right to rule—at least temporarily.

Everyone on earth, apart from those whose names have been written in the Lamb's book of life, will worship the beast (13:8-9).

So powerful will be the Antichrist that everyone living on earth in that future day will worship him. This universal worship of the beast will include, of course, only those "whose names have not been written in the book of life" (compare Revelation 3:5). This book belongs to "the Lamb who was slain." Those whose names ultimately appear in the book of life are those who've placed their faith in Jesus Christ for eternal salvation. True believers living on earth during the reign of the Antichrist will not participate in worshiping him. Their loyalties will remain with Jesus Christ. The phrase "from the foundation of the world" may refer to its immediate antecedent, meaning that Jesus' death was anticipated from eternity past (compare Hebrews 4:3). However, based on its usage in Revelation 17:8 it more likely should be linked with those whose names have or have not been written in the book of life "from the foundation of the world." God knows who will and who won't respond to the gospel. Obviously, both the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and the salvation of God's people are intricately linked.

Verse 9 may point forward to verse 10 as an announcement to pay attention to the following warning about retribution. However, since the exhortation to listen usually follows that which is to gain the reader's attention (Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22) it makes better sense to take verse 9 as an announcement to reflect on the previous verses. Those who have an ear should hear, that is pay attention to, the warnings about the coming Antichrist.

**The Antichrist will be a doomed
beast—evil will ultimately be defeated (13:10).**

While the beast out of the sea will be a ferocious foe to God's people, believers can take comfort in knowing that this beast—and evil itself—will be defeated. The Lamb is Lord.

Those who inflict punishment will themselves be punished (13:10a).

Those destined for captivity will go into captivity and those who kill by the sword must themselves be killed by the sword. In other words, God will punish those who inflict punishment on others. The future Antichrist will himself be sent to his doom (Revelation 19:20). Righteousness will win over evil. Christ will be victorious over the Antichrist.

God's sovereign justice serves to strengthen the resolve of His people (13:10).

Because Jesus Christ is our victorious Lord, those who follow Him in that future day of tribulation will exhibit “endurance” in their trials and remain “faithful.” “This is the endurance and faithfulness of the saints.” Believers, both future and present, take comfort in the fact of Jesus’ ultimate victory over sin, Satan, and evil. While evil seems overwhelming, God’s people will triumph in the end. The Lamb is Lord.