

BITTER HONEY: THE REVELATION

Rodger Dalman

CHAPTER 13: ISRAEL AND THE ANTICHRIST

Verses 1-2

John opened Revelation 13 by pointing again to Daniel 7. Like Daniel, John stood on the sea shore. John saw a beast coming up from the sea. This beast resembled the fourth beast in Daniel 7. The beast had ten horns like Daniel's beast, and its body was like a leopard, a bear, and a lion. Those are the first three beasts in Daniel 7 which were eaten by the fourth beast. The Roman Empire crushed and assimilated the empires of Mesopotamia, Persia, and Greece. The beast that John saw in Revelation 13 was not the red dragon in Revelation 12. The dragon had diadems on his heads while the beast had diadems on his ten horns. So the beast in Revelation 13 was the period of mixed nations which were given power and authority by the dragon. Revelation 13:1-2 talked about the period when Satan was bound. With his power to deceive the nations diminished, Satan could not create a unified front to attack God's people. When Satan is again loosed to deceive the nations, the church would fall to apostasy and a unified world empire would emerge.

Verses 3-10

John saw one of the beast's heads as if it had been slain. His fatal wound was healed, and the whole world followed after the beast. The fatal could refer to one of two things. The beast's seven heads represented Rome. The empire fell and was broken up. Verses like Revelation 11:7 said that Rome was in Sheol until the empire was re-established. Sheol was the place of the dead. Perhaps the beast's fatal wound was the period of mixed nations when Satan was bound in Sheol. The fatal wound could be cured when Rome was re-established. Isaiah 23:13 provided an Old Testament parallel here. Chaldea was called "the people which was not." Assyria made the land desolate. Later, the city was reborn, and it became man's first world empire.

The beast's fatal wound could also have been the new Babylon's fall. In Revelation 17:3, Babylon sat on the beast with seven heads and ten horns. John was told that the seven heads were the seven hills of Rome and seven kings. One of those kings existed during Babylon's reign, and one was yet to come (Revelation 17:10). The head that was coming was the Antichrist's empire. The sixth head could have received its fatal wound when Babylon was destroyed. Although one of the beast's heads was killed, the beast itself did not die. It was healed and resurrected as the Antichrist's empire. The motif of an incurable wound was used at least twice in the Old Testament. Nahum 3:19 claimed that Ninevah's wound was incurable putting the deadly wound motif in the context of the empires of Mesopotamia. Micah 1:9 claimed that Jerusalem's wound was incurable, but Micah 4 promised restoration for the city in the future. So there is Biblical background for applying the idea of a healed deadly wound to a nation or empire.

The whole world will worship Satan because he gave his authority to the new Rome. The world will also worship Rome. The world will also worship Rome because no one can oppose it. Revelation 13:5 noted that the new Rome was given a mouth to speak arrogant words and blasphemies and the authority to act for 42 months. The mouth that spoke blasphemies may have been the Antichrist or the false prophet. The Antichrist was given the authority to act for 42 months. It is hard to be sure if this was a limited time period parallel to the 3½ last days motif or if the 42 months saw the Antichrist in the broad context of the Roman Empire, the mixed nations, and the restored Rome. All three were parts of the same eschatological force. The mouth that spoke arrogant words and blasphemies may have come from Daniel 7:8. Daniel was contemplating the fourth beast's ten horns. Then a little horn grew up among them, and it tore out three others by their roots. This little horn was the Antichrist's empire. It had eyes like a man and a mouth that uttered great boasts. Daniel 7:25 claimed that this last horn would persecute God's people for time, times, and half a time. That was the same basic image as 3½ days, months, or years. It was the same

period as the 42 months of Revelation 13:5. Rome would be led by one man, the Antichrist. He would persecute the church severely and blaspheme God. Revelation 13:7 claimed that he would not only make war against the saints, but he would overcome them. Then he would rule over every people, tongue, and nation. The age of the exiled church would end as almost every believer would either be martyred or fall away. Everyone whose name was not recorded in the Lamb's book of life from eternity would worship the powers of this world.

The description of the beast and the Antichrist in Revelation 13 was interrupted by verses 9-10. These verses claimed, "If anyone has an ear, let him hear. If anyone is destined for captivity, to captivity he goes. If anyone kills with the sword, by the sword he must be killed. Here is the perseverance and the faith of the saints." What do these verses mean? Revelation 13:9 repeats Christ's constant command in Revelation 2 and 3 that the one with ears to hear should hear. So Christ commanded His church to understand something. What was it? The first sentence in Revelation 13:10 came from the prophets. It meant that the promised judgment was inevitable. So those who are willing to understand should prepare for the judgment. In Jeremiah 15:2, God told Israel that those who were destined for death, famine, sword, or captivity must go where they were destined. In Jeremiah 43:11, Egypt was told nearly the same thing. Jeremiah's point was that man's empire would conquer the whole world through Nebuchadnezzar. The nations could not escape this judgment because God had decreed it. So Christ told his church in Revelation 13 that the Antichrist would take over the world. Christ's children must prepare for this time. God also promised that those who killed with the sword would in time be killed with the sword. Although the Antichrist would persecute the church, he would be destroyed by his own violence. So Christ told His people to keep the faith despite persecution. Their suffering would end when the Antichrist was destroyed.

Verses 11-18

John saw another beast which came up out of the earth. Through Daniel and Revelation, beasts which signified empires always came from the sea because the sea was a symbol for the vast bulk of humanity. This beast came from the north because it was identified with the new Rome which had been released from the abyss (cf. Revelation 20:7-10). The beast had two horns like a lamb and spoke like a dragon. The beast tried to look like the Lamb of God, but he spoke like Satan. This beast was the false prophet who ruled with the Antichrist. This false prophet would make the whole earth worship the Antichrist.

The false prophet performed great signs. He even made fire fall down from heaven in the presence of men. Revelation 16:13 predicted that the Antichrist and the false prophet would send spirits of demons to gather the nations to Armageddon. These demons would perform signs to deceive the world. The false prophet was primarily responsible for these signs. Revelation 19:20 said that he would produce these signs in the Antichrist's presence. Christ warned His church several times to expect the Antichrist to produce these signs and wonders, but the church must not be deceived (cf. II Thessalonians 2:3-12). The false prophet and his institution may look like a lamb, but they speak for Satan.

The false prophet deceives men because of his ability to call down fire from heaven. He tells men to make an image of the beast that had the wound of the sword and was healed. The image of the beast was given the ability to speak, and everyone who did not worship it was killed. The image's ability to speak was probably the blasphemous mouth of Revelation 13:5-6. The image of the beast may well refer back to Daniel. Nebuchadnezzar saw a vision of man's empire in Daniel 2:31-35. Then in Daniel 3:1, Nebuchadnezzar built a golden image of the vision that he had seen. Nebuchadnezzar required everyone to worship the image of man's power. Anyone who refused to worship the image would be killed.

Nebuchadnezzar was not the only person to worship man's power. Rome had set up images of Caesar, and the empire first encouraged then required emperor worship. Some of the worst persecutions that Christians faced in the first century came because they refused to worship Caesar. In the same way, Herod allowed himself to be called a god. Because of this, the Lord killed him in a terrible way (Acts 12:23).

Men would rather worship human power and authority than worship the true God. The image in Revelation 13:14 was probably not an idol although it was worshiped as if it were one. The beast who came back to life was the new Rome. An image of a government should be an institution. Since the Antichrist and the false prophet shared power in Rome, the image of the beast may be the false church led by the false prophet. The false church would force anyone who did not worship the new Rome to be killed.

The false prophet commanded that anyone who did not worship the Antichrist must die. This command began the final persecution which would decimate the gentile church. The New Testament community remained a largely Jewish church until Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 AD. The New Testament community would remain a largely gentile church until the new Babylon was destroyed and the final persecution began. Increasing numbers of Jewish people would be converted before Babylon was destroyed. The exile of the faith began in a gradual way and it would end by a gradual process.

The final persecution would involve both physical abuse and an entire economic system designed to entrench the Antichrist's power. Revelation 13:16-17 promised that every person would receive a mark on his forehead or right hand. Without this mark, it would be impossible to buy or sell anything. To receive this mark, a person must swear allegiance to the beast. That is why Revelation 14:11 promised that anyone who received the mark would be thrown into hell. Revelation 13:18 declared, "Here is wisdom. Let him who has understood calculate the number of the beast because it is the number of a man. His number is 666." The idea of numbering in Revelation usually described man's inheritance from God. How could 666 describe the Antichrist's inheritance from God? Using Scriptural sources, this number could be interpreted in several different ways. It is not clear which approach is correct. One possibility is that the number 666 referred to the sixth seal, the sixth trumpet, and the sixth bowl of wrath. All of these described the events leading up to Armageddon. The number 666 could suggest that the Antichrist's inheritance from God was his complete destruction in the flames of Armageddon.