

[IN GOD'S IMAGE 80 – REVELATION 13-18 - TWO BEASTS AND THE GREAT HARLOT]

Last time we came face to face with the ultimate source of evil, the great red dragon.

- ◆ So far we have identified a number of sources representing the forces of evil.
- ◆ They were the despotic and cruel Roman emperors, his conquering armies, grasping businessmen, corrupt government agencies and false religious institutions, and finally a fierce supernatural red dragon called the “destroyer” and his evil cohorts.
- ◆ God is not going to allow these destroying evil forces to have their way forever and He is going to step in and bring this cycle of destruction to an end.

This is the focus of the book from this point on, the destruction of the destroyer and his evil cohorts both natural and supernatural.

- ◆ These evil agents have invaded God’s good earth and infested all areas of life with their wickedness.
- ◆ We see this represented now by the two beasts sponsored by the dragon, one that comes up out of the sea, the other out of the earth.
- ◆ ***Revelation 13:1 The dragon stood on the shore of the sea. And I saw a beast coming out of the sea. It had ten horns and seven heads, with ten crowns on its horns, and on each head a blasphemous name.***
- ◆ This is the same beast that was identified earlier, but now we get more details.
- ◆ What we see here is John adopting the same practice Daniel used to portray the natures of conquering empires as wild beasts.
- ◆ But John takes this symbolism further by combining these evil traits from Daniel’s first three beasts and combines them into the fourth fearsome beast.
- ◆ ***Revelation 13:2 The beast I saw resembled a leopard, but had feet like those of a bear and a mouth like that of a lion. The dragon gave the beast his power and his throne and great authority.***
- ◆ This beast is used by Satan to inflict his wickedness on people by controlling the political arm of the Roman Empire.
- ◆ The Roman Empire rampaged across the earth crushing all in its path.
- ◆ Julius Caesar’s famous quote, “I came, I saw, I conquered.”
- ◆ ***Revelation 13:3 One of the heads of the beast seemed to have had a fatal wound, but the fatal wound had been healed.***
- ◆ This is referring to the reincarnation of this type of evil power down through the ages.
- ◆ Regardless of the age, the dragon will infect each political system with his destructive evil influence.
- ◆ John in speaking to the churches, is again contrasting two types of power at work.
- ◆ The Lamb too had suffered a fatal wound but rises from death to give life while the beast rises from the dead to take life.
- ◆ The Lamb “conquers” by faithfully suffering death for others while the beast inflicts death on others.
- ◆ The Roman Empire prided itself on its system of justice, but their justice was implemented from the perspective of “might is right.”
- ◆ God’s justice in contrast is implemented from the perspective of “love.”
- ◆ ***Revelation 13:7 It was given power to wage war against God’s holy people and to conquer them. And it was given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation.***
- ◆ As mentioned earlier, the dragon inspired the beast to wage war with God’s people.
- ◆ Nero, for instance, blamed the burning of Rome on the Christians and unleashed violent persecution on the Christians.
- ◆ Christians were arrested and thrown to wild beasts in the circus or were crucified.
- ◆ Many were also burned to death at night in Nero’s gardens to serve as lighting while Nero mingled among the watching guests or rode around the fires in a chariot.
- ◆ ***Revelation 13:8-10 All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast—all whose names have not been written in the Lamb’s book of life, the Lamb who was slain from the creation of the world.***
- ◆ Worship is an expression as to which one gives their loyalties.
- ◆ ***V.9 Whoever has ears, let them hear. 10 “If anyone is to go into captivity, into captivity they will go. If anyone is to be killed with the sword, with the sword they will be killed.” This calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of God’s people.***

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- ◆ Are you going to give your loyalty to this predatory beast or to the suffering lamb?
- The beast from the sea works in the realm of politics, but now we are introduced to a second beast.***
- ◆ ***Revelation 13:11-12 Then I saw a second beast, coming out of the earth. It had two horns like a lamb, but it spoke like a dragon. ¹² It exercised all the authority of the first beast on its behalf, and made the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose fatal wound had been healed.***
- ◆ The second beast from the land supports the beast from the sea through the religious and economic practices that serve the interests of the empire.
- ◆ But be careful, even though it looks like a lamb, it is really a wolf in sheep's clothing.
- ◆ What is being revealed here is the two ways the dragon infests society with his evil practices, first through the political sphere, then through false religion and economic bondage.
- ◆ Notice the terms used to describe the methods of this second beast in regard to worship practices.
- ◆ ***Revelation 13:13-15 And it performed great signs, even causing fire to come down from heaven to the earth in full view of the people. ¹⁴ Because of the signs it was given power to perform on behalf of the first beast, it deceived the inhabitants of the earth. It ordered them to set up an image in honor of the beast who was wounded by the sword and yet lived. ¹⁵ The second beast was given power to give breath to the image of the first beast, so that the image could speak and cause all who refused to worship the image to be killed***
- ◆ The role of the second beast is to promote the imperial cult through worship.
- ◆ Julius Caesar was formally deified as "the Divine Julius," and his son Augustus Caesar became "Son of the Divine One."
- ◆ Now notice the methods it uses to control economic forces.
- ◆ ***Revelation 13:16-17 It also forced all people, great and small, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hands or on their foreheads, ¹⁷ so that they could not buy or sell unless they had the mark, which is the name of the beast or the number of its name.***
- ◆ The mark of the beast is symbolic language used to represent the social and economic ways of engaging with the empire.
- ◆ The warning is, as you engage with the empire in your day-to-day living, be careful you don't adopt the same evil practices you see at work in the culture around you that exploit and oppress others.
- ◆ And of course you don't have to look too hard to see these same evil forces at work in today's world.
- ◆ The political establishment even in our leading democracies have become so corrupt and self-serving (snouts in the trough) that the call has gone out to "drain the swamp."
- ◆ The religious force of Islam holds sway over much of the world's population, and even Christian institutions are accused of violating their sacred trust with those most vulnerable with predatory priests.
- ◆ The fat cats of the corporate and business world retire with multi-million dollar golden handshakes even when they have been kicked out because of blatant failure or fraud.
- Now John introduces the intriguing number of 666 into the dialogue.***
- ◆ ***Revelation 13:18 This calls for wisdom. Let the person who has insight calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man. That number is 666.***
- ◆ This number too has led to a great deal of speculation and some have gone to great lengths to identify who it may represent.
- ◆ This is usually done through a system called "gematria" where a number value is applied to successive letters of the alphabet.
- ◆ Under this formula, the emperor Nero was identified in Hebrew if his name is used as "Nero Caesar."
- ◆ Later even the name of the prophet Mohammed apparently fitted into the system.
- ◆ But was John really giving a secret code to identify a particular person or was he using it as a symbol representing a particular system?
- ◆ We have already seen how he has used symbolism such as, horsemen, dragons, beasts, etc. to represent a particular system or process.
- ◆ We do the same thing today when we use images such as Elephants and Donkeys to represent the republican and democratic parties in the US.
- ◆ We use the symbols of bulls and bears to represent the direction of the stock market.

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◆ The wisdom that is called for in this verse is to identify the various evil methods used by these powers represented by symbols so that you are not deceived.

◆ “Are you going to worship the Lamb or the dragon?”

◆ “Are you going to cast your allegiance in with the 144,000 or with those represented by 666?”

And this is precisely the message as we move to Revelation 14 that identifies two groups, the 144,000 who are faithful to the Lamb and the destruction of those who oppose the Lamb and give their allegiance to the beast.

◆ ***Revelation 14:9 A third angel followed them and said in a loud voice: “If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives its mark on their forehead or on their hand,¹⁰ they, too, will drink the wine of God’s fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath.***

◆ God’s people are again warned not to adopt the same evil practices you see at work in the culture around you otherwise you will find yourself on the wrong side of God’s fury.

With Revelation 15-16 the vision shifts again to God’s throne and the seven angels holding the seven last plagues that are released on those who worshiped the beast and its image.

◆ ***Revelation 15:1-3 I saw in heaven another great and marvelous sign: seven angels with the seven last plagues—last, because with them God’s wrath is completed.² And I saw what looked like a sea of glass glowing with fire and, standing beside the sea, those who had been victorious over the beast and its image and over the number of its name. They held harps given them by God³ and sang the song of God’s servant Moses and of the Lamb.***

◆ While destruction is the fate of those who continue to resist God, the destiny of those who remain loyal are rewarded for their faithfulness.

Revelation 17 is an obituary (looking back) and we are introduced to another powerful symbol of evil, a great harlot dressed in purple and scarlet, glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls and inscribed with the name, “Babylon the great, the mother of prostitutes and of the abominations of the earth.”

◆ The harlot like the two beasts already identified, represents another form of wickedness that infests these evil empires.

◆ Conquering empires filled with the arrogance of their conquests, degenerate into hotbeds of hedonism, debauchery and depravity.

◆ Babylon the Great, symbolising the city of Rome situated on the seven hills (seven heads of the beast, Revelation 17:9) is portrayed as a harlot riding on the back of the political and economic power of Imperial Rome.

◆ Her depiction by John point to her deceitful practices that revolve around pleasure, profit, and power.

◆ ***Revelation 17:4 The woman was dressed in purple and scarlet, and was glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls. She held a golden cup in her hand, filled with abominable things and the filth of her adulteries.***

◆ First of all, the fact she is riding on the beast demonstrates the influence she wields in the powerful ruling circles of the empire.

◆ A prostitute exchanges pleasure for profit and in the process dehumanises and degrades life.

◆ Second, the harlot’s attire shows she is obsessed with the desire to display wealth, status, and opulence.

◆ Third, the golden cup “***filled with abominable things and the filth of her adulteries***” along with the fact she was “***drunk with the blood of God’s holy people***” (Revelation 17:6) testify to her vicious use of power and her appetite for violence.

◆ Of course Rome was known not only for its violent conquest of other nations but also for its gladiatorial sports that included the persecution of Christians.

◆ As a harlot without values, she will even stoop to murder in order to further her goals of domination.

John’s goal through this cheap and gaudy image is again, to warn Christians not to be seduced by her vices.

◆ He paints a portrait of Babylon so repulsive one has to question why anyone would want to be part of it.

◆ Of course this picture is the antithesis of the image Rome would like itself to be portrayed as.

◆ It wants to portray itself as strong, virtuous and elegant but in reality she is a cheap drunken whore.

◆ By comparing Rome to Babylon, John warns his readers not be seduced by her ways, but to look beneath the surface to reveal the true beastly nature underneath.

◆ Of course, this advice is just as applicable today as it was then.

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- ◆ We live in a society that is obsessed with the pursuit of pleasure (sex and pornography), profit and consumerism (out of control debt and credit cards) and violence (TV, video games, crime, cage fighting).
- ◆ Each of these pursuits dehumanises and degrades life.
- ◆ Eventually a society dominated by these vices will consume and devour itself.
- ◆ And this is what eventually happens to the harlot.
- ◆ **Revelation 17:16 *The beast and the ten horns you saw will hate the prostitute. They will bring her to ruin and leave her naked; they will eat her flesh and burn her with fire.***
- ◆ Evil eventually becomes evil's undoing.
- ◆ The society that uses violence to dominate others will in the end be consumed by violence.
- ◆ We see this rise and fall process repeating itself over and over throughout history.
- ◆ This is why the call goes out to God's people in Revelation 18 to come out of this lifestyle of violence and consumption.
- ◆ **Revelation 18:4 *"Come out of her, my people,' so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not receive any of her plagues.***
- ◆ But even as she is destroyed, we see the politicians and merchants who benefited the most from committing adultery with this harlot mourning her loss.
- ◆ **Revelation 18:9 *"When the kings of the earth who committed adultery with her and shared her luxury see the smoke of her burning, they will weep and mourn over her.***
- ◆ **V.11-12 *"The merchants of the earth will weep and mourn over her because no one buys their cargoes anymore— ¹²*cargoes of gold, silver, precious stones and pearls...****
- ◆ But at the end of this long list of items is one commodity upon which this wealth and luxury has been built.
- ◆ **V.13 *...cargoes of cinnamon and spice, of incense, myrrh and frankincense, of wine and olive oil, of fine flour and wheat; cattle and sheep; horses and carriages; and human beings sold as slaves.***
- ◆ Everything including people in this beastly system had been reduced to a commodity.
- ◆ The lifestyle of the rich and famous is made possible through the repulsive trade of human souls.
- ◆ This same exploitation is very evident today as our rich economies exploit the low paid masses of the third world to subsidise our extravagant lifestyles.
- ◆ The question at the end of this obituary is left hanging, "Is the legacy of this drunken whore something you want to be part of?"