

# The Beasts and the False Prophet

by John F. Walvoord

---

*John F. Walvoord's sermon explores the characteristics, authority, and ultimate fate of the beast and the false prophet during the great tribulation.*

**Scripture:** Revelation 13

**Topics:** "End Times", "False Prophets"

---

## Description

John F. Walvoord delves into Revelation 13, unveiling the rise of two central evil characters during the great tribulation: the beast symbolizing the revived Roman Empire and its ruler, empowered by Satan, and the second beast, a false prophet supporting the first. The chapter highlights the deceptive miracles performed by the false prophet, leading people to worship the first beast and enforcing a mark of allegiance to facilitate buying and selling. The mysterious number 666 is presented as the number of a man, possibly alluding to historical figures like Nero or Caligula. Walvoord emphasizes the ultimate triumph of God's justice and the need for discernment in understanding the prophetic events.

---

## Transcript

13:1-2 And I stood upon the sand of the sea, and saw a beast rise up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and upon his horns ten crowns, and upon his heads the name of blasphemy. And the beast which I saw was like unto a leopard, and his feet were as the feet of a bear, and his mouth as the mouth of a lion: and the dragon gave him his power, and his seat, and great authority.

In the first ten verses of chapter 13, a character is introduced of central importance to the events of the great tribulation. This passage is first of all a revelation of the revived Roman Empire in its period of worldwide dominion, but more especially this paragraph directs attention to the evil character who exercises satanic power as the world dictator. The revelation is introduced by the expression "And I stood upon the sand of the sea," which in some versions is included in the last verse of chapter 12, instead of the first verse of chapter 13.

A textual difficulty also appears in the expression "I stood." Some manuscripts read, "he stood," the change being effected by the dropping of one letter nun from the end of the verb estathe,. If the letter is properly dropped, it indicates that the dragon himself stood upon the sand of the sea. If the letter is added, it means that John stood upon the sand of the sea. The difference is not of great moment, but inasmuch as it is more likely that a letter be dropped than a letter added to the text, some scholars continue to feel that the Authorized Version is correct and that John stood upon the sand of the sea. The reading

supporting the translation "he stood," that is, the dragon himself contemplates the scene, has better manuscript testimony and seems to fit well into the context. Chapter 13 would then be the next action following the act of the dragon in chapter 12.

As John watches the scene, he sees a beast coming up out of the sea having seven heads and ten horns. Ten crowns are seen on the horns, and on the seven heads names of blasphemy are written. The identity of this beast is quite clear in its reference to the revived Roman Empire, as the description is similar to that found in Daniel 7:7-8 and in Revelation 12:3 and 17:3, 7. The stage of the empire depicted by the beast is the period after the emergence of the little horn, the future world ruler, displacing three of the horns (Dan. 7:8). The description fits the time of the empire during the great tribulation. The fact that the beast rises out of the sea is taken by many to indicate that he comes from the great mass of humanity, namely the Gentile powers of the world. Others take it as a reference to the Mediterranean, namely, that the beast will arise from the Mediterranean area. Probably both are true in that the beast is a Gentile and does come from the Mediterranean scene.

E. B. Elliott, in keeping with his historical view of Revelation, identifies the beast out of the sea and his associate, the beast out of the land, as Roman popes and the papal empire. The reference to the sea portrays the invading Goths descending on the Roman Empire.<sup>231</sup> The difficulty with this historical view as with other historical interpretations of the book of Revelation is its lack of uniformity, with literally dozens of explanations on a given symbol depending on the time and circumstances of the expositor.

The monstrosity of seven heads and ten horns probably refers to the remnants of the confederacy which formed the Roman Empire in the beginning, namely, the ten nations of which three were overthrown by the little horn of Daniel 7:8. The ten crowns, therefore, refer to the diadems or symbols of governmental authority. The fact that they have the names of blasphemy ("names" is properly plural) indicates their blasphemous opposition to God and to Christ.

Some consider the seven heads as successive phases of governmental and political history during this period. Others believe that they are simultaneous kings who are subrulers under the beast. The successive idea seems to be borne out by Revelation 17:10-12 where the heads are indicated to be successive rulers. The difficulty can be resolved by regarding the heads as successive, referring to kings or emperors, and the horns as kings who will reign simultaneously receiving their power from the beast (cf. Rev. 17:12). John may be seeing the beast in both its historic and prophetic characters.

The beast is further described as being comparable to a leopard with the feet of a bear and the mouth of a lion, and as receiving his power, throne, and authority from the dragon, that is, from Satan. The selection of these three animals is related to the similar revelation given in Daniel 7, where the successive world empires are described by the lion, referring to Babylon, the bear, referring to Medo-Persia, and the leopard, referring to the Alexandrian Empire. The fourth empire gathers all these elements and characteristics in itself and is far more dreadful in its power and blasphemy than the preceding empires. The beasts selected, as many have pointed out, are typical of the revived Roman Empire in the great tribulation, having the majesty and power of the lion, the strength and tenacity of a bear, and the swiftness of the leopard, so well illustrated in the conquest of Alexander the Great. In addition to these natural symbols of strength is the added factor of satanic power coming from the dragon, Satan himself.

The Deadly Wound of the Beast (13:3)

13:3 And I saw one of his heads as it were wounded to death; and his deadly wound was healed: and all the world wondered after the beast.

John in his vision sees one of the heads of the beast as wounded unto death, and the apparent parallelism is to the slain Lamb, described in 5:6. John further observes that the deadly wound (literally "plague") is healed and that the entire earth marvels at the beast. Countless views have been offered in the interpretation of this verse, one of the very common ones being to identify the person wounded to death and healed as some historic character. Among the more common suggestions are Nero, Judas Iscariot, and in modern times such personages as Mussolini, Hitler, and Stalin. The multiplicity of suggestions seems to be evidence in itself that these explanations are not the meaning of the passage.

The wounding of one of the heads seems instead to be a reference to the fact that the Roman Empire as such seemingly died and is now going to be revived. It is significant that one of the heads is wounded to death but that the beast itself is not said to be dead. It is questionable whether Satan has the power to restore to life one who has died, even though his power is great. Far more probable is the explanation that this is the revived Roman Empire in view. As Alford states, "This seems to represent the Roman pagan Empire, which having long been a head of the beast, was crushed and to all appearance exterminated."<sup>232</sup> It is questionable, however, whether Alford is right in saying that "the establishment of the Christian Roman Empire" was the stroke which caused the death.<sup>233</sup>

The identification of a head with the government over which he has authority is not a strange situation. The person is often the symbol of the government, and what is said of the government can be said of him. Although verse 3 will continue to be a subject of controversy, the theological reasons for resisting an actual resurrection of a historical character to head the revived Roman Empire are so great as to render it improbable even though such personages as Nero and Judas Iscariot will continue to attract the attention of modern students of the book of Revelation. The beast is both personal and the empire itself; so also is the head. The revival of the future empire is considered a miracle and a demonstration of the power of Satan.

#### The Worship of Satan by All the World (13:4)

13:4 And they worshipped the dragon which gave power unto the beast: and they worshipped the beast, saying, Who is like unto the beast? who is able to make war with him?

The final form of apostasy is not simply the worship of some pagan deity but the worship of Satan himself who in his whole program seeks to be "like God" (Isa. 14:14). Because men worship Satan, they also worship the beast, that is, the man who rules over the revived Roman Empire. He is Satan's substitute for Christ as King of kings and Lord of lords, and to him the world as a whole flocks to give homage, indicated in the questions "Who is like unto the beast? who is able to make war with him?" The point in history where this takes place is apparently at the beginning of the great tribulation when the head of the revived Roman Empire, described here as the beast, is able to assume authority over the entire world. The basis for this authority is undoubtedly power given to him by Satan himself which is aided by a world situation in which there is no serious contender for his office. It may be that the battle of Ezekiel 38 and 39, predicting the destruction of the northern confederacy, takes place just before this, thereby removing the threat of eastern and northern powers to his authority and reign. The answer to the question, however, is to be Christ Himself manifested in His power at His second coming, who will cast the beast into the lake of fire. Until that time the beast is allowed to reign and fulfill his place in human destiny.

### The Blasphemous Character of the Beast as World Ruler (13:5-6)

13:5-6 And there was given unto him a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies; and power was given unto him to continue forty and two months. And he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme his name, and his tabernacle, and them that dwell in heaven.

The evil character of the world ruler of that day is shown in his boasting and blasphemy. A similar description of the same character is given in Daniel 7:8, 11, 25. His authority continues for forty-two months, again the familiar three and one-half years of the great tribulation. It is probable that the person who heads the revived Roman Empire comes into power before the beginning of the entire seven-year period of Daniel 9:27, and as such enters into covenant with the Jewish people. His role as world ruler over all nations, however, does not begin until the time of the great tribulation. From that point, he continues forty-two months until the second coming of Christ terminates his reign. It is evident that blasphemy is not an incidental feature of his kingdom but one of its main features, and he is described in verse 6 as blaspheming against God, against the name of God, and against the Tabernacle of God, as well as against them that dwell in heaven. As Satan's mouthpiece he utters the ultimate in unbelief and irreverence in relation to God. If the king of Daniel 11:36-45 is the same individual, as some believe, he does so in total disregard of any god because he magnifies himself above all (Dan. 11:37).

### The Universal Dominion of the Beast (13:7)

13:7 And it was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them: and power was given him over all kindreds, and tongues, and nations.

As is anticipated in Daniel 7:23, where the beast devours "the whole earth," here the worldwide extent of his power is indicated. The expression "it was given to him" refers to the satanic origin of his power. Acting as Satan's tool, the beast is able to wage war against the saints throughout the entire globe and to overcome them. (Cf. Dan. 7:25; 9:27; 12:10; Rev. 7:9-17.) In the will of God, many believers in Christ among both Jews and Gentiles perish as martyrs during this awful time of trial, while others are preserved in spite of all the beast can do. The ultimate in worldwide authority is indicated in verse 7, in that "power was given him over all kindreds, and tongues, and nations." The dream of countless rulers in the past of conquering the entire world is here finally achieved by this last Gentile ruler.

The universal authority of the beast over the entire earth is stated specifically in the latter part of the verse. The word peoples should be inserted after the word kindred as in the best texts, making the verse read "power was given him over all kindreds, peoples, and tongues, and nations." As the nouns are properly singular, the clause is better rendered "and authority was given to him over every tribe and people and tongue and nation." Such authority was anticipated by Daniel (Dan. 7:23) where it is stated that the fourth beast "shall devour the whole earth, and tread it down, and break it in pieces." The dream of world conquest achieved in part by the Babylonian, Medo-Persian, Macedonian, and Roman empires is now for the first time realized completely and is the satanic counterfeit of Christ's millennial reign permitted by God in this final display of the evil of Satan and wicked humanity.

The time of this universal sway is clearly indicated in verse 5 as being forty-two months, namely the last three and one-half years preceding the return of Christ. This period is otherwise described as the great tribulation. It is apparent, however, that as the period moves on to its end a gigantic world war is under way continuing to the time of the return of Christ. This war is in the form of a rebellion against the universal sway of the beast and comes at the very end of the tribulation time. A universal kingdom and a world war

could not coexist, since one is the contradiction of the other. The alternative view of J. B. Smith, that all passages speaking of conflicts between the nations must precede the time of tribulation, that is, refer to the first half of the seven-year period, is without proper justification.<sup>234</sup> This would put the natural development of the end of the age in an unwarranted stricture.

#### The Universal Worship of the Beast (13:8)

13:8 And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.

Just as the entire world is under the political domination of the beast, so all the world except the saints will worship him. Some like J. B. Smith have read into the phrase "dwell upon the earth" a particular class of people.<sup>235</sup> It may be that they are contrasted to those who worship the true God in heaven. Rather than designating a particular class of people, however, the intention is to include everyone dwelling upon the earth, excluding only those who are saints. Walter Scott defines the term as meaning that "all save the elect are referred to."<sup>236</sup> These who thus worship the beast are described as not having their names written in the book of life, a book frequently mentioned in the Revelation (3:5; 17:8; 20:12, 15; 21:27; 22:19; cf. Luke 10:20; Phil. 4:3). Those worshiping the beast are the unsaved of both Jews and Gentiles in contrast to saved Jews and Gentiles whose names are written in the book of life.

A further description of the book of life is given as belonging to the "Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." The translation here follows the order of the Greek. Most expositors have taken the expression "from the foundation of the world" to refer to the writing of the names in the book, rather than to the slaying of the Lamb which occurred on Calvary. This verse presents a number of problems.

Some references to the book of life seem to indicate it is the book of the living, namely, of all born in the world, and that those who do not trust in Christ are blotted from it leaving only those who are saved (cf. Rev. 3:5; 22:19). The reference to 22:19, however, in the best texts, concerns the tree of life rather than the book of life, and it seems preferable not to distinguish between the book of life belonging to the Lamb and the book mentioned in 3:5, as Walter Scott does, referring to the latter as the book of profession.<sup>237</sup> The simplest explanation here seems the best, namely, that their names were written in the book of life from eternity past. This was made possible by anticipation of the future dying of the Lamb on their behalf. Though somewhat involved, the ultimate meaning is simply that all who are not saved will worship the beast and that those who are saved will not worship him. The reference to "the foundation of the world" cannot be limited, as J. B. Smith does, to the beginning of the Old Testament,<sup>238</sup> but rather, as the Greek indicates, to the beginning of the "cosmos," that is, the ordered events which predate human history.

#### Exhortation to Hear (13:9-10)

13:9-10 If any man have an ear, let him hear. He that leadeth into captivity shall go into captivity: he that killeth with the sword must be killed with the sword. Here is the patience and the faith of the saints.

It is clear from verse 8 that the universal worship of the beast will achieve at long last the characteristics of a world religion in that it will be ecumenical. The desire to have all Christian churches unite, or to even go one step further and unite all religions of the world, has been advanced as a desired goal. It is questionable whether this will be achieved prior to the end of the church age. However, in the great tribulation as here described, a world religion will be advanced which will have as its focal point the worship of a man chosen and empowered by Satan himself. In that day, true believers on Christ will be

separated from this world religion and will be the objects of its fearful persecution. From a biblical point of view, the concept of a world religion prior to the second coming of Christ will be far removed from a true recognition of God.

The invitation "If any man have an ear, let him hear" emphasizes the preceding relation as a matter of great moment to which any man should give attention. Here, as in the Gospels where a similar expression is found frequently (Matt. 11:15; 13:9, 43; Mark 4:9, 23; 7:16; Luke 8:8; 14:35), the invitation concludes the revelation on which the exhortation is based. A close parallel as well as a contrast is also observable between this invitation and the invitation to the seven churches of Revelation 2 and 3 where the exhortation is to "hear what the Spirit says unto the churches." The omission of the phrase "unto the churches" in 13:9 is most significant and tends to support the teaching that the church, the body of Christ, has previously been raptured and is not in this period. This instruction is not addressed to the churches. The exhortation in Revelation 13 is much wider. It is to anyone who will listen, and the message is not addressed to the church as such but to the entire world.

Reinforcing the exhortation is the warning of the ultimate sovereign justice of God which will be brought to bear upon this scene of wickedness. A number of variations occur in the text of verse 10, but the general meaning is clear. The best texts seem to read, "If any man is for captivity, into captivity he goes. If any man is to be killed by the sword, he must be killed by the sword." In a word, it is the law of divine retribution. Those who persecute the saints and lead them into captivity must in turn suffer the righteous wrath of God. In this ultimate triumph and judgment upon wicked men lie the patience and faith of the saints in their hour of trial. The Scriptures frequently mention this final vindication (Gen. 9:6; Matt. 5:38; 26:52; Rom. 12:19; Gal. 6:7). The same truth which serves as an encouragement to the saints acts as a warning to their persecutors. Their ultimate doom is assured as in this case at the end of their brief period of power (Rev. 13:5; 16:6; 18:2-3, 5-8, 20; 19:20).

Taken as a whole, the first ten verses of Revelation 13 predict a future world government which from God's point of view will be a continuation of the ancient Roman Empire expanded ultimately to cover not only the area of the ancient empire but the entire world. This government will be empowered by Satan, and its primary objective will be forcing the whole world to worship Satan and his human representative, the world dictator.

The purpose of Satan to take the place of God in this future great tribulation is the motivating power behind Satan's activities today. Satan's desire to be like God originally plunged the universe into sin (Isa. 14:14). His program has never changed, and he is seeking today as throughout his career to lure men to obey him instead of God. In the great tribulation this purpose will be transparently clear, and after its manifestation it will be brought into divine judgment.

#### The Second Beast (13:11-12)

13:11-12 And I beheld another beast coming up out of the earth; and he had two horns like a lamb, and he spake as a dragon. And he exerciseth all the power of the first beast before him, and causeth the earth and them which dwell therein to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed.

After the revelation of the first beast, John now beholds another beast coming up out of the earth and occupying a secondary role supporting the activities of the first beast. In contrast to the first beast which comes out of the sea, the second beast is said to come out of the earth. He is of similar nature to the first beast. The same word for beast (Gr., the,,rion) is used as well as the word "another" (Gr., allo) meaning

"one like in kind." Though some have interpreted the word earth as referring to the Holy Land, it is the general word for the earth (Gr., *ge*,). If the sea, mentioned as the source of the first beast, represents the mass of humanity indicating the racial background of the first beast as a Gentile, the reference to the second beast as coming out of the earth indicates that this character, who is later described as a false prophet (Rev. 19:20), is a creature of earth rather than heaven. To argue that the earth means Palestine and that therefore this character is a Jew is reading into the passage more than it says. His geographic origin and his racial connection are not mentioned. He is pictured, however, as having two horns like a lamb and as speaking like a dragon. The description of him as a lamb seems to indicate that he has a religious character, a conclusion supported by his being named a prophet. His speaking as a dragon indicates that he is motivated by the power of Satan who is "the dragon."

As a supporting character to the first beast, he is active on behalf of the first beast and exercises his authority. Verse 12 translated literally reads, "He exerts [Gr., *poieo*,, 'to do'] all the authority of the first beast in his presence." Using his satanic power, he causes (Gr., *poieo*,) the earth, that is, those who dwell in the earth, to worship the first beast whose wound unto death was healed according to verse 3. There is some evidence pointing to the conclusion that the second beast is the head of the apostate church during the first half of Daniel's seventieth week. With the rise of the first beast to a place of worldwide dominion, the apostate church is destroyed according to Revelation 17:16, and the worship of the whole world is directed to the beast out of the sea. The second beast, however, survives the destruction of the church which had been under his control, and he assists the beast in making the transition. Facilitating this change into the final form of apostate religion, the beast out of the earth causes men to worship the first beast.

The identification of the second beast as the head of the apostate church is indicated in many ways in the book of Revelation. It is obvious that he is associated with the first beast in a religious way in that his miracles and activities tend to cause men to worship the image of the first beast (cf. 13:13-17). It is also clear that he shares prominence and leadership with the first beast throughout the great tribulation as they both are cast alive into the lake of fire at its close (19:20).

Alford's extended remarks on the character of the second beast are worthy of mention:

It may be well to premise a few remarks, tending to the right understanding of this portion of the prophecy. 1) These two beasts are identical as to genus: they are both the „ria, ravaging powers, hostile to God's flock and fold. 2) They are diverse in origin. The former came up out of the sea, that is, if we go back to the symbolism of Daniel, was an empire, rising up out of confusion into order and life: the latter comes out of the earth: i.e., we may not unreasonably say, arises out of human society and its progress: which as interpreted by the context, will import its origin and gradual development during the reign and progress of the secular empire denoted by the former beast. 3) The second beast is, in its zeal and action, entirely subsidiary to the first. It wields its authority, works miracles in its support, causes men to make and to worship its image; nay, itself is lost in the splendour and importance of the other. 4) An important distinction exists between the two beasts, in that this second one has two horns like a lamb. In other words, this second beast puts on a mild and lamb-like appearance, which the other did not. But it speaks as a dragon: its words, which carry its real character, are fierce and unrelenting: while it professes that which is gentle, its behests are cruel. And now I may appeal to the reader, whether all these requisites do not meet in that great wasting Power which arose, not out of anarchy and conquest, but out of men's daily life and habits, out of and in the presence of the last form of the secular power, which was the Empire of Pagan Rome; I mean, the sacerdotal persecuting power, which, gentle in its aspect and professions, was

yet cruel in its actions; which did all the deeds of the Empire, in its presence, which kept up its image, its laws, its formulae, its privileges; which, coming in as it did by a corrupt and ambitious priesthood, deceived by its miracles the dwellers on earth, and by them maintained the image of the despotic secular power? Surely it is this Latin Christianity, in its ecclesiastico-secular form, not identical with, but as preparing the way for, the great apostasy, helping, so to speak, to place the woman on the beast, as in chapter XVII, that is here depicted before us. It is this which, owing its power in the main to imposture and unwarrantably assumed spiritual authority, deserves best the name of the false prophet, expressly given to this second beast in chapter 19:20.239

Although the primary reference of this passage is to the period just prior to the second advent, it is foreshadowed undoubtedly in history as Alford indicates. While resisting the historical school of interpretation, Alford is nevertheless unduly influenced by it.

#### The Deceptive Miracles of the False Prophet (13:13-14)

13:13-14 And he doeth great wonders, so that he maketh fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men, And deceiveth them that dwell on the earth by the means of those miracles which he had power to do in the sight of the beast; saying to them that dwell on the earth, that they should make an image to the beast, which had the wound by a sword, and did live.

The first miracle accomplished by the false prophet is described as a great wonder, literally, one of many "great signs." The frequent use of poieo,, in the present tense seems to indicate repeated action, of which fire coming down from heaven in the sight of men is an illustration. The miracle may be an imitation of Pentecost (Acts 2:3), or it may be regarded as similar to Elijah's miracles (2 Kings 1:10-12), or to the destructive fire coming out of the mouths of the two witnesses (Rev. 11:5). The Scriptures indicate that the devil does have power to do miracles and that by their use he deceives people into worshiping the beast.

The deceptive power of the beast is mentioned specifically in verse 14. By means of this power he performs miracles in the sight of the first beast. On the basis of this power and the impression it makes upon men described as "them that dwell on the earth," the second beast urges them to make an image of the first beast, described for the third time in this chapter as one which had the wound by a sword and did live. The beast is both the empire and its ruler. As ruler he is the symbol of the empire and the executor of its power. Though the wound by the sword apparently refers to the decline of the historic Roman .Empire and its revival is indicated by the expression "did live," the man who serves at the head of the empire is the symbol of this miraculous restoration. The image made to the beast is not necessarily an image of the beast but, like the image of Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 3, is the symbol of his power and majesty. Though the Scriptures do not say so, it is apparent that this suggestion is followed through, and the image, whatever its character, becomes the center of the false worship of the world ruler. This image, referred to three times in the chapter, is mentioned seven more times in the book of Revelation (14:9, 11; 15:2; 16:2; 19:20; 20:4). The image is the center of the false worship and the focal point of the final state of apostasy, the acme of the idolatry which has been the false religion of so many generations.

#### All Required to Worship the Beast (13:15-17)

13:15-17 And he had power to give life unto the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak, and cause that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed. And he causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads: And that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or

the number of his name.

Translated literally, the expression "he had power to give life unto the image of the beast" is properly rendered "It was given to him to give spirit to the image of the beast." The word translated "life" (Gr., *pneuma*) as in the Authorized Version, is obviously an incorrect translation, as *pneuma*, commonly translated "spirit" or "breath," is quite different from *zoë*, which means "life." Expositors usually hold that the extraordinary powers given by Satan to the false prophet do not extend to giving life to that which does not possess life, because this is a prerogative of God alone. The intent of the passage seems to be that the image has the appearance of life manifested in breathing, but actually it may be no more than a robot. The image is further described as being able to speak, a faculty easily accomplished by mechanical means. In ancient times religious ventriloquism was sometimes used to give the impression of supernatural speech, a practice confirmed by archaeological excavations in Corinth. In Acts 16:16 the slave girl possessed of a demon was able to bring gain to her masters by soothsaying. She also supernaturally recognized Paul and his companions as "servants of the most high God, which shew unto us the way of salvation" (Acts 16:17). Her power of speech was under demonic control. Whether completely natural in its explanation, or whether some supernatural power is used to create the impression of life, the image apparently is quite convincing to the mass of humanity and helps to turn them to a worship of the first beast as their god.

The absolute authority of both the first and second beasts is such that those who will not worship the image of the beast are sentenced to be killed. J. B. Smith attempts to ridicule the interpretation that this verse means what it actually says because some saints obviously survive the period of the great tribulation.<sup>240</sup> This is a needless objection, however, as a decree that all who fail to worship the beast should be killed is one thing, and its execution another. Even in Germany under Hitler, it took many months to execute condemned Jews, and the task was never completed. How much greater the difficulty to extend a decree of this sort to the entire world. A countless multitude will undoubtedly be martyred according to Revelation 7:9-17, but the disorder which attends the latter half of the great tribulation as the world empire begins to break up makes it impossible for full execution of this decree. Swete goes so far as to suggest that no decree to kill nonworshippers of the beast is actually issued, but that the beast only causes the image to suggest that this be done. Swete says,

As they stand, the words can only mean that the ventriloquist used his opportunity to make the image suggest that all who refused to worship to the image of Caesar should be put to death.<sup>241</sup>

If the latter part of verse 15 records the words of the image, it would appear that verse 16 refers to the false prophet himself. The regulation is issued that all classes of people who worship the beast are to receive a mark in their right hands or in their foreheads and that possession of this identification is necessary to buy or sell. All classes are included in three contrasting pairs: the small and the great, referring to status; the rich and the poor, alluding to possessions; and the free and bond, referring to their state in society. To try to read into this an evil trinity or significance from the fact that six classes are mentioned is to read more into the passage than it intends.<sup>242</sup> There has been much speculation concerning the mark (Gr., *charagma*) which is affixed to the right hand or to the forehead. George W. Davis observes that the mark of the beast is in mimicry of the seal of the Holy Spirit on the true believer.<sup>243</sup> The mark itself seems to vary according to verse 17 as in some cases being the name of the beast and in others the number of his name. There is no need for a complicated explanation. The mark is simply a token that they are beast worshipers, and it serves as an identification necessary to conduct business and to purchase the necessities of life. It is another device to force all people to worship the

beast.

### The Number of the Beast (13:18)

13:18 Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number is Six hundred three score and six.

Special attention is given in verse 18 to the number of the beast, 666. The number is introduced by the phrase "Here is wisdom," and the appeal is made to those of understanding to count the number of the beast which is the number of a man. There has been endless speculation concerning the meaning of this number. In attempting to solve the riddle of this verse, some have considered the phrase to represent Caesar, others Nero or Caligula.

The explanation is rather complicated. Letters in Hebrew, Latin, and Greek had numerical equivalents. The name Caesar Nero spelled Kaisar Neron if written with Hebrew endings (as John does in some other proper names such as Abaddon, Apollyon, Armageddon) has a corresponding numerical value in that K equals 100, S equals 60, R equals 200, N equals 50, R equals 200, O equals 6, and N equals 50. Using the letters that would be Hebrew consonants in their numerical value it would add up to 666. Accordingly, J. B. Smith concludes that Nero is the one who is intended, with the reference purposely obscure to avoid persecution.<sup>244</sup>

A number of other suggestions are made in that the six Roman numerals, that is, I, V, X, L, C, D, add up to 666. J. B. Smith says, "This alludes to the possibility of a Roman being the antichrist."<sup>245</sup> Smith also adds, "All the numerals from 1 to 36 total 666. Beast in the evil sense occurs exactly 36 times (6x6) in Revelation."<sup>246</sup> Speculation continues ad infinitum using the letter equivalents for numbers in Hebrew, Greek, or Roman numerals. The very variety of the suggestions, however, and the unlikely and unprecedented supposition that someone would rise from the dead to take active part in earthly affairs leaves serious question as to all these imaginative explanations.

Reading the number as 616 instead of 666, others find it referring specifically to Caligula (Gaius Caesar) as the Antichrist. The 616 is derived from the numerical equivalents of the Greek letters for Gaius Caesar written in the style of Caligula. Or if the Latin equivalents are used, the number 616 is reached by dropping the final n.<sup>247</sup> The connection is made with Antichrist on the similarity of these Roman rulers to the future Antichrist.

Beckwith holds that the number 666 refers to Nero and to the first century tradition that he would be raised from the dead. He holds, "No valid objection can be found here to the Neronic explanation of the number." Whether or not the final Antichrist is actually Nero or not, he will in effect be a Nero reincarnate.<sup>248</sup> All of these interpretations are based on speculation which reduces the numbers to their equivalents, either in Hebrew or Greek letters or in Roman numerals.<sup>249</sup> Regarding the number 666, J. N. Darby writes,

I confess my ignorance as to the number six hundred and sixty-six. I cannot present you with anything satisfactory to myself. We find, answering to the number six hundred and sixty-six, the words apostasy and tradition; but I cannot say anything positive on the point.<sup>250</sup>

Probably the simplest explanation here is the best, that the triple six is the number of a man, each digit falling short of the perfect number seven. Six in the Scripture is man's number. He was to work six days and rest the seventh. The image of Nebuchadnezzar was sixty cubits high and six cubits broad. Whatever

may be the deeper meaning of the number, it implies that this title referring to the first beast, Satan's masterpiece, limits him to man's level which is far short of the deity of Jesus Christ.

Chapter 13, taken as a whole, is one of the great prophetic chapters of Scripture and is the only passage which presents in any detail the two principal evil characters of the end of the age who form with Satan an unholy trinity. Here is clearly presented the fact that the head of the revived Roman Empire ultimately becomes the ruler of the entire world. Dominated by Satan, he is Satan's masterpiece and substitute for Christ, and is aided and supported by the second beast called the false prophet. Many have alluded to the contrast of this evil trinity with the heavenly Trinity, Satan corresponding to God the Father, the first beast corresponding to Christ, and the second beast corresponding to the Holy Spirit. George W. Davis expresses a common view that this is a false trinity: "This trinity will consist of Satan as God, Antichrist, the counterfeit of Christ, as Christ, and the false prophet, a travesty on the Holy Spirit."<sup>251</sup>

Expositors have not agreed entirely as to the identity of these two characters as revealed in other passages of Scripture. The preferable view seems to be that the first beast in Revelation 13 is the "little horn" of Daniel 7:8, "the prince that shall come" of Daniel 9:26, the willful king of Daniel 11:36-45, and the man of sin, or the lawless one, of 2 Thessalonians 2:3. Some prefer to identify the willful king of Daniel 11 and the man of sin in 2 Thessalonians 2 as the second beast of Revelation 13. The term "antichrist" is variously assigned either to the first or second beast or by some to neither. Among premillennial expositors, the trend seems to be to identify all of these terms with the first beast and relegate the second beast to a subordinate role as a religious rather than a political ruler.

There is no evidence that either of the beasts is a Jew. The expression "the God of his fathers" in Daniel 11:37 which would seem to make the king in that passage a Jew is better translated "gods" in keeping with the Hebrew *elohim* which removes any specific Jewish character from the phrase. The Hebrew *elohim* is in many places properly translated in the singular, but it is not specifically singular and therefore could be translated plural. The appeal often made to the phrase "his fathers," while it is a familiar one in reference to Israel, obviously cannot be limited to the Israelite race, as others have predecessors also; and in the case of the heathen their gods could be referred to as "the gods of their fathers." It is significant that in many cases where the God of Israel is referred to, "Lord" is added to make clear that the God of their fathers is Jehovah. For instance in Exodus 3:15 the expression is found "the Lord God of your fathers." Similar expressions are found frequently (cf. Deut. 1:11, 21; 4:1; 6:3; 12:1; 26:7; 27:3; 29:25; Joshua 18:3; Judges 2:12; etc.). The customary form of reference included the name "Lord," and its omission in Daniel 11:37 is most significant and points to the conclusion that this is not the God of Israel, and hence, that the king is not a Jew. It would seem quite unlikely that either of the two beasts of Revelation 13 will be a Jew inasmuch as they both persecute the Jewish people and are the final Roman rulers of the times of the Gentiles. The general character of the great tribulation, however, is graphically portrayed in this chapter. It will be a time of absolute rule, and Satan will have his way. The ultimate in false religion will sweep the entire world in a manifestation of evil never before seen on the earth. The fact will be demonstrated beyond question that man is not able to solve his own problems and only God can bring righteousness and peace to the earth. The present attempts at unification of ecclesiastical and political power seem to be the forerunner and preparation for this end-time situation.

231 Horae Apocalypticae, III, 92-93.

232 Henry Alford, The Greek New Testament, IV, 675.

- 233 Ibid.
- 234 A Revelation of Jesus Christ, p. 119.
- 235 Ibid., p. 199.
- 236 Exposition of the Book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ, p. 277.
- 237 Ibid., p. 277.
- 238 Smith, p. 200.
- 239 Alford, IV, 678-79.
- 240 Smith, p. 205.
- 241 Henry B. Swete, The Apocalypse of St. John, p. 172.
- 242 Cf. Smith, p. 205.
- 243 The Patmos Vision, p. 209.
- 244 Smith, p. 207.
- 245 Ibid.
- 246 Ibid.
- 247 Swete, p. 176.
- 248 Isbon T. Beckwith, The Apocalypse of John, pp. 400-408.
- 249 Cf. Smith, pp. 226-67; Swete, pp. 174-76; Scott, pp. 285-87.
- 250 Notes on the Apocalypse, p. 68.
- 251 Davis, pp. 205-6.

---

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/john-f-walvoord/the-beasts-and-the-false-prophet/>

# *Grow in Your Walk with Christ*

---

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

**[www.sermonindex.net](http://www.sermonindex.net)**