

## THE DRAGON AND THE FIRST BEAST: A WORLD SYSTEM

### Revelation 13:1-2

The **dragon** stood on the shore of the **sea**. And I saw a **beast** coming out of the sea.

*John continues in the imagery of chapter 12*; the dragon is Satan, the sea represents the abyss or chaos. We see that the first beast comes from the same place and has the same nature. Again, it is not a new event, but an overview.

### Revelation 13:2b

It had **ten horns and seven heads**, with **ten crowns on its horns**, and on **each head a blasphemous name**. The beast I saw **resembled a leopard**, but had **feet like those of a bear** and a **mouth like that of a lion**.

John was well acquainted with the prophets of old. **What God envisions for him is from the beasts of Daniel 7**. In that vision of Daniel, Babylon, the nation in which Daniel lived, and the Persian and Greek empires to come, fit the features of these animals. The twist in John's vision was that all the features are combined into one beast. That is to say, **this beast would have all the evil and powers of the previous kingdoms combined**.

John was living in the time of the mid-Roman Empire. It was powerful and undefeated. John may have even seen Rome alone as this beast. But by the fact that Christ has not returned, we must conclude something else. Rome was a physical illustration of the beast at the end of days, a foreshadow, but it is not the full explanation of this beast. It simply contains the traits the beast will have. We look from a broader scope.

**The word blasphemy (blasphemia") means literally, the vilification of a divinity, especially God**. This beast will have a form of religion, but it will be hostile to the idea of a one true God. It is like the dragon so it will pride itself on being enlightened, it will be beautiful, but yet brutal, it will appear sanctimonious, but be desperately evil. It will appear regal but be vile.

**The beast is not any particular nation, it is a system of human living**, it is the thought, philosophy, values, and nature of the heart, mind, and soul. It is the collective picture of humanity. In the case of the beast it is essentially the concert of Satan's nature and our own fallen nature willfully enslaved to Him.

### Revelation 13:2-4

The **dragon gave the beast his power** and his throne and great authority. **One of the heads of the beast seemed to have had a fatal wound**, but the fatal wound had been **healed**. The whole **world was filled with wonder and followed the beast**. People **worshiped the dragon** because he had given **authority to the beast**, and they also **worshiped the beast** and asked, **"Who is like the beast? Who can wage war against it?"**

One of the arguments for the beast being the Roman Empire saw Nero representing the wounded head. To appreciate the myth known as "Nero redivivus", it helps to understand just what a dark character he was. Here is a lengthy passage of how the scholar, William Barclay describes him:

No man ever started life with a worse heritage than Nero. His father was Cnaeus Domitius Ahenobarbus, who was notorious for wickedness. He had killed a freedman for no other crime than refusing to drink more wine; he had deliberately run over a child in his chariot on the Appian Way; in a brawl in the Forum he had gouged out the eye of a Roman knight; and he finally died of dropsy brought on by his debauchery. His mother was Agrippina, one of the most terrible women in history. When Ahenobarbus knew that he and Agrippina were to have a child he cynically said that nothing but a monstrous abomination could come from himself and her. ...

Under the Emperor Claudius, Agrippina was recalled from exile. She had now only one ambition-- somehow to make her son emperor. She was warned by fortune-tellers that, if ever Nero became emperor, the result for her would be disaster. Her answer was: "Let him kill me, so long as he reigns."

Agrippina set to work with all the passion and the intrigue of her stormy nature. Claudius already had two children, Octavia and Britannicus, but Agrippina badgered him into adopting Nero as his son, when Nero was eleven years of age, and persuaded him to marry her although he was her uncle. Agrippina then summoned the famous philosopher, Seneca, and the great soldier, Afranius Burrus, to be Nero's tutors. Steadily Britannicus, the heir to the throne, was pushed into the background and Nero was given the limelight.

For five years the marriage lasted and then Agrippina arranged for Claudius' poisoning by a dish of poisoned mushrooms. When Claudius lay in a coma, she hastened his end by brushing his throat with a poisoned feather. No sooner had Claudius died, than Nero was led forth as emperor, the army having been bribed to support him.

A curious situation ensued. For the next five years Rome was never better governed. Nero was busy playing at painting, sculpture, music, theatricals; he was the complete dilettante; and the wise Seneca and the upright Burrus governed the empire.

Then Nero stopped being the cultured dilettante and embarked on a career of vicious crime. At night with other gilded youths he would roam the streets attacking all whom he could find. Worse was to come. He murdered Britannicus as a possible rival.

No young man or woman was safe from his lust. He was a blatant homosexual. He publicly married a youth named Sporus in a state wedding; and he took Sporus with him on a bridal tour of Greece. He was "married" to a freedman called Doryphorus. He took Poppaea Sabina the wife of Otho, his closest friend, as his paramour, and kicked her to death when she was with child.

He had a passion for wild extravagance and extracted money from all ... The imperial court was a welter of murder, immorality and crime.

One of Nero's passions was building. In A.D. 64 came the great fire of Rome which burned for a week. There is not the slightest doubt that Nero began it or that he hindered every attempt to extinguish it, so that he might have the glory of rebuilding the city. The people well knew who was responsible for the fire but Nero diverted the blame on to the Christians and the most deliberately sadistic of all persecutions broke out. He had the Christians sown up in the skins of wild animals and set his savage hunting dogs upon them. He had them enclosed in sacks with stones and flung into the Tiber. He had them coated with pitch and set alight as living torches to light the gardens of his palace.

The insanity of evil grew wilder and wilder. Seneca was forced to commit suicide; Burrus was murdered by a poisoned draught [beer] which Nero sent him as a cure for a sore throat; anyone who incurred Nero's slightest displeasure was killed.

Agrippina made some attempt to control him and finally he turned against her. He made repeated attempts to murder her--by poison, by causing the roof of her house to collapse, by sending her to sea in a boat designed to break up. Finally, he sent his freedman Anicetus to stab her to death. When Agrippina saw the dagger, she bared her body. "Strike my womb," she said, "because it bore a Nero."

It could not last. First Julius Vindex rebelled in Gaul, then Galba in Spain. Finally the senate took its courage in its hands and declared Nero a public enemy. In the end he died by suicide in the wretched villa of a freedman called Phaon.

The myth of Nero redivivus essentially reasoned that Nero was so evil, he wouldn't simply die a mortal's death but come back to life.

Rome and Nero certainly put a human face to what the beast and the antichrist will be like, **they are illustrations, but they are not the ultimate meaning of the imagery**. They personify the spiritual principles and dynamics that are even now at work.

The beast functions by the power of the dragon. That is to say, **Satan's make impact on the world comes through his human instruments**.

**The head with a mortal wound is not Nero, but the fallen nature of humanity** that will default to its dark condition. It represents lines of thinking and believe that were thought to have died away with the light of Christ, but with the rebellion against God, they quickly rise again. They will most likely come in new packaging, but in nature and features, they will be like the pagan practices of old.

Like the ancient Roman Empire, the beast will be everywhere. It will appear irresistible, the world may not call this system of human life, God, but the effect will be the same. It will be absolute authority and it will appear too great to cross or reject. The words mimic Exodus 15:11 and Psalm 35:10, "Who is like God?"

#### **Revelation 13:5-10**

The beast was given a mouth to utter proud words and blasphemies and to **exercise its authority for forty-two months**. It opened its mouth to **blaspheme God**, and to slander his name and his dwelling place and those who live in heaven. 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. 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.

Whoever has ears, let them hear.

**"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.

**The beast exercises authority for forty-two months**. Once again, the violation of Antiochus Epiphanies is used as a metaphor. It may or may not be a literal forty-two months, but this beast-system is allotted a definite, and limited period of time. It will seem like it will never end, but the clock is running down on the beast.

***The only people to have discernment to resist this humanist system are those in the Lamb's book of life.***

However, the people of God are to resolve to what fate may come and not lose heart. Some will go into captivity, some will be martyred, that is unfortunately, part of the plan unfolding. God will balance justice in the end.

Every Christian's job will be to strive for patience, endure, and remain faithful in their part of God's Kingdom.

## THE SECOND BEAST AS A RELIGIOUS SYSTEM

### Revelation 13:11-18

Then I saw a ***second beast***, coming out of the ***earth***. It had ***two horns like a lamb***, but it ***spoke like a dragon***. 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. And it ***performed great signs***, even causing fire to come down from heaven to the earth in full view of the people. 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. 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. 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***, 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.

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.***

***A second beast rises***; it comes from the earth, looks like a lamb and performs wonders. All of these point to a religious system. It looks like Christianity, but is the opposite. It looks like Christ, but speaks like Satan. It will be a beautiful system and very compelling and convincing. It will not be an individual but a religious system that supports the world system that has the nature of Satan. It may be personified by an individual, but the second beast is really the religious-type system. Its ultimate purpose is to deceive.

The second beast will breathe into the first beast. The word used in the original Greek is "pneuma", the same word means spirit. The second beast will bring spiritual authority to the first.

The mark of the beast is illustrated well by Rome. In the time of the later Caesars, Emperor worship became the state religion. It became impossible to buy or sell without paying tribute to divine Caesar. In any transaction, a pinch of salt was dropped by the right hand into an incense bowl. The receipt was basically a document with a seal (*mark or "charagma"*) of Caesar which affirmed you had paid proper tribute to the god Emperor.

However, the physical practices simply illustrate the spiritual situation behind them. The symbolism of the hand represents the physical practices of a person's life dictated by the beast-system and religion. The forehead represents what one actively thinks. It is our mentality, our worldview, values, and line of reason.

Undoubtedly, what physical practices might be involved, will change with time, but it will come back to the same principles:

1. It will seem like such a small compromise.
2. It will seem impossible to carry out even the basic functions of life without compromise.
3. Satan's features will wear the face of humanism. (666)